

Collaborative Efforts Between Informal Learning Programs and Traditional K-12 Settings

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This dissertation attempts to create an improved collaborative effort between in-school and after-school educators. The purpose of this study is to examine the current process by which after-school educational programs collaborate with in-school leaders to enhance students' academic achievement. To address this challenge, this research study will; (1) examine the current obstacles between in- and out-of-school programs, particularly for Black students; and (2) determine the nature of partnerships that currently exist between in- and out-of-school programs in the Pittsburgh region. The literature explores the history of after-school partnerships and the challenges and opportunities associated with implementing quality after-school programs in urban educational settings. The results of this study will help after-school program directors and school leaders identify how to best support long-term success for youth.

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Preface

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1.0 Chapter One - Introduction

“Schools are not, have never been, and will never be the only site for learning.”

(Baldrige, 2019)

Historically, the term “formal learning” refers to the system of accredited educational institutions, such as K-12 schools, trade schools, colleges, and universities, that are intentionally organized and structured for the delivery of educational objectives (Bevan et al., 2010). For Black communities, schools have often been sites of suffering, terror, and cultural violence (Baldrige, 2019). Over the last century, profound changes in the daily lives of youth and adolescents took place: demographic, social, economic, political, and technological changes have resulted in a youth population that is increasingly diverse in personal and family characteristics, in addition to life experiences (Russell et al., 2011). The above changes play a significant role in shaping youth to be productive citizens in their individual communities and society at large.

What does it look like when a community helps youth to be productive citizens? The community should be a place where chaos comes to order, where crises are resolved and where everyone begins to work together. In this community, all young people have a mentor, a role model and someone looking out for their best interests. This community is a place where families have support, and students have tutors and access to computers. This community is where education is being promoted, love and respect are valued, and kids can be kids. Everyone is safe and secure, no one goes without a meal and expectations for youth are high. This community sets high standards, goals and values, and has the power to enforce these standards if there are attempts to lower them. Outside of this community is another story.

Outside of this community can be unhealthy and dangerous. Outside of this community, chaos can be the norm, low expectations are acceptable, crises are not resolved, and everyone is not working together towards common goals. Outside of this community, growth is not nurtured, families are not supported, and everyone is not looking out for the best interests of the children. Outside of the community some children lack father figures, role models and guidance from positive people. Tutors are hard to find, computers are non-existent, education is not being promoted, and love and respect has been replaced by gangs and violence. The norm is to be tough, to make your own rules and to think only about self. Outside of the community can be rough.

One of the proven strategies for creating a safe, supportive community and to mitigate the many risks that face youth is to involve youth in after-school programs. After-school programs grew into an informal system of multiple local, regional, national, and international institutions serving generations of children and youth (Russell et al., 2011). Russell and colleagues state that efforts have always been made to reach marginalized youth, yet during the course of a century, a mainstream has emerged in the United States, one that reflects dominant cultures. Within Black communities, afterschool spaces are always fighting for a right to exist within the oppressive structures of anti-Blackness, these spaces provide an opportunity where Black students can escape oppressive structures (Baldrige, 2019).

The consequence is that some youth remain underrepresented and underserved in youth development programs (Russell et al., 2017) despite the fact that the public's support for public investment in out-of-school time (OST) programs is consistently high: a 2017 opinion poll conducted by Quinnipiac University found 83 percent of those surveyed were opposed to cutting public funding for OST programs (McCombs et al., 2017). The author reported that the support of OST programs is fueled by three key factors. Firstly, due to working family members, youth are

largely unsupervised after school, which increases their likelihood to engage in risky behaviors such as drug use and unsafe sexual activity. Youth and community safety benefit by ensuring that youth have access to enriching activities and caring adults when out of school. Secondly, youth access to enrichment activities is highly dependent on family income. Approximately 59 percent of school-aged children from low-income communities participate in sports, compared with 84 percent of children from wealthier families. Thirdly, on average, low-income students lag behind their more affluent peers in terms of academic achievement on state and national assessments (McCombs et al., 2017).

Each after-school program operates differently but the common denominator is the commitment to create supportive learning settings that nurture young people's strengths and interests and enable them to thrive (Little et. al, 2018). The range of organized activities available to children and adolescents in the United States and other Western nations is substantial (Mahoney et al., 2005). Community-based agencies typically have the trust of community members; they are established and respected entities (Reid et al., 2001). The process of connecting to the community is slow but necessary for becoming knowledgeable about the impact of out-of-school learning environments.

1.1 Purpose of the Study

In the scope of my previous work with various non-profit youth enrichment organizations, there was a disconnect between in-school educators, school leaders, and after-school program directors. I was the Program Coordinator for Steel City Squash (SCS), a non-profit after-school and summer youth enrichment program providing opportunities to children from underserved

communities in Pittsburgh through education, mentoring, community service, and the sport of squash. SCS's mission is to provide consistent, long-term and reliable support to underserved students and their families. The organization is located at Trees Hall on the University of Pittsburgh's main campus under the Department of Health and Physical Activity. SCS provided services to students in grades 4 through 9, and each year an additional grade will be added to work with them through high school and college.

SCS partnered with the following schools: Miller African-Centered Elementary School K-5, Pittsburgh Science and Technology Academy 6-12, The Neighborhood Academy 6-12, Milliones 6-12, and Saint Benedict the Moor School K-8. All of the students whom SCS serves live in predominately Black communities. SCS is primarily an academically focused program using the sport of squash as an incentive. The program supports students learning by addressing achievement gap issues with in-school administrators. However, many in-school leaders do not take into consideration the value of out-of-school learning entities. Some school administrators believe that after-school programs only offer homework help and games.

How can the educational approach to collaborative efforts among in-school educators and after-school educators improve the importance of an education? This research was borne out of the idea of exploring collaborative efforts between in-school leaders and after-school program directors to promote the importance of an education. The attempt to create an improved collaborative effort between in-school leaders and after-school directors requires the promotion of a collaborative perspective for educators. The purpose of this approach is to examine the current process by which after-school educational program collaborate with in-school leaders to enhance students' academic achievement. To address this challenge, I interviewed program directors from out-of-school learning (OSL) programs, and school leaders from charter, public, and private

schools within the city of Pittsburgh to identify specific barriers and opportunities associated with the collaborative efforts.

1.2 Research Questions

This study sought to gather information from Out-of-school Learning (OSL) program directors and school leaders within the city of Pittsburgh. I interviewed members of these organizations in order to better understand their individual perceptions and level to which they value out-of-school learning programs, specifically for Black students. To address the lack of collaboration between in-school educators and OSL program educators the following inquiry questions were examined:

Q1: What are the current obstacles between in- and out-of-school programs, particularly for Black students?

Q2: What is the nature of partnerships that currently exist between in- and out-of-school programs in this region?

1.3 Significance of the Study

This study sought to identify and examine the supports needed for educators from OSL environments, as well as public, charter, and private schools within the city of Pittsburgh. This study is important because the identification of barriers and supports may provide opportunities to

influence and improve informal and formal practices. The results of this inquiry hold the potential to align and implement research-based best practices in schools and informal learning spaces to improve the frequency and quality of OSL collaborative efforts for Black students. Specifically, in the city of Pittsburgh, there is potential to share the results of this study across all networks to include schools and informal learning environments.

1.4 Summary

The aim of this study is to gain insights on collaborative efforts between informal and formal learning settings in the greater Pittsburgh community. Often times, OSL environments become more like a second home to students and families. However, school leaders may not view OSL as a prominent factor in an adolescent's life. To improve that process, I documented the insights of leaders from OSL programs, as well as charter, public, and private schools.

2.0 Chapter Two – Literature Review

This literature review explores the history of after-school partnerships and the challenges and opportunities associated with implementing quality after-school programs in educational settings. The review begins by defining cultural pathways within out-of-school learning (OSL) spaces and provides background on the history and context of the current problem of practice. This research is committed to finding ways to organize and re-focus external and internal entities to help Black youth succeed throughout their adolescent years. The main focus of this research is on tapping the personal expertise of OSL directors and school leaders. However, there is another dimension of importance. Are there existing collaborative efforts between school and OSL programs that can shed light on current efforts? This chapter will address this question.

2.1 Cultural Pathways

Learning styles vary greatly among youth and some can learn through a variety of techniques: however, evidence from many educational and psychosocial interventions indicates that the most effective and efficient teaching strategies for many youth emphasize active forms of learning (Durlak et al., 2010). Learning is accomplished across diverse pathways of participation in activity and affiliation with cultural groups in ways that the field of education barely understand. It is common for cultural differences to exist. Some schools are serving significant numbers of BIPOC youth or immigrant youth for the first time, but few teachers are equipped to work effectively with all students (Bell et al., 2012). Issues of race, ethnicity, social class, and gender

have to be negotiated in order to achieve mutual understanding. This negotiation can begin with recognition and clarification of assumptions, expectations, and goals (Reid et al., 2001).

