

Kids Connection Program Analysis

SOAN 373: Ethnographic Research Methods

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Title: Kids Connection Program Analysis

Abstract:

This collaborative, community-based research initiative evaluates the challenges and successes of So How Are the Children's (SHAC) Kids Connection after school program. Kids Connection's primary goal is to provide underserved youth in Faribault, Minnesota with enriching and educational activities. This research initiative assesses how the program has served the youth in the aforementioned capacities. We evaluate eight main areas: limiting the amount of students in program, curriculum structure, volunteer and staff retention, student interest in program, staff/volunteer and student relations, students' attitudes towards program, balance between recreational and academic time, and punitive measures. This data was collected through interviews with youth, staff/volunteers, and teachers, and through unobtrusive observation at So How Are the Children? and Faribault Middle School. Through this academic civic engagement and community-based research, we hope to provide So How Are the Children? with an accurate assessment of their program's strengths and potential areas for improvement in serving students. Youth involved in this program are primarily Somali refugees. Due to the nature of this population we encountered issues concerning language, immigration, the achievement gap, diversity, and acculturation.

Bulleted summary of main points:

- So How Are the Children (SHAC) is a non-profit youth-, education-, and immigrant-oriented organization located in Faribault, MN that was created in 2002 in response to the recent influx of Somali refugees and immigrant youth. SHAC is committed to providing these "at-risk" youth with programs that seek to positively affect youth development and adjustment in a new cultural environment.
- Kids Connection, a division of the SHAC programming that was created in 2009, is the focus of our research and evaluation. Kids Connection operates through the Faribault Middle School and serves as an after-school site for students' academic and personal growth. Various college and community volunteers, paid staff members, and the director coordinate this program, which, on average, serves sixty students per day.
- Students spend thirty minutes of the program focusing on academic work. The remainder of the student's time, about an hour, consists of recreational activities such as crafts, cooking class, sports, and general socializing.
- Our research is based on qualitative data gathered through open-ended interviews and observations. We interviewed staff, volunteers, student participants of the after school program and teachers at Faribault Middle School. In total, we interviewed 24 students, 2 volunteers, 3 staff, and 1 ESL teacher.
- Research shows that staff and volunteer presence is important and vital in successfully educating immigrant youth. School programs are most effective when there is a low

student to staff ratio, as this can help to meet the needs of underserved youth.

Additionally, student interest and positive feelings towards the program and their mentors is crucial in their educational and positive social development. Other characteristics of a successful program include non-punitive behavior management, high quality of materials and experiences, the use of structured programs, and an understanding of participants' culture.

- Research also shows that new immigrants to the United States face many challenges such as “culture shock,” linguistic barriers, racism, and resistance to being accepted by the dominant society of their new location.
- Limiting the number of student participants in the Kids Connection program is recognized as a potential solution to problems the program faces but most staff and volunteers had ambivalent feelings towards this restructuring option and were hesitant in denying students an area of socialization and safety. Additionally, introducing a 3-week curriculum was another unpopular idea for restructuring the program.
- Specific guidelines and clear expectations for students, as well as recruiting more staff and volunteers, are important components to having an effective after school program for such a large number of students. Staff and volunteer retention is difficult and volunteers generally felt unprepared in working with this particular group of students, and felt that better training was necessary in preparing students and dispelling any confusion on roles and expectations.
- Students were generally very enthusiastic about their time at the program and enjoyed socializing with friends and receiving homework help from staff members and volunteers. Many students highly valued this program and attended the program voluntarily.
- There is a general struggle between maintaining a balance between socialization and academics and straying too far from the original and primary purpose of the program, which is fostering academic development.
- Somali, Hispanic, and White participants were largely enthusiastic regarding the support they were acquiring from volunteers, staff, and the program director. Volunteers in particular were highly valued by the students. Many volunteers and staff members are able to engage students in academically productive activities and maintain a good rapport with students.
- Regular meetings and updates, formal training, and clear expectations of volunteer and staff roles are crucial in maintaining a balance between being an adult supervisor and a guide, and being a “friend.”
- Having time to socialize and recreational time are extremely important to student participants. Students desire a more diversified range of engaging activities and exercises during both academic and playtime. Staff and volunteers also agree that a balance between socialization and academics is necessary, with socialization being an important component to encouraging student interest and positive feelings towards the program.
- Both volunteers and students feel that the current form of punishment (suspending students from the program for an extended period of time) is reactionary and too harsh. It is felt that having constructive discussions about students' disruptive behavior can be more effective and positive. The program director disproportionately and overwhelmingly plays the role of the disciplinarian and it is felt that redistributing some of this authority to other staff members and volunteers can help eliminate

misunderstandings and rash judgments, and help to eliminate further behavioral problems in the long run.