Community-centered programs are central to Black civil society and the Black Freedom Struggle, most famously in the form of community schools in the early 1960s (Baldrige, 2014). The author stated that learning within informal community spaces is widely regarded as beneficial to young people, especially those living in low-income communities. As after-school community-based programs are viewed as vital places for serving low-income Black and other racially minoritized youth, they are often framed in political and educational discourse as institutions that “save” or “fix” students who are “broken” or “at-risk” (Baldrige, 2014). She continued to say that the language used to define and frame minoritized youth is connected to the ways they are imagined within educational spaces and society at large.

Historically, racially marginalized youth are targeted for education programming such as after-school programs to be used as a preventative measure and place of containment for youth who are considered to be “at risk” or “disadvantaged.” The Baldrige (2014) article noted that after-school programs who rejected the script of deficiency had difficulty securing funds and did not receive adequate acknowledgement for their work with youth. The ways in which Black youth are framed and how they are imagined shapes the expectations educators have of them, and it influences the ways in which educators interact and engage with them. Baldrige (2014) also described how these images impact the ways certain after-school programs promote their organizations to funders. In this study, staff members held expectations for student behavior that were largely rooted in White middle-class cultural standards to ensure that students look and act a certain way in brochures sent to donors and during site visits with potential funding agencies.

According to Bell et al. (2012), we orient to three conceptual dimensions of learning: life-long learners, life-wide learning, and life-deep learning. The authors continued with a five-year longitudinal study of youth development and learning across the social settings of their lives. This study incorporated four conceptual themes such as personally consequential biology (focusing on personal health, nutrition, and local environmental conditions), everyday argumentation, images of science and self, and technological fluencies.

Using the themes mentioned above, 123 people were charted for multiple years for learning pathways that included in school and at home. Participants were also observed participating in activities in many additional settings, such as religious institutions, after-school clubs, museums, sporting events, camping excursions/vacations, neighborhoods, and parks. Data collection methods included observations, interviews, self-documentation techniques, and document collection (Bell et al., 2012). The authors went on to note that out of the multitude of cultural learning pathways, parents provide resources to learners; they broker access to future learning experiences and arrange for more expert-others to teach their children. The study also touched on interdiscursive uses of language and how specific terms and styles of talk connect multiple encounters.

Also, in addition to cultural pathways, it is important to gain clarity on what motivates youth to engage in such programs. Akiva et al. (2017) facilitated a study on reasons why youth engage in activism programs. One reason youth were motivated to participate in such programs were due to seeking a safe space and a sense of belonging for students who are a part of a marginalized social identity group. These programs were driven by authentic and deeply rooted adult-youth mentoring relationships that supported the academic and social development of youth from marginalized groups and communities, such as Black girls and young women (Akiva et al.,

2017). As noted in the literature, maintaining consistent attendance is a challenge, students reported that what drew them to these particular programs is their interest in the causes or topics being undertaken.

One student participant of a social justice after-school program reported the following, “I think what motivates me...is the topic definitely because I feel like if you’re not enjoying something that you’re organizing or attending, you’re not going to put your full effort into it” (Akiva et al., 2017). Basically, youth are motivated to attend, at least in part, to the affirming nature of their sites as noted in the study. Youth feel affirmed and safe to be their full selves without judgement from others who may further marginalize them (Akiva et al., 2017). The study did however state that some limitations may arise from youth organizing programs such as competing with high school sports and other adolescent activities.

The research highlighted pathways of human development that exist in diverse communities and the range of bridges and barriers linked to extended learning pathways. The ways in which resources are accessible to reveal how the structures of power, privilege, and oppression impact identity trajectories (Barton et al., 2013). The authors found that students from nondominant backgrounds view their possible future selves as participatory when their identity work is carefully recognized. Out-of-school experiences are critical in shaping students’ ongoing engagement in various fields of interest. Some may argue that broadening their attention to out-of-school experiences simply adds one more task for school leaders and teachers at a time when administration, teachers, and students are already overloaded from all directions (Barton et al., 2013).

2.2 Problems that may stem from Collaborative Efforts

Problems that may stem from this issue could include the following: misaligned instructional support between in-school educators and after-school educators, the effectiveness of the out-of-school program is not properly promoted, fewer students attend out-of-school learning programs, and a decline in students' academic achievement. School administrators and teachers may not have a good understanding of what goes on at various after-school programs, therefore they do not see it as a valuable resource. Results from an open survey conducted by AnnMarie Schamper, a kindergarten teacher at William Dick Elementary School in Philadelphia, found the following: Six out of seven teachers thought the afterschool program consisted of homework help, games, and crafts. Only one teacher knew that the program included did projects that supported students' learning in social studies, science, and literacy. Furthermore, when teachers were asked to name three ways collaboration might affect outcomes, the following responses were given: Six teachers checked "student academic achievement," three checked "student behavior improvement," and six checked "improved staff communication. All six after-school practitioners checked all three positive outcomes of collaboration (Schamper, 2012).

If school administrators and teachers do not have a baseline understanding of what an after-school program has to offer, it decreases the likelihood of students' participation in various after-school programs. Additionally, in-school teachers may not want to collaborate with after-school practitioners because they feel they do not have the time for collaboration. While after-school programs certainly hold their own in promoting increased engagement in learning, after-school programs are only as strong as the schools with which they are aligned. This lack of communication between after-school educators and students' teachers has a significant impact on the growth of student achievement.

2.3 Historical and Pedagogical Context

During the late 1970s and early 1980s, community-based programs emerged in urban centers in response to underfunded schools as well as racialized and class-based legislation among other contributing factors (Baldrige, 2019). According to the author, under the Clinton administration in 1994, the U.S. Department of Education granted millions of dollars to school-based after-school programs in rural and urban contexts through the development of 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21CCLC). Baldrige (2019) noted that through 21CCLCs, the federal government allocated funding for states to distribute to schools and community-based organizations (some in partnership with schools) to provide after-school programming to increase academic achievement and access to higher education.

Over the last decade, great strides have been made in the development of effective interventions to prevent problem behaviors. An example of how preventative measures are being made is the approach of a community-school collaboration. For example, university researchers and a local public K-8 elementary school developed a partnership where researchers were able to gain access to students from a public elementary school with the intent of studying homeless families from this established relationship (Reid et al., 2001). Out of the 500 students in this school, 20 percent lived with their mothers in shelters for the homeless and all children except for one received no-cost or reduced-cost lunch.

Also, the maturity of the youth may lead to some adolescents to drop out of organized activities. Generally speaking, participation in many out-of-school organized activities declines as the child moves into and through adolescence (Mahoney et al., 2005). The author continued by stating a few results of older children being less inclined to participate in an after-school program. An older student may decline to participate in some organized programs because the program does

not provide kinds of activities likely to be of interest to adolescents, diminished budget cuts for extracurricular activities or the increase of adolescent employment during non-school hours (Mahoney et al., 2005).

Reid et al. (2001) noted that although they had established an acceptable level of collegiality between the researchers and teachers, the distinction was obvious. The researchers went about their work and the teachers went about theirs. The principal and his supervisor knew about the overall dimensions and measurement goals, but the teachers and staff were not invited to comment on the researcher's objectives. After gaining a deeper level understanding of poverty and the needs of the students, a peer-tutoring program was developed to address self-esteem issues and academic competency (Reid et al., 2001). The researchers informed the principal of their intention and only consulted about logistic components of the program.

This program was implemented with a small group of fifth-and sixth-grade students. These students were prepared to assist with first and second graders with their homework. The older children would act as models for the younger children. The children who participated were regular in their attendance and enthusiastic. Many others whom they could not accommodate because of their decision to limit the child-to-adult ratio demanded admission (Reid et al., 2001). The author mentioned that the initial success and subsequent failure of the program to thrive beyond their efforts were related to the lack of collaboration with teachers and mothers. These outcomes illustrate why creating an improved collaborative effort between educators within schools and after-school educators to enhance student learning is vital.