- We suggest adequate training that clearly outlines expectations and roles pertaining to work done by volunteers and staff as an important area of development in making the program more effective in academic and social achievements for the students. This can be done through “orientation sessions” before the program starts and regular staff and volunteer meetings and communication on updates and other issues pertaining to the problem.
- We suggest that special attention be paid to balancing the friendship and academic advising components of the relationships between volunteer/staff and students in order to effectively assist students academically.
- We suggest incorporating into staff and volunteer positions more emphasis on their role as behavioral managers to effectively help manage behavior and create a more productive environment for recreational and academic activities.
- We suggest more aggressive recruitment of college volunteers, especially those who have a background working in educational contexts with youth.
- We suggest developing a mentor-mentee relationship between volunteers/staff and students. This will help facilitate positive relationships and create consistency around student-staff/volunteer interactions.
- Restructuring the program by limiting the number of students and/or creating a rotating academic curriculum are not seen as viable options by many volunteers and staff members, and we are not able to offer any conclusive suggestions at this time due to limited information.
- In improving students’ attitudes towards the program, we suggest organizing more group activities in order to facilitate interactions across ethnic lines between Latino, Somali and White students. We also suggest communicating clear expectations with student participants about the importance of utilizing homework help and encourage students to set academic goals to help them remain focused on academic improvement. Finally, we suggest spending more time discussing behavioral issues with students instead of suspending them from the program in order to promote positive behavior and correct misbehavior.

ABSTRACT

This collaborative, community-based research initiative evaluates the challenges and successes of So How Are the Children's (SHAC) Kids Connection after school program. Kids Connection's primary goal is to provide underserved youth in Faribault, Minnesota with enriching and educational activities. This research initiative assesses how the program has served the youth in the aforementioned capacities. We evaluate eight main areas: limiting the amount of students in program, curriculum structure, volunteer and staff retention, student interest in program, staff/volunteer and student relations, students' attitudes towards program, balance between recreational and academic time, and punitive measures. This data was collected through interviews with youth, staff/volunteers, and teachers, and through unobtrusive observation at So How Are the Children? and Faribault Middle School. Through this research we hope to provide So How Are the Children? with an accurate assessment of their program's strengths and potential areas for improvement in serving students. Youth involved in this program are primarily Somali refugees. Due to the nature of this population we encountered issues concerning language, immigration, the achievement gap, diversity, and acculturation.

SETTING

Walking through the rain into the Faribault Middle School, we were met with a track coach's shouts as children, dressed in gym clothes, crowded the hallway. Track practice was brought indoors due to the rain, and the dark, damp hallway was filled with eagerly attentive children waiting for their turn to jump over the miniature hurdles. The gym teacher approached us, while the all-white track team silently watched. As he began directing us towards the cafeteria, a flash of color caught our eyes as we looked beyond the poster-covered windows and caught glimpses of balloons flying through the air, flowing direhs, jumping children, and a few frazzled college volunteers.

We walked through the doors to Kids Connection and stood shell-shocked, watching the joyously chaotic scene before us. The presence of a few simple balloons had the children screaming, laughing and ignoring the dreary rain of the afternoon. This joyful scene, however, was not enough to distract us from the overwhelming juxtaposition of these two different scenes we were just exposed to. The track team: organized, orderly and structured in the foreground;

and Kids Connection: chaotic and sporadic, hidden behind poster-laden windows in the background. While the context of these two groups must not be ignored, the physical representation of these two distinct groups is too dramatic not to acknowledge.

The dauntingly large cafeteria, filled with round tables and “Healthy Eating” posters on the walls, echoed with giggles and hushes for silence as the Kids Connection staff scrambled to collect the balloons and organize the children. As the children sat huddled on the tile floor, the aesthetics of the room suddenly became more apparent; the neutral-colored walls, shiny linoleum flooring, and yellow-tinged lighting were no longer blurred by the running children.