2.4 Partnerships

Partnerships represent a way to meet social needs by combining efforts and resources; they also serve as a response to the pressure to control public expenditure (Reid et al., 2001). According to Ainscow et al. (2006) there are three reasons why schools might enter into contemporary collaborative arrangements: they may do so voluntarily through incentives or through partnerships with another school by central government. The published literature on inter-school collaboration reflects this. Many studies report on schools entering into collaboration with OSL programs on a voluntary basis because of an underlying need and mutual benefit to do so. For example, under resourced schools, often in urban communities, may enter into partnerships as a means of sharing resources and taking advantage of what OSL programs have to offer students within these entities. An example of a successful partnership took place at a South Bronx middle school in New York City and Tacoma Public School in Washington State. The principal of Laboratory School of Finance and Technology - in partnership with community agencies, nonprofits, and foundations - provided the academic support and extracurricular opportunities needed to bridge the literacy gap for socioeconomically disadvantaged students of color.

This principal used a community approach which approach included the framework provided by The After-School Corporation (TASC). TASC developed a comprehensive set of tools and resources offered guidance to principals for building a strong school-community partnership and connecting with a local intermediary who can work with them to develop high-quality expanded learning programs. The school district provided Middle School ExTRA (MS ExTRA) services to 6th graders to improve adolescent literacy. After two years, the principal's school was performing 70 percent higher than all middle schools in New York City (Gonzalez, 2015).

In 2011, Tacoma Public School decided to incorporate a school-community approach to address the achievement gaps by addressing the social, emotional, and academic needs of Tacoma's students. This initiative is called the Tacoma Whole Child Initiative (TWCI). It is a decade-long strategic plan designed to support student success in the classroom and beyond (Olson, 2018). According to Olson (2001), TWCI was built on four overarching goals for Tacoma's youth: academic excellence, partnership, early learning, and safety. These goals were developed from extensive conversations with the Tacoma Public Schools administrators, the mayor's office and city council, the health and human services agency, and a host of other community-based organizations (Olson, 2018). The author noted that the "clear vision, common language, and transparency about results, combined with strong district and school leadership, were essential for making communitywide implementation possible" (p. 03). However, this notion wasn't always the case. All of the providers mentioned above shared a common goal of doing what was best for the students, but not all stakeholders had a common language or shared metrics, which in turn made it difficult to move in the same direction.

The Tacoma Public Schools started the conversation with numerous providers by posing this question: "Which benchmarks are you trying to help us move?" Their answers to this question gave significant insights into which specific benchmarks each entity could attain. Additionally, TWCI conducted an analysis that identified 92 separate initiatives of which only less than a third aligned with the benchmarks (Olson, 2018). Using this information allowed efforts to be made to fill gaps and redirect resources toward district priorities. Olson (2018) gave an example of how the district did not have any programming targeted toward middle school engagement and how the lack of programs led to an expansion of after-school programs in middle schools.

Under the Tacoma Initiative, schools are responsible for reaching out to partners in its neighborhood and for publicly reporting on the number of expanded learning opportunities created with partner organizations. Tacoma's Science and Math Institute (or SAMi) epitomizes how partnerships are enriching students learning experiences and supporting their comprehensive development (Olson, 2018). SAMi uses natural resources to offer creative learning pathways for students. This initiative is between Tacoma Public Schools and Metro Parks Tacoma. As part of this school-community approach, a zoo employee teaches a course as part of their normal schedule with classrooms built in and around the natural forest and marine facilities (Olson, 2018). The author noted that the strategy of using partnerships to offer students real-world learning experiences extends beyond SAMi. The school district engaged with 75 employers to provide students with summer jobs or internships to further support student learning outside of regular school day hours. These linkages also allow students to attain credit for work-based projects.

Reid et al. (2001) suggested that another major issue in healthy partnerships is the right and responsibility to speak and to listen to one's partners. Each partner plays a role in defining the goals of the collaboration, and each should agree on the method to accomplish these goals. The author discussed how the relationship with the agency staff in the program for poor women who were suffering from addictions were reluctant to document their actions in a systematic manner. The staff became more sensitive to this necessity after the researchers discussed how the data is useful in substantiating program viability and success (Reid et al., 2001).

Also, a strong commitment on the part of school and community organizations is necessary to establish trust and cooperation. Engaging in partnerships requires more time, energy, and research commitments for all stakeholders. In the literature, one study noted that "true partnerships" develop slowly, and only after teachers saw their ideas used and, experienced

benefits that were personally meaningful (Pierre et al., 2001). Effort to establish partnerships with community-based agencies provide a voice for the voiceless. Even though the cost of conducting this type of collaboration may be trivial at times, the benefits compensate for the investment (Reid et al., 2001).

2.5 Benefits of Partnerships

After-school programs have been shown to positively influence social and behavioral outcomes. A meta-analysis of such programs found that they enhanced a range of personal and social skills to include self-perceptions, behavioral adjustment, and school performance (Pyatak et al., 2015). Given the advantages to both researchers and community groups, one might wonder why there is hesitancy to develop partnerships or why this strategy has not become the common course (Reid et al., 2001). One answer may be that the cost of partnership often seems too great. Reid and colleagues stated that community-based leaders may also be reluctant to enter into situations in which their goals may or may not hold primacy. Additionally, further collaboration may elicit unspoken but implicit agendas connected to the ethnic, gender, and social class statuses of the potential partners. Resistance and misinterpretations may also develop on the community side of proposed partnerships (Reid et al., 2001).

It is important to gain a better understanding of the current processes by which in-school educators may not collaborate or even consider working with after-school educators. To facilitate enhanced student learning in- and out-of-school time, school administrators, teachers, and after-school practitioners need to work together. This approach can improve students' academic achievement, behavior, and attitude can improve. Benefits for schools could include the following:

- a) Improved social and academic outcomes (e.g. - low levels of negative emotions such as depressed mood and anxiety during adolescence; Mahoney et al., 2005);
- b) The benefit of having year-round learning opportunities;
- c) Have a wider range of enrichment activities to offer to students compared to the regular school day; and
- d) Access to additional community partners.

Benefits for Afterschool programs included the following: a) gain access to recruiting groups of students most in need of support services, and b) enhance program quality and staff engagement.

Partnerships with community-based agencies may gain access into communities that might not otherwise be available to outsiders (Reid et al., 2001). According to Olson (2018), the results of the community-wide Tacoma Whole Child Initiative showed significant decreases in chronic absenteeism and tardiness, as well as increases in high school graduation rates, verified college acceptances, and the number students earning industrial certificates. Graduation rates increased from 55 percent in 2010-11 to 86 percent in 2016-17, with improvements across every ethnic and racial group. Olson (2018) noted that seven in ten Hispanic students and nearly nine in ten Black students now graduate from high school. Additionally, the number of middle and high school students connected to a sport or club increased almost threefold between the 2013-14 and 2015-16 school years. Equally important, teachers' and staff members' beliefs about behavior changed exponentially (Olson, 2018).

There are important differences in the perspectives of school personnel and staff members of after-school agencies. According to Jehl et al (2001), schools emphasize student achievement and classroom-based learning, after-school programs tend to emphasize the role of the school in a

more holistic developmental approach of personal and social skills, in addition to academic achievement. Schools and parents need to have a clear understanding of what out-of-school learning has to offer so that they can understand that community organizations are as a valuable additional learning environments. The deputy superintendent of Tacoma Public Schools stated that “... a lot of families get their information from classroom teachers. We [had] to make sure our classroom teachers were solid enough in their beliefs and background about the Whole Child Initiative before we talked to families” (Olson, 2018, p.07). This understanding gives after-school programs and community entities the support they need to improve the programmatic practices and decision-making efforts to address student achievement.

Important research on the experiences of Black and other minoritized youth in after-school programs show how aspects of their lives have been improved by their time in the program, the public and political discourse around these spaces often exude undertones that depict Black youth as inherent problems and ignores deep structural barriers shaping their lives (Baldrige, 2019). To establish a successful partnership, three areas must be considered: forged common goals, respect for cultural differences, and shared efforts in interpretation (Reid et al., 2001). To understand these differences in perspectives, one must understand the underlying histories and cultures of the schools and community organizations as well as the contexts in which they operate (Jehl et. al, 2001). For example, Black and other racially minoritized communities are increasingly suspicious of researchers, especially of those who are from outside of their communities (Reid et al., 2001). These suspicions date back to unethical treatment of participants in the Tuskegee syphilis experiments and data fabrication in the findings of Sir Cyril Burt – two of many origins for the heightened levels of distrust (Reid et al., 2001).

There is also reluctance to expose personal and family deficits out of fear they may be interpreted as a family failure. Especially under the weight of political and economic forces like neoliberal reforms dominating public education and white supremacy, the important work of youth programs—and the flexibility, funding, and purpose that sustain these programs—is in serious jeopardy (Baldrige, 2019).

2.6 Summary

While there are schools and after-school programs that care for the same set of students there are philosophical and pedagogical differences that often and sometimes unfairly pit these spaces against each other. Using an established relationship with a community service organization tends to alleviate or lessen participant differences (Reid et al., 2001). Research shows that expanded learning opportunities from summer school to afterschool can have a significant impact on school attendance, achievement, and students' attitudes, behaviors, and feelings of belonging (Olson, 2018). Impacts are more likely when program content is intentionally designed to achieve such outcomes. Also, significant research demonstrated that youth with risk factors in their lives are more likely to drop out of school, engage in violence, and commit suicide (Berlin et al., 2007).

The more students consistently attend high-quality expanded learning programs, the greater the students' benefit. Olson (2018) further noted that when communities take a coordinated approach to supporting access to quality after-school learning experiences, learning and developmental outcomes can improve. As I continue to develop my problem of practice, I am interested in engaging with school administrators and community leaders in dialogues to develop a “we” mentality. The results of community-level effort are encouraging; however, the work is far

from over. The ongoing work will continue to grow if communities and organizations embrace and respond to the needs of youth in out-of-school time learning environments (Frazier et al., 2011).

3.0 Chapter Three – Methodology

The chapter begins with a statement of the inquiry problem, which is then followed by a discussion of two critical research questions. The participants and interview protocol are also described. Then, I will provide a discussion of the data analysis procedures and identify the study stakeholders.

3.1 Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study was to gather information from leaders of public, charter, and private schools as well as directors of OSL programs within the city of Pittsburgh. As in-school and OSL leaders are the stakeholder groups most likely responsible for supporting students in the formal and informal academic settings, both groups are most likely to benefit from this inquiry. The goal of the literature review was to provide a foundation for this study by answering the following question: “How do in-school leaders and OSL directors collaborate to promote a community school environment?” Throughout the research literature, several themes of interconnectivity between OSL and formal school administrators emerged. The gaps that remain, found between the general themes, is the problem space that led to the formulation of the research questions this study will examine. These research questions also guide the research instrument, stakeholder group, and processes for analyzing data and reporting findings.

3.2 Research Questions

The following are the specific research questions that drove this inquiry:

Q1: What are the current obstacles between in- and out-of-school programs, particularly for Black students?

Q2: What is the nature of partnerships that currently exist between in- and out-of-school programs in this region?

Regarding Question One

What are the current obstacles between in- and out-of-school programs, particularly for Black students? In a variety of different contexts, out-of-school learning spaces transform formal educational settings. Some after-school programs are still housed within school buildings, but the vast majority of afterschool programs are located beyond the traditional school setting. These OSL settings include museums, libraries, universities, and community centers. Since after-school programs are not a typical part of the school setting it is important to identify obstacles associated with the collaborative efforts between in-school leaders and out-of-school programs. For these reasons, I interviewed school principals and OSL program directors to determine what effect (if any) their roles had on each barrier.

Regarding Question Two

What is the nature of partnerships that currently exist between in- and out-of-school programs in this region? While many efforts to improve educational opportunities for youth focus on public school systems, this reform strategy often overlooks the range of informal educational organizations that host learning environments (Russell et al., 2013). Collaborative efforts

encourage boundary crossing as well as distributed teaching and learning practices. Question two of this study sought to identify the extent to which youth - primarily Black students – were given the opportunities to participate in OSL experiences to support their educational growth.

3.3 Research Setting and Participants

3.3.1 Research Setting

The research for this study took place in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Despite being named America’s most livable city by Forbes Magazine in 2014, Pittsburgh is home to stark racial disparities (Teixeira & Zuberi, 2016). Davis and Bangs (2007) noted, “African Americans in our region remain at the bottom of every measure of the quality of life, which include indicators of economic status, educational achievement, family stability, and violence” (p. 01). According to Teixeira and Zuberi (2016), the disparity in exposure to neighborhood poverty among Pittsburgh’s Black and white urban youth estimates that Black youth, both poor and non-poor, are more likely than white youth to live in high-poverty neighborhoods (i.e., neighborhoods where more than 30% of residents are below the poverty line). The authors noted that a greater share of non-poor Black youth (42%) live in these high-poverty neighborhoods than poor white youth (25%). These statistics suggest that Pittsburgh is an ideal place to develop out-of-school learning opportunities based off the above factors.

My research included public, charter, and private schools within the city of Pittsburgh. The Pittsburgh Public School District is the largest urban district within the city, enrolling over 22,000 students in more than 60 schools during the 2019-20 school year (Facts at a Glance, n.d.). Like

many districts, Pittsburgh is struggling with improving the performance of its students, especially Black students. Currently, Black students represent nearly 53 percent of the district population, with white students representing 33 percent of the district and the remaining balance spread across a number of different races/ethnicities (Facts at a Glance, n.d.). One significant challenge facing the district is the achievement gap between Black and white students and the district has made the closing of this achievement gap a top priority. At the same time, the district is focusing on improving the learning of low-performing students more generally. Charter and private school enrollments are rapidly increasing in many Northeastern states such as Pennsylvania at a time when overall enrollment is generally decreasing (Kotok et al., 2017). The authors mentioned that policymakers in Pennsylvania have embraced school choice as a remedy for failing schools many of which are located in areas of high racially minoritized residents and high poverty.

My aim is to provide both schools and community organizations with the necessary information to establish trust and cooperation with all key stakeholders. In the literature, a study noted that effort to establish partnerships with community-based agencies will provide a voice for the voiceless. Even though the cost of conducting this type of collaboration may be trivial at times, the benefits compensate for the investment (Reid et al, 2001).

3.3.2 Participants

During fall 2020, participants were contacted via email or by phone to schedule virtual interview sessions. I interviewed six principals from public, charter, and private schools that predominately served Black students. I also interviewed six OSL program directors that serve primarily Black students and represent organizations that are academically focused. In this study, it is important to identify the backgrounds, characteristics, and levels of experience of individuals

within the educational system and OSL environments. OSL leaders may demonstrate higher levels of proficiency with OSL learning, compared to colleagues in other learning spaces, due to their passion, and experiences.

3.4 Research Instrument

Interviews were used as the method of data collection to address the inquiry questions in this research study. The use of an interview protocol for this particular study was chosen because it can provide deeper and more nuanced information that could then be used to guide in-school and out-of-school leaders. The interview responses will remain anonymous which is important because school leaders and afterschool program directors are sharing sensitive information and perceptions about their work environments. The interview protocol was piloted by two OSL practitioners who are not members of Pittsburgh Public Schools but have experience with partnerships with in-school educators.

The feedback garnered through the piloting process was used to refine the inventory instrument prior to implementing. All grammatical and content issues were reviewed and addressed. The interview protocol was designed by the researcher and informed by the reviewed literature. The interview protocol includes both closed and open-ended questions. A copy of the interview protocol is included in Appendix A. The interview protocol will include a block of demographic questions (Q1 – Q5) in section one to allow the researcher to analyze data based on patterns correlated to particular demographic characteristics. Demographic differences or similarities may be relevant to the inquiry questions. A summary of demographic questions included gender, practice context, and time in education or OSL.

For Research Question One, interview items Q6-Q9 were used to identify current obstacles between in- and out-of-school programs, primarily Black students. Regarding Research Question Two, items Q12-Q15 were used to determine the nature of partnerships that currently exist between in- and out-of- school programs in this region and the extent in which Black students have opportunities to participate in high-quality collaborative OSL experiences.

3.5 Data Analysis

After interviewing school leaders and OSL directors, the process of analyzing the data surrounding their perceptions of partnerships between OSL organizations and schools began. During the analysis of interview data, I maintained a master file of raw data. The process of organizing the data, also called data cleansing, is the process used to ensure that data is correct, consistent, and usable (Das & Johnson, 2003). In addition, all identifying information from the data, including names and email addresses was deleted. Removing personal information assures that participants information is kept confidential. The next step in the cleaning process was to create variables and examine frequencies of that data. This examination and correction included variable coding, inconsistent values, and missing data.

During the final step in data analysis, I organized data to draw conclusions related to the research topics. As the interview protocol included a combination of closed and open-ended question formats, I anticipated that the interview protocol analysis would include looking for trends and patterns in the data.

3.6 Study Participant Analysis

The study demographic data recorded participants’ racial identities (Black, white, and Hispanic) and gender (male, female). Table 1 shows six principals that represent small- to mid-sized schools and a range in school leadership experience from 2 to 15 years at predominately Black schools. Table 2 shows six OSL participants that represent organizations that serve underrepresented youth who are primarily Black youth; two are founding executive directors, and their OSL experience ranges from 4 to 20 years.