After vying for the prized position of being our escorts, a few of the children guided us back out into the hallway where we dodged track practice and tried to sort through the multiple energetic voices eagerly shouting for our attention. We entered the computer lab and were met with stark white walls and whiteboards, rows of computers and metal stools. The room was cramped; the computers were packed in together tightly and the tables were cluttered with cords and keyboards, leaving little room for a notebook or textbook. There were a few students doing homework while hunched over on their stools, writing in their notebooks on their laps, and swiveling back and forth on the slippery metal seat. Soon after our arrival, a student volunteer burst through the door, greeted with squeals of joy and excitement, as she declared that the bus was ready to leave and the students must hurry.

We walked back through the hallway, which was at this point eerily void of the shouting from moments before, and found ourselves in the now completely deserted room where we began. The rain outside created a peaceful accompaniment to the silence in the room as we began to unpack our first experience at Kids Connection.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Nate Jacobi, Carolyn Treadway and Elly Kuhlman were invaluable resources during the research, data collection, and analysis of our findings during this academic civic engagement and collaborative community-based research initiative. Their devotion to their role in a larger community around them encouraged us to develop and complete this project and we hope our insights in this paper offer them constructive materials that assist in the continuance of their own work. We hope to be a resource in offering our academic knowledge and skills to help strengthen this crucial after school program. We also hope to benefit by connecting our classroom learning to a community-based experience and develop skills for future civic leadership roles, research, and internships.

THE PROBLEM

A growing body of literature suggests that participation in after-school programs positively affects youth development and adjustment of students identified as “at-risk”. So How Are the Children (SHAC) is a non-profit youth-, education-, and immigrant- oriented organization located in Faribault, MN. This statement found on the organization’s website indicates that the phrase “So How Are the Children” communicates a belief that the health and well being of the community’s children reflects the health and well-being of the whole community. In response to the recent influx of Somali refugees and immigrant youth, and the observed challenges of other underserved youth in Faribault, SHAC has engaged in providing youth with programs that seek to “develop a wide range of positive life skills and pro-social behaviors in order to make healthy life choices”.

This ethnography will focus on the after-school program “Kids Connection” which is a division of SHAC’s programming. Kids Connection operates through the Faribault Middle School and serves as an after-school site for students’ academic and personal growth. Various college and community volunteers, paid staff members, and the director coordinate this program, which, on average, serves sixty students per day. Students spend thirty minutes of the program focusing on academic work. The remainder of the student’s time, about an hour, consists of recreational activities such as 4-H events, J-stops community service, STEM programming with students from the private boarding high school Shattuck St Mary’s, crafts, cooking class, sports, and general socializing.

Through initial conversations with SHAC’s director Carolyn Treadway, this research initiative has identified key points of interest, improvement, and restructuring of the program that will be addressed by this ethnographic research. Evaluation of volunteer and staff attitudes towards the program will consider level of preparation to interact and serve middle school students, relationship with youth, efficacy of punitive measures, and identified areas of improvement and strengths observed in the program. Consideration of youth’s experience with the program will include evaluation of students’ attitudes towards the academic and recreational components of program, feelings of inclusion, and level of interest in program. Research into the relationship between teachers, and other school administrators will focus on perceived efficacy of Kids Connection’s academic activities. These specific areas of interest seek to address larger issues concerning the achievement gap, youth’s social adjustment and development, and pedagogical strategies for educating underrepresented youth.

Kids Connection (a subset of the SHAC program) relies on staff and volunteers to be present and engage the youth in learning and play during the after school hours. The opinions

and attitudes of these staff and volunteers instill certain values in the program and define what is or is not valuable or productive behavior from the students. Using Bourdieu's theory of social and cultural capital, we will be examining the different values that students, staff members, and volunteers attach to and find within the Kids Connection program. The negotiation of these values will uncover power structures, imbalances, and symbolic violence between the levels of hierarchy. In addition to the value of the program itself as conceptualized by these 3 main groups, the values and identity that each group inherently possesses will also be examined. We anticipate there to be clashes that arises from ethnic divides, language skills, and the varying conceptualizations of the program in regard to students, staff and volunteers.

METHODOLOGY

This study is based on qualitative data gathered through open-ended interviews and on site observation. The data we gathered was acquired from four-targeted populations: staff, volunteers, students, and teachers at Faribault middle School. We scheduled visits to Faribault Middle School, during which we gathered data from our participants. Data was collected through participant observation, formal and informal interviews with students, teachers, program staff, and college volunteers. Program staff and college volunteers were interviewed informally on site, and other informants who were pressed for time were interviewed via telephone or at convenient site. These discussions were informal in nature and their sole purpose was to achieve an understanding of our setting and create a level of comfort between the participants and our research group. Utilizing open-ended interview questions we constructed for each population, we interviewed participants that were available.

Our research population consisted of 24 students, 2 volunteers, 3 staff, and 1 ESL teacher from Faribault Middle School. We gathered our sample through availability and suggestions made by the program director. Three of the four-targeted populations were selected from the same institution (Faribault Middle School) except for the volunteers, who came from the local colleges (St Olaf and Carleton College). For the purpose of our study, we included full-time staff, volunteers, teachers, and students who were consistent in their attendance and participation in the program.

For the study, we devised research questions that address 8 specific areas of study:

1. Limiting program
2. 3 week curriculum
3. Volunteer and Staff Retention
4. Students Level of Interest in Program
5. Staff and Students Relation
6. Feeling of belonging
7. Balance between homework and playtime
8. Punitive Measures

In our interviews with staff and volunteers we focused on their perception of the program, and ways in which past experiences qualified them for the position. To measure their perception of the program, we asked questions that required critical analysis of the program's overall efficacy for students. For example, we asked participants to indicate their perception of the program with questions such as:

- What do you feel the after school program's biggest strength is in serving its students?
- What is its biggest weakness?
- What are your main concerns about the after school programming at the Faribault Middle School?
- How do you feel the basic structure is working?
- Do you feel restructuring would be positive? If so, how would you suggest restructuring it?

To measure their work-related experiences that are relative to the program, we asked questions such as:

- Have you had any prior experience working with underrepresented students? If so, could you tell me about it?
- Do you have prior experience working with underrepresented youth?
- How effective do you feel as a staff member? Why do you feel that way?

In order to fully understand the structure of the program, we also conducted participant observation. Several of our group members were given the task to observe the forms and types of activities that were being provided for the students, how efficient these activities were, and its overall structure. Researchers that perform this task also conducted informal interviews with the students to understand their overall perception of the program, staff, and volunteers. To evaluate students' perception of the program, we asked questions such as:

- What is your favorite part of your time at the program? Why is this your favorite part?
- Your least favorite time?
- Why is this your least favorite part?
- If you could do anything with your time at the after school program what would it be?
- How would you feel if the after school program had more homework and learning time and less playtime?
- How do you feel when you're at the after school program?

To evaluate the students' view of staff and volunteers at the program, they were asked question such as:

- Which adults and/or college students do you spend time with?
- How do you feel about working with the adults and college students?
- How do you feel you are treated by your teachers and other grown ups here?

Likewise, our interviews with ESL teachers at Faribault middle school focused on pinpointing weaknesses that students in the program possess. We wanted to have their insider perspective on this matter. Our interview questions here took into consideration behavioral issues, in class participation, literacy improvements, and specific areas of weakness. Some of the questions were:

- Can you pinpoint any improvement in the area of literacy with any of your students?
- What are some of the characteristics/behaviors of your Kids Connection students in the classroom?

- Do you perceive differences between your students who have resided in the states longer opposed to those who are newcomers? If so, what are they?
- What do you think challenges your students the most and why?
- What do you see your students excel at the most in the classroom and why?

After all data had been transcribed, we began coding the material. During group meeting, we reviewed our initial assumptions of the program, and systematically gathered and analyzed the data to look for recurrent patterns in our participants' responses, to form relevant themes.

Additionally, to ensure and prevent any potential harm to our respondents, we followed the Institutional Review Board (IRB) ethical requirements. We were specifically concerned with providing informed consent and ensuring the privacy of all subjects. Informed consent requires researchers to be explicit about how the study is conducted and what potential impact the study may have on the participant (Nardi 2006). To meet the requirement of informed consent, student participants received a letter that was to be taken to their parents, and staffs and volunteers were told the purpose of the research. The cover letter explained that this research was part of an ethnographic research course for sociology/anthropology majors. Most importantly, however, this letter explicitly stated that participation was voluntary.