Table 1: School Principal Participants

Participant	# of years with school/educational field	Gender	Race	Professional Work	# of students
Principal 1	10 yrs./27 yrs.	F	B	PreK-5 (Public)	< 300
Principal 2	4 yrs./11 yrs.	F	B	K-5 (Charter)	< 300
Principal 3	2 yrs./10 yrs.	F	B	6-12 (Public)	> 400
Principal 4	1 & 9 months/20 yrs.	F	W	PreK-8 (Private)	< 300
Principal 5	2 yrs./20 yrs.	M	B	6-12 (Private)	< 300
Principal 6	13 yrs./20 yrs.	F	B	K-5 (Public)	< 300

Notes - Race/B = Black, W = White

Table 2: OSL Leader Participants

Participant	# of years with school/educational field	Gender	Race	Professional Work
Program Director 1	4 yrs./8 yrs.	M	B	6-12
Executive Director2	15 yrs./20 yrs.	F	B	6-12
Program Director 3	4 yrs./8 yrs.	F	H	K-12
Executive Director 4	27 yrs./27 yrs.	M	B	6-12
Program Director 5	12 yrs./19 yrs.	F	B	7-12
Program Director 6	7 yrs./8 yrs.	M	W	K-5

Notes - Race/B = Black, W = White, H = Hispanic

3.7 Data Collection

The main source of data collection for this research study was individual interviews. Six principals and six OSL directors were interviewed via Zoom video conference services with the researcher reading the interview questions and the participants responding to each question. Each participant was asked a series of 15 questions including general introductory background questions about their professions and how they arrived at their current position. The individual interviews were recorded and transcribed by Zoom video conference service. Then, the researcher went through each interview to elicit themes or differences between school principals and OSL directors. Comparisons between OSL directors and principals were used to draw down the data until themes emerged from the data.

4.0 Chapter Four – Results

This chapter contains the results of the qualitative research study conducted to improve collaborative efforts between informal learning programs and traditional K-12 schools. As in-school and OSL leaders are the stakeholder groups most likely responsible for supporting students in the formal and informal academic settings, both groups were interviewed. The research questions guiding the construction and analysis of the interviews were:

Q1: What are the current obstacles between in- and out-of-school programs, particularly for Black students?

Q2: What is the nature of partnerships that currently exist between in- and out-of-school programs in this region?

The local participants in this study were PreK-5, K-5, K-8, 6-12, or 7-12 principals and OSL Executive or Program Directors. The study participants spoke openly about their experience with or knowledge of OSL partnerships in the Pittsburgh region. All interview transcripts were read multiple times and 13 potential themes were initially identified. These themes were entered into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet with example quotes. The themes were discussed with advisor, re-read, recoded, and collapsed into four final themes from all the columns.

The four themes were identified as: Relationships/Partnerships; Effective Communication; Program/Organizational Leadership; and Technology Literacy. The themes were reviewed again and coded to judge whether the quotes suggested it was viewed as a strength, weakness, opportunity, or threat (SWOT analysis). Strengths were defined as what OSL providers and school

leaders do well separately and collectively. Weaknesses were defined as what school leaders and OSL providers would see as something they are not doing well. Opportunities were coded when OSL providers and school leaders talked about weaknesses or gaps that they were seeking to make into strengths in the future, or strengths they wanted to strengthen even more. Lastly, threats were defined as perceived negative competition or external factors that could undermine collaborative efforts between schools and OSL programs. The coding was iterative and proceed through several steps of coding, discussion with a research advisor, and then recoding.

4.1 Theme 1:Relationships/Partnerships

OSL partnerships were formed out of the desire to provide quality opportunities and partnerships for Black families understanding and realizing the challenges that may be associated with historically underrepresented individuals (Principal 5). This theme supports research question 1 and 2 (What are the current obstacles between in- and out-of-school programs, particularly for Black students? What is the nature of partnerships that currently exist between in- and out-of-school programs in this region?)

In response to the questions, How do you determine what OSL programs to partner with? and “Are there OSL programs you have chosen not to partner with in your target area? If so, why/what determines which OSL programs become partners?” five out of six school leader participants described the formation of current OSL programs from a strength-based perspective. One principal explained that

some of the community based after school programs were already in place before I came to this school, and were just continued over the years, but I’ve developed relationships with each

of these executive directors to ensure that the programs are aligned with our schools goals, and that we're working together to make sure needs are met, even outside of the school day.

(Principal 1)

Another principal shared that the school had a “long-standing relationship with one of the workers at [name of OSL program] who lives in the community and is an alumni.” He has a direct connection and relationship with the students who attend the school and their parents are able to relate to them on a deeper level. This principal further explained that the community school’s liaison has a system where he checks in with OSL programs to see if they meet certain learning goals, and if they are not met, then the school does not invite them to return.

When the OSL providers were asked similar questions on how they determine what schools to partner with and what schools not to partner with in their target area, five out of the six OSL directors also shared their experiences from a strength-based perspective. Executive Director 4 stated that most of the schools they target to partner with are Title I schools whose students come from under-represented communities. All of the OSL study participants echoed the same sentiments. Another participant explained that

Most if not all of our team or staff are from the same communities in which we are located. So, they understand the dynamic of growing up in those communities in those areas to be able to connect with kids and the youth we serve. We understand what their parents could potentially go through more often than not, our staff knows the parent by growing up in the communities. This allows us to connect on a different level. It's a collective team effort. In general, we understand what the end goal is. We've adapted by leaning on resources within the city. (Program Director 1)

Other participants shared their reflections on school district partnerships:

The partnership has made a world of difference for our organization. This office provides us with grades, attendance, standardized testing and IEP's which is something the school didn't give us prior to it. Not only do we get grades and assessments, but I can call the [school district name] office and say we need to get in touch with someone at a school and they are able to get us in contact with the right people a lot faster. Also, the partnership is what you make it. (Program Director 5)

We have a partnership with [school district name] and it's been very good. They are very organized when it comes to out-of-school type programming. (Program Director 6)

However, when OSL participants were asked to describe their experience with Pittsburgh school partnerships four out of six struggled to gain entry into schools.

Schools was a hard process as far as entry. Getting into [school district name] was very difficult. I will fault that to there being so many partners. (Executive Director 2)

Establishing Pittsburgh school partnerships is rough. I developed my own relationship with teachers and counselors but now that my role shifted and a significant number of school staff turned over, everyone I know is not there anymore. We have FERPA's signed but it's almost impossible to get report cards in a timely manner. Half the time you get quarter one right before quarter 2 and at that point we can't do much with that information. (Program Director 3)

I think the collaborative piece of youth programming, everybody does not get that. So, recruitment becomes a challenge. (Program Director 5)

When participants were asked to describe the main challenges of OSL in the Pittsburgh area during and before COVID-19 a total of 8 out of 12 expressed their thoughts.

One participant reflected on the lack of qualified OSL staff:

The main challenge is probably adults who are not teachers, they don't have some of the same skill set and professional development that teachers have on record, so they often struggle to fully comprehend some of the work that the children are being asked to do.

(Principal 1)

Another participant shared:

I have found Pittsburgh to be a very competitive region and a mindset of I need my participants. I need my students. As opposed to collaboration and sort of looking at ways in which we can partner together to best support students and families as well. The less likelihood of collaboration is also a huge barrier as well. (Principal 5)

Despite the challenges of operating schools and afterschool programs before or during the Coronavirus epidemic, one of the principals stated that

the change in our setting has provided time to just reflect on out-of-school partnerships, instead of just looking at everything that isn't working to see it as an opportunity to do things differently to see it as an opportunity to get this right. (Principal 1)

Many of the study participants echoed the same mindset and even suggested ways to improve collaborative efforts between informal and formal educational settings.

One participant shared:

I think the school system and OSL programs should work together in a very collaborative manner to ensure positive youth development. While realizing that every home is different, and every school district and school campus are different as well. I think it's important to reinforce holistic development both inside and outside school walls. (Principal 5)

An OSL participant also offered a suggestion:

[School district name] has a database but each discipline needs to be in the right category. So, you don't have 10 programs doing the same thing. You need to take those strong programs that have similar missions and have them work together instead of a part. (Executive Director 4)

A principal also noted that there are wonderful OSL programs in the Pittsburgh region but at times recruiting and having students be a part of a program presents some challenges. He further explained that sometimes there are politics with schools which may present different barriers and challenges when it comes to partnership and collaboration and ultimately getting in front of those students (Principal 5). Another principal gave an example of how preference was given to two particular schools and how an OSL program only took two students out of the whole building, which had several parents very upset because their children were not selected for the after-school program (Principle 4). An OSL provider also echoed a similar aspect saying that “it’s about human

capital and sometimes certain people in capital are deplorable which is where we are” (Executive Director 4).