Another ethical concern we took into consideration was ensuring the privacy concern of our subjects. We guarantee the privacy of our subjects by ensuring confidentiality. This meant that the responses we acquired from our subjects through open-ended interview and participant observation were confidential and unidentifiable. Confidential information that was provided by our subjects was coded in a format that kept questions and answer separate from the identities of the respondents. In addition to ensuring subjects privacy, we also took into consideration another ethical principle: respect for the subject's participating in the research. This meant upholding the principle of beneficence, which is doing no harm and maximizing benefits for subjects. To minimize the harm that participants were subjected to in our research,

we decided to not ask question that were invasive or easily upsetting in nature. To ensure participants that our foremost concern was preventing them from any possible harm, we insisted that they should not answer any questions that they were not comfortable discussing with us as researchers.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Prior research focusing on programs aimed at educating immigrant youth stresses the importance of staff and volunteer presence. Riggs (2006) argues that school programs are most effective when there is a low student to staff ratio; in other words, programs must have enough adult educators present to fully meet the needs of large groups of students who, due to cultural differences and a possible lack of literacy and English skills, are already unprepared to enter the U.S. education system. Riggs finds that, in addition to having low student to staff ratios, staff members are most effective when they are ‘warm, attentive, and responsive’ and do not intimidate students. Students’ comfort at the after school program is a necessary requirement to their educational and positive social development (Riggs 2006). Similarly, Diversi and Meham (2005) note a safe and friendly work environment as well as individualized attention towards the students by mentors or volunteers as conducive to the improvement of students’ grade point averages.

This research suggests that staff and volunteers should work with students to promote agreed upon cultural capital and not simply label the student’s capital as worthless and hegemonically force certain narratives upon the students. Using some of Bourdieu’s theoretical framings, the field of the Kids Connection is defined by its relationship networks including students, staff, volunteers, the program director, and other objective positions. In this field, all of

these different parties are engaged in a ‘soft violence’ or competition. This competition is understood in terms and negotiations of symbolic capital, “the extent of valued social relations possessed by an actor” (Ritzer 2010), and cultural capital, or the “various kinds of legitimate knowledge possessed by an actor” (Ritzer 2010). This would support a policy of cultural relativity in which all cultures are equally valued despite different practices and beliefs. If symbolic violence (indirect limiting of capitals and actions of an actor) is present in after school programs with young children as the main ‘victims’, the students will not thrive or be able to effectively learn and socialize.

Another study mentions that teachers, too, stress a comfortable work environment for children (Ghajar 1999). Other scholars note other characteristics of effective and helpful afterschool programs, such as high levels of healthy and non-punitive behavior management, high quality of program materials and experiences (Riggs 2006), the use of structured programs versus unstructured socialization (Bender et al. 2011), an understanding of participants’ cultures, communities, and families in order to design an appropriate program structure (Lee and Hawkins 2008) which in turn leads to a comfortable work environment. The cultural and social capital of the students cannot be ignored by those in charge of the program or else the strategies and actions of students will be limited in the social field of the after school program.

There are many challenges that face these new immigrants to the United States. Many of these challenges take whatever skills or knowledge immigrant populations possess and render this knowledge obsolete through symbolic violence. Lee and Hawkins report that students often face a sort of ‘culture shock’ between their home life and life at school. Students, as well as their parents, face linguistic barriers as well as culture shock (“A Place to Call ‘Home’” 2003, Bazile 2003, Diversi and Mecham 2005). Furthermore, when students find they are not accepted by the

dominant society of American public schools, they are more likely to drop out than non-immigrant youth (Lee, 2008). The ability for educators and volunteers to foster an atmosphere in which children and youth feel a sense of purpose or inclusion is also important. In order for such an environment to exist, Lee and Hawkins find that knowledge of the culture the students come from is necessary on behalf of the staff. This knowledge and preparation allows for incongruencies to be avoided when possible and more smoothly integrate students into a new culture, limiting the amount of symbolic violence enacted towards them as an underserved and stigmatized population.