For the relationships/partnerships theme, all of the principal participants formed OSL linkages by continuing the long-standing relationship with an informal learning provider. In contrast, the OSL partnerships were formed through persistent measures of pitching their individual programs to various school districts in the Pittsburgh area. Although, many OSL programs had a difficult time gaining entry into schools, the relationships that were built over the years with school administrators, students, and families of these programs are able to stay afloat. However, the threat and lack of collaborative efforts among OSL providers continues to unfold over the years.

4.2 Theme 2:Effective Communication

“Communication is critical. Will a program do what they say or attempt to do what they said they would do?” (Principal 5). The theme of effective communication supports research question 1. What are the current obstacles between in- and out-of-school programs, particularly for Black students?

The current obstacles between informal and formal educational settings is effective communication. “Just a lot of the communication isn’t always great” (Principal 2). Two other principals echoed similar experiences with OSL providers:

The ability for staff and OSL providers to be on one accord has been a challenge over the years. The ongoing communication between the school and after school providers can be overwhelming at times. (Principal 6)

I would say keeping everybody informed and on the same page is necessary but lacking. I think sometimes communication of what OSL programs need and what they're doing gets lost. For example, math is being taught in a whole new way. I think sometimes when after-school programs are doing it, they do it a different way and kids understand it. Then, they come to school and do it this way, but we can't accept it that way for one reason or another. It creates some animosity, not only between the kids and teachers but parents are getting upset as well. (Principal 4)

One OSL program director explained, "I think it's exceedingly challenging when we're in the brick and mortar setting to create space just like this one that we're having even now to just talk freely about brainstorming." Two school leader study participants gave some suggestions on what an efficient collaborative effort should look like from their perspectives:

We all should just kind of meet together to get an understanding of what the expectations are. I think just how we meet with families internally, there needs to be more conversations with OSL providers. There needs to be some time like we do parent teacher conferences every nine weeks, maybe we need to get with some of these OSL programs every nine weeks. (Principal 2)

I definitely think communication needs to be at the forefront. It has to be more of a relationship than a network or service. (Principal 4)

An OSL director also expressed her opinion on what schools should do:

I think schools should be more transparent and we need to have real conversations about what's not working and what is, and we need to trust each other.

(Program Director 3)

Out of all the study participants none mentioned any threats related to effective communication. With regard to research to research question 1 (What are the current obstacles between in- and out-of-school programs, particularly for Black students?) the data tells us that only weaknesses and opportunities were described. None of the study participants reflected on any strengths of effective communication. This finding shows that school leaders and OSL providers need to be very intentional to carve out time on a recurring basis to make sure that the students they serve will have a better chance in excelling in their academic setting.

4.3 Theme 3: Program/Organizational Leadership

“Out-of-school time programs for some children and families gives them another way of providing an opportunity for children to focus on their academic learning and growth” (Principal 6). Program/Organizational leadership theme supports research questions 1 and 2 (What are the current obstacles between in- and out-of-school programs, particularly for Black students? What is the nature of partnerships that currently exist between in- and out-of-school programs in this region?). OSL study participants spoke proudly about their programs. Three of them shared the following:

We are an after-school provider focusing on social emotional learning and mentoring with the idea of positive goal setting and planning for our youth. To assure that they can identify their passion as they approach adulthood and receive the necessary resources and support that they need in order to be a successful adult. We primarily serve African American students and families. (Program Director 1)

It was founded to improve the lives of homeless children while using a holistic approach to be able to understand and improve the lives of children. You have to address systemic issues and systemic barriers that are preventing children from being successful. We do that through a myriad of programming. We do adult programming targeting parents or guardians of our children in our programs. We also do programming from K through college and beyond. The program is based on three main areas: project-based learning, high school success, and career exploration. (Program Director 3)

We help young ladies ages 10-17 on how to attain the most successful future as possible through a couple different ways. The main way is through forums. We facilitate five different curriculum forums through a conversation style facilitation. We have these conversations, so they know their voices are relevant and needs to be heard but they're also getting pertinent information that is going to help them achieve success now and in the future. We also specialize in behavioral health issues. So, we help them peel back the layers and aid in identifying what is the proper way to address these issues. (Executive Director 2)

When OSL participants were asked, “What differentiates your program from other OSL programs in your target area?” the following responses were shared:

Cultural relevance. We know that there’s more often than not a lot of barriers that kids experience and a lot of traumatic experience that they go through before entering a school day or entering the school building. They’re already behind the eight-ball walking into the building. So, from our end specifically if we can connect with them from a social emotional learning standpoint, mentoring and giving them the support necessary to uplift them by goal setting and planning. We know that we can prepare them from there to be able and ready to learn academically. (Program Director 1)

We’ve been called a boutique program; we don’t deal with one-hundred kids. We normally have 40 and below. To funders it’s not appealing but our outcomes are impressive. We’ve had one hundred percent high school graduation since I started 12 years ago. We’ve always had a certified teacher on staff to make sure that they’re monitoring where the students are academically. Having their grades and school attendance have always been important to us because we know what barriers exist if that child does not graduate from high school. We’re dealing with African American young men and women and we cannot have them become statistics of our system. (Program Director 5)

We recruit older adults (50 +) to tutor kids in grades K-4. Majority of our students come from low-income communities. The tutors work with students one-on-one to develop their reading abilities. All tutors are trained using a research-based program that

includes materials for all student sessions. Our program is free to students and schools.

(Program Director 6)

Six out of twelve study participants shared their thoughts on the need of OSL programming:

I think it helps them develop their likes and dislikes. I think it helps them see learning in a whole different light. (Principal 4)

I think out-of-school learning programs play a critical role when it comes to academic support, when it comes to providing a safe learning environment, and when it comes to ensuring that students are well cared for outside of the scope of their parents and their families as well. On a personal note, I would say that out-of-school programs were critical for me. I was very much at risk and if I didn't get involved in various OSL activities I definitely wouldn't be where I am today. (Principal 5)

I believe in afterschool programs and I think it's a great opportunity, especially for [school name] students. (Principal 3)

Two OSL directors also shared a similar outlook on OSL programs:

OSL programs are essential for our kids to achieve success. (Executive Director 2)

Sometimes a kid knows that someone cares about their grades. They don't always get the support that's necessary. They lean on our team and staff as an adult figure and role model in their life. (Program Director 1)

It takes a village to raise a kid and I'm glad to be a part of that village. (Program Director 5)

Despite having strong feelings about the value of out-of-school learning programs, three out of the six principals shared the following drawbacks of school or OSL organizational leadership:

There has been a lot of turnover with administration. So, I would say since I've been here, I've probably had 10 different administrators, no one has been here for longer than two years. I'm also very disappointed with our artists in OSL learning programs. My disappointment is that the quality of the programming that occurs with our students and the lack of access at times. The after-school program needs to make sure that they have qualified staff to actually be able to tutor. (Principal 3)

If an OSL program cost money for our families, we do not partner with them because many of our families are struggling just to meet the basic needs of students. (Principal 6)

I would say leadership plays a role in determining what OSL programs we partner with. There are a lot of individuals who could be perceived as paper champs, you know,

bring what sounds to be a great program and everything looks fine and great on paper but are the programs actually high quality and can they impact the lives of those individuals in which they serve on a daily basis. (Principal 5)

One out of the six principals offered a suggestion for OSL programs:

Maybe more involvement in terms of all grade levels or more grade levels. Some of the [OSL] programs that we work with only take middle school. There's a lot of different programs where I wish we could find more that ran K to 8th grade. (Principal 4)

With respect to research questions 1 and 2 the consensus of the OSL study participants spoke about the systemic barriers that exist for the students they serve on a daily basis. All of the study participants primarily work with Black students as well as understand the need for out-of-school learning programs. The consensus of the study participants was that OSL programs are valuable to developing well-rounded youth and that they prepare youth to excel academically. However, some participants felt that OSL programs should include a wider range of program participants instead of limiting the target audience to middle through high school students. The data also showed the impact of whether or not a school would partner with an OSL provider based on the organization's leadership/program design.

4.4 Theme 4: Technology Literacy

“We were patient with our families, understanding that this new technological expectation was just that brand new. We exercised grace” (Principal 1). The technology theme supports research question 1 (What are the current obstacles between in- and out-of-school programs, particularly for Black students?)

This theme was referenced at least once by 7 out of the 12 interviewees in this study (58%). One out of these seven participants was a school principal. She shared the following when asked, “What would you describe as the main challenges of OSL programs in the Pittsburgh area during COVID-19? What would you describe as the main challenges of collaborative OSL efforts in the Pittsburgh area before COVID-19?” her response was technology. The biggest struggle she cited were the lack of understanding how to use the technology resources, whether it be the actual computer or Chromebook with an OSL program. (Principal 1)

Several OSL participants also reflected on the weaknesses of technology literacy:

Technology literacy has been the biggest challenge. We didn't know there were so many discrepancies with using technology until we had to be virtual. Something as using the keyboard. A lot of students didn't know where certain letters were and how to type on a proficient level. (Program Director 1)

We are a hybrid program, however, since turning virtual our students are behind in the tech age, which is what I've been screaming from the mountaintop since I got in this field. We assume that because they're Generation Z that they're professionals at all of this. The reality is they're not. (Program Director 3)

The biggest challenge is technology and it shows the inequity in the city of Pittsburgh. The technology piece has been terrible. We tried to do our summer orientation virtually and kids were dropping out because they didn't have a computer, or they were trying to use their phone. You can't type on the phone. (Executive Director 2)

One OSL study participant proudly reflected on her program's adaptability to a virtual platform:

We were featured on [school district's name] webpage last year because we were doing online tutoring and homework assistance. So, when Covid-19 hit we were able to start our program in three days after we went in quarantine. We literally shutdown on Friday and we were up and running by Wednesday. (Program Director 5)

With respect to research question 1 (What are the current obstacles between in- and out-of-school programs, particularly for Black students?), no mentioning of technological threats was described during the individual interviews. However, the data tells us that since switching to a remote platform for many OSL program leaders and one principal expressed strong feelings about the inadequacies that continue to plague predominately underrepresented communities within the city of Pittsburgh.

5.0 Chapter Five – Conclusions and Recommendations

This qualitative study looks at collaborative efforts between informal learning programs and traditional K-12 schools. This study reveals the ways in which school leaders and OSL directors form partnerships for the purpose of Black youth. This chapter also includes a discussion of major findings as related to the literature on OSL programs. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the limitations of the study and areas for future research.

In this study, participants provided their experience with out-of-school learning programs here in the Pittsburgh region. Many of the study participants reflected on how their school or OSL program addresses systemic barriers that impact the experiences of Black youth. The study participants discussed the collaborative efforts between school leaders and OSL directors and provided recommendations on how to build a more cohesive culture between informal and formal educational settings.

As a result of exploring this research topic, four themes emerged from the data and the findings will be discussed as they relate to Theme 1: *Relationships/Partnerships*, Theme 2: *Effective Communication*, Theme 3: *Program/Organizational leadership*, and Theme 4: *Technology literacy*. School leaders and OSL directors shared the following insights:

- Insights about relationships/partnerships
- Insights about effective communication
- Insights through program/organizational leadership
- Insights on technology literacy
- Insights on the value of OSL and recommendations

Throughout these five focus areas, this research study was able to document ways that school administrators and OSL directors can work together more cohesively through a holistic approach. It was also determined that OSL and school leaders provided valuable insights which will improve the process.

5.1 Insights about Relationships/Partnerships

Analysis of experience made by school leaders and OSL directors indicates that study participants are knowledgeable about youth and OSL programs. The participants understand the dynamics of the community, the schools and the social atmosphere surrounding the youth's circumstances, especially OSL directors. Some of the OSL leaders grew up in the same or similar neighborhoods and communities the OSL programs currently serve. The participants expressed that the formation of OSL programs were mostly developed by previous school leaders but were further supported by the current school administrators. These long-standing relationships with OSL providers played an important role in supporting the development of Black students.

In Chapter I, community-based agencies were defined as respected entities that are established and have the trust of the community (Reid et al., 2001). The identification of OSL programs as community-based agencies provided value to some of the school leader participants. A principal of a community school spoke very highly about one of the OSL study participants program. She explained that this program has a direct connection with the youth that attend her school and parents. The OSL program that she is referring to employs staff members who primarily grow up in low-income communities similar to the students at her school. Baldrige (2014)

explained that community-centered programs are central to Black civil society and most famously in the form of community schools in the 1960s.

Ainscow et al. (2006) noted that there are three reasons why schools might enter into collaborative arrangements: voluntarily; through incentives; or in partnership with another school by central government. The prior literature suggests that schools often enter into collaboration with OSL programs on a voluntary basis. The study findings show that all of the partnerships were formed on a voluntary basis. In Chapter 2, it was also noted that under resourced schools, often in urban communities, enter into partnerships as a means of sharing resources and taking advantage of what OSL programs have to offer their students.

The study findings showed that the formation of OSL program partnerships was a very difficult process for most of the OSL directors. The OSL study participants faced many challenges in terms of accessing school partnerships in the Pittsburgh area. However, the study participants did mention that after they finally gained access to schools, specifically certain school districts, the partnership made a tremendous difference in collecting student data (grades, attendance, scores on standardized testing and assessments) for youth in their programs. It was also noted that gaining entry to schools came with its own set of obstacles such as: competition with other OSL providers, recruitment and concerns about OSL program staff qualifications.

One of the principal study participants reflected on the lack of qualified OSL program providers. She mentioned that adults at the OSL programs do not have some of the same skill sets and professional development as teachers, so they often struggle with comprehending some of the work that students are being asked to do by schools. Participants also mentioned there being so many OSL programs and school politics. These barriers play a significant role in recruiting students and maintaining an OSL program.

The findings show that study participants are aware and understand current barriers that impact collaborative efforts between informal and formal education. Participants offered some recommendations on how to improve these collaborative efforts. Implementing a community approach to the educational system was a common insight on a successful partnership that included a community approach framework provided by the After-School Cooperation (TASC) (Gonzalez, 2015).

5.2 Insights about Effective Communication

The findings indicate that OSL directors and school leaders were unanimous that effective communication is key to facilitating successful partnerships/relationships – a finding that is supported by the literature (e.g. Reid et al.(2001). The authors further explained that defining roles for each partner in the collaborative process should be agreed on to accomplish the goals of each organization. Although, OSL directors and school leaders are aware of the importance of communicating, the findings show that both entities are not always on one accord.

In Chapter 2, the literature explained that engaging in partnerships requires more time, energy, and research commitments for all stakeholders (Pierre et al., 2001). The findings from my study showed that ongoing communication between schools and OSL providers can be overwhelming and lacking at times. A principal gave an example of how math is being taught in a very different way and when kids attend OSL programs it is being taught a different way in which students understand. Then, the students come back to school and do it the way they learned it at the OSL program, but the school is unable to accept it. This dynamic creates some animosity between students, teachers and parents.

As a result of the lack lustered or ineffective communications between school leaders and OSL directors, I noticed that principal participants gave more insights on how to improve communication between formal and informal educational settings. Here are some suggestions on what an effective collaborative effort should look like from the principal study participants: all OSL providers and school leaders should meet together to get a clear understanding of expectations, and all OSL providers should meet every nine weeks with school leaders they are partnered with to have meaningful conversations about student achievement. Pierre et al. (2001) noted that even though cost of conducting collaborative efforts may be trivial at times, the benefits compensate for the investment.

5.3 Insights on Program/Organizational Leadership

Pyatak et al. (2015) noted in the literature review that after-school programs enhanced a range of personal and social skills to include self-perceptions, behavioral adjustment, and school performance. Given the advantages, one might wonder why there is hesitancy to develop partnerships (Reid et al., 2001). For this study, the findings showed that OSL is indeed an opportunity for youth to focus on their academic learning and growth. Many of the OSL study participants spoke with great pride about their programs. They understand the barriers that kids, specifically Black youth, experience before they enter the school building. Principal study participants also explained the importance of OSL programs and the impact it has on Black youth. I did notice that only two out of the six OSL participants served students from K-12. Most of the programs only worked with students in six through twelfth.

Despite study participants expressing the value and need for OSL programming, participants reflected on the inadequacies of organizational leadership with school and OSL directors. The findings showed the following:

- School administrative leadership turnover was on the rise
- OSL providers were viewed as not properly trained
- Quality of OSL programming was subpar

5.4 Insights on Technology Literacy

“Technology. The biggest struggle is the lack of understanding how to use the resource, whether it be the actual computer or Chromebook with an OSL program” (Principal 1). The findings showed that technology literacy and the lack of resources created a barrier for students and families. After examining the results of the study participant interviews, it was evident that technology literacy was a known issue before and heightened during the coronavirus epidemic. Participants identified the following weaknesses of technology:

- Students did not know how to use a keyboard
- Students did not know how to type on a proficient level
- Students did not own or have access to computers
- The pandemic showed the inequities in the city of Pittsburgh

Technology literacy is one of the most important skills a student can have in today’s competitive environment. Often issues of race, gender, or social class have much to do with

differences in opportunities as well as engaging with literacy through computers (Williams, 2005). The author further explained that students who do not have convenient physical access to computer technologies will struggle to gain the necessary experience to feel confident about using them. The technological insights gained from study participants are not surprising. Prior research has shown that lower-socioeconomic status families generally have less access to computers and are less likely to be proficient users.

5.5 Conclusion

Based on the insights of the study participants, both groups understand the dynamics of communities, schools and the social atmosphere surrounding Black youth in Pittsburgh. Some of the OSL leaders grew up in the same or similar neighborhoods and communities as the OSL programs. That's why it is important to invest in building positive relationships between OSL and school leaders to have a large impact on partnership success.

The findings indicated that OSL directors and school leaders were in full agreement that effective communication is critical in facilitating successful partnerships/relationships. As a result of the ineffective communication efforts between school leaders and OSL directors, I noticed that principal participants gave more insights on how to improve communications between formal and informal educational settings. The study findings also showed that OSL programs are an opportunity for youth to focus on academic learning and developmental growth. The participants also reflected on the inadequacies of organizational leadership with school and OSL directors. And how, its necessary to maintain consistency in OSL programming & school operations to aid student

academic success. The problem with following through with the study participants recommendations is that there needs to be a systematic approach to addressing the needs of the child. Although the needs are being addressed and insights are revealed, there needs to be a system to measure and document risks and needs to ensure that long-term success is being addressed.

5.6 Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to discuss the current process by which after-school educational programs collaborate with in-school leaders to enhance students' academic achievement. The main recommendation for change is to improve the communication efforts between school leaders and OSL directors on an ongoing basis. The literature review identifies effective communication as a variable for successful OSL partnerships. This study was limited in scale due to the coronavirus epidemic. It only represented 12 participants in the city of Pittsburgh. The primary medium for data collection was individual interviews and it did not include perspectives or experiences of youth. However, a new study with an increase in the number of OSL directors and school leaders, in urban settings, would provide additional data to develop a systematic approach for preparing youth for success. I would also recommend exploring ways to survey youth involved in school or OSL partnerships. For future studies, it would be beneficial to gather insights from OSL supporters such as funders, intermediaries, and policy makers to expand the knowledge and methods of collaborative efforts for leaders of schools and OSL programs.

From my experience, while working for various non-profit, youth enrichment after-school organizations in the city of Pittsburgh, I can conclude that a formalized approach to developing partnerships with schools would be helpful. A formalized approach would grant access to many

schools as well as provide partnerships among other OSL programs. It seems that there are a number of OSL providers in the Pittsburgh region but many of them do not partner with existing OSL programs for various reasons. The key is to learn how to effectively work together to ultimately benefit the youth in which we serve. When these young women and men can leave high school and become a productive citizen, then all of the collaborative efforts between informal and formal educational leaders will create a community where everyone works together.

Appendix A Interview Protocol Consent

Dear Interviewee:

Thank you for participating in my research study on out-of-school learning programs in Pittsburgh. My name is Valeria McCrary and I am a Doctor of Education candidate at the University of Pittsburgh with a concentration in Out-of-School Learning. You are being asked to participate in an interview research project entitled, “*Collaborative efforts between informal learning programs and traditional K-12 schools.*” For this 45-60-minute interview, I appreciate any insights you can provide into your knowledge of and experience with out-of-school learning programs here in Pittsburgh.

This interview is for the sole purpose of my dissertation study at the University of Pittsburgh. Your participation in this interview is completely voluntary and you can stop the interview at any time or skip any questions. I will be jotting some notes as we speak. I will keep the notes and any transcripts confidential and will not share them outside of my dissertation committee. Additionally, the data I do share will not be identified by individual, but instead summarized among all interview participants.

Given these conditions, do you agree to participate in today’s interview? *[If YES, continue. If NO, stop interview and thank them for their time.]* I would like to record the conversations to check the accuracy of my notes. Do you agree to this? *[If participant agreed to have interview recorded, start recording. If not, prepare to take detailed notes.]* Do you have any questions before we begin?

Appendix B Interview Protocol for OSL Directors

Demographic questions (Q1 – Q5) in section one to allow the researcher to analyze data based on patterns correlated to particular demographic characteristics. A summary of demographical questions includes practice context and time in OSL.

Q1. What is your position at your out-of-school learning program? (Follow-up Question: What do you like most about your position? What’s the least favorable aspect of your position?)

Q2. How long have you worked in the out-of-school learning field?

Q3. How long have you been employed with your program? (Probe as necessary) Tell me a little more about _____ program.

Q4. Please explain the racial, ethnic and cultural differences in the youth and families you serve. (Follow-up Question: How do you consider cultural or background differences in your work with families and students?)

Q5. Tell me a little more about your experience with Pittsburgh school partnerships.

Research Question One, items Q6-Q9 will be used to identify current obstacles between in- and out-of-school programs, particularly for Black students?

Q6. What differentiates your program from other OSL programs in your target area? What is your program niche? Any similarities?

Q7. What schools are you currently partnered with? How was that partnership formed? (Follow-up Question: Are these the same schools you partnered with before COVID-19? If not, please explain why the partnership no longer exists.)

Q8. What does the partnership entail (i.e. mutual benefits, etc.)? Please provide some examples.

Q9. What would you describe as the main challenges of OSL in the Pittsburgh area during COVID-19? What would you describe as the main challenges of OSL in the Pittsburgh area before COVID-19?

Regarding *Research Question Two*, items Q12-Q15 will be used to determine the nature of partnerships that currently exist between in- and out-of-school programs in this region.

Q10. How do you determine what schools to partner with? Are there schools you have chosen not to partner with in your target area? If so, why/what determines which schools become partners?

Q11. Describe how COVID-19 impacted your school partnerships. Prior to COVID-19, describe your experience with school partnerships with Pittsburgh schools?

Q12. How does your OSL program adapt to changing circumstances (i.e. COVID-19, etc.)? Please provide some examples of what this looks like in your opinion.

Q13. If your program did not exist, how might this affect the youth you serve? (Follow-up Question: Are there other programs they might attend?)

Q14. How do you think the school system and OSL programs should work together to ensure positive youth development? (Follow-up Question: Please provide examples of what that might look like with your program or other programs).

Q15. Is there anything else that you would like to share regarding the value of OSL programs in your target area?

Appendix C Interview Protocol for School Leaders

Demographic questions (Q1 – Q5) in section one to allow the researcher to analyze data based on patterns correlated to particular demographic characteristics. A summary of demographical questions includes practice context and time in education.

Q1. What is your position at your school? (Follow-up Question: What do you like most about your position? What’s the least favorable aspect of your position?)

Q2. How long have you worked in the academic setting?

Q3. How long have you been employed with your school? (Probe as necessary) Tell me a little more about _____ school.

Q4. Please explain the racial, ethnic and cultural differences in the youth and families you serve. (Follow-up Question: How do you consider cultural or background differences in your work with families and students?)

Q5. Tell me a little more about your perspective about out-of-school learning programs.

Research Question One, items Q6-Q9 will be used to identify current obstacles between in- and out-of-school programs, particularly for Black students.

Q6. What differentiates your school from other schools in your target area? Any similarities?

Q7. What out-of-school learning programs are you currently partnered with? How was that partnership formed? (Follow-up Question: Are these the same out-of-school programs you partnered with before COVID-19? If not, please explain why the partnership no longer exists)

Q8. What does the partnership entail (i.e. mutual benefits, etc.)? Please provide some examples.

Q9. What would you describe as the main challenges of OSL programs in the Pittsburgh area during COVID-19? What would you describe as the main challenges of collaborative OSL efforts in the Pittsburgh area before COVID-19?

Regarding *Research Question Two*, items Q10-Q15 will be used to determine the nature of partnerships that currently exist between in- and out-of-school programs in this region.

Q10. How do you determine what OSL programs to partner with? Are there OSL programs you have chosen not to partner with in your target area? If so, why/what determines which OSL programs become partners?

Q11. Please describe how COVID-19 impacted OSL partnerships. Prior to COVID-19, describe your experience with OSL partnerships with Pittsburgh Schools?

Q12. How does your school adapt to changing circumstances (i.e. COVID-19, etc.)? Please provide some examples of what this looks like in your opinion.

Q13. If OSL programs did not exist, how might this affect the youth you serve?

Q14. How do you think the school system and OSL programs should work together to ensure positive youth development? (Follow-up Question: Please provide examples of what that might look like with your school or other schools).

Q15. Is there anything else that you would like to share regarding the value of OSL programs in your target area?

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