These findings speak to the need of cultural sensitivity and competency among the volunteers, teachers, and mentors that work with immigrant children not only in the after school programs, but in the classroom as well. Bazile (2006) claims that programs to aid immigrants' adjustment are "plagued by culturally insensitive teachers and curricula," a reflection on the public education system in the United States in general. This cultural insensitivity hinders a bicultural identity, which is highly dependent on how immigrants are treated by the host society, i.e., whether their sense of self is invalidated by suppressing their native language, rather than acculturating properly (Diversi and Mecham 2005). Ghajar and Masny (1999) further complicate the cultural knowledge of educators and other program staff by insisting that students' 'assimilation' does not necessitate overwriting their cultural background; symbolic violence is not necessary. In the logic of many after school programs, assimilation in this sense is a potent form of symbolic violence that renders students' cultural capital worthless. Acculturation, on the other hand, accounts for student background, identity, and value and does not deny the importance of these capitals (in the way that assimilation/symbolic violence does). An environment that encourages the development of a bicultural identity also affects school

performance; Riggs finds that not only is a cultural understanding necessary, but volunteers and mentors should also understand children's social-emotional trajectories to place them in an appropriate program (Riggs 2006). Riggs also emphasizes a process of acculturation rather than assimilation into the dominant culture as an influential factor in social outcomes, but also notes that more research is needed in that field.

Immigrant youth often face stigmatization and prejudice in public school systems; institutionalized discrimination which suppresses their cultural background only perpetuates this separation, the defining of immigrant youth as 'the other' and continuing various forms of symbolic and structural violence due to the student's lack of culture-specific social capital. Ghajar and Masny cite that the culturally specific types of literacy found in Somalia are often at odds with the type of literacy expected of students in America. The issue of literacy and English proficiency is an essential facet to ensuring the success and inclusion of immigrant youth. English-proficiency is perhaps the most valuable capital that an immigrant--youth or otherwise--can gain.

Even outside of youth schooling, various programs in Minnesota (which has the largest Somali and Hmong immigrant population in the United States of America ["A Place to Call 'Home'" 2004]) aim to help immigrants find work and housing. They have discovered that English proficiency and literacy are perhaps the largest challenge facing immigrant populations. The Hennepin County Office of Multi-Cultural Services has recently undergone large structural changes to accommodate for immigrant populations by training and maintaining bilingual staff that are familiar with the cultural specificities and are sensitive to the unique challenges faced by different populations. Restructure and reform was possible through efforts to "enact systems of change by enhancing multicultural service delivery coordination across county departments and

with the community while paying attention to the tension over ever-increasing needs and limited fiscal resources” (“A Place to Call ‘Home’” 2004).

Funding for such reform practices, both for county and state services as well as school programs, has historically been challenging to achieve at a level high enough to provide high quality educational materials and opportunities.

The literature on after school programs cites a number of benefits for the participating students as well as the mentors or volunteers working with the students. Lee and Hawkins (2008) note that students’ participation in these programs positively affects the development and adjustment to American culture of at-risk students. Riggs (2006) concurs, noting that keeping kids off the streets and in a safe, healthy work environment positively impacts their social-emotional and behavioral outcomes. In their specific study, Bender et al. (2011) found a couple notable benefits of the after school program, which may be applicable to our project at hand: youth who were supported, encouraged, and listened to were more likely to participate in the program, and participants showed improvements in reading ability over the course of the school year. Ritter (2009) also found that participation in an after school program improved reading skill. Bender et al.(year?) also note that “problem behaviors” that children’s’ friends may display are directly associated with the participant’s behavioral and academic problems. These “problem behaviors” are elaborated on by Diversi and Mecham (2005), who identify these behaviors as missing or disturbing classes, intimidating or fighting with other students, and showing disrespect to school faculty and staff.

This body of literature also speaks to useful methodologies that are used to assess these programs and make suggestions to improve after school programming for immigrant youth. Riggs cites the importance of taking program attendance in order to assess the academic status of

each participant, to show if the program improved reading skill, etc. These attendance rates can show the efficacy of the program, if those students who attended the most show improvement in academic skill and/or social-behavioral development. Bender et al. (2011) points out a limitation in doing a program evaluation, which is the problem of assigning youth to participate or not participate in the program, as well as selection bias by voluntary participants. We, however, will not be choosing which students participate in the after school program at Kids Connection, but this would be a problem if a more quantitative approach were taken, requiring a control and a variable group. We will be conducting our research in a way most similar to Ghajar, who collected data through observations and interactions with students.

FINDINGS & ANALYSIS

As we began our research, observations, and interviews using eight areas of focus, we applied these lenses to our data. These eight areas largely encapsulate the facets of the Kids Connection program that the program director initially asked us to examine, as well as our own areas of interest developed through initial research and the beginnings of our work and interviews. These areas will be used to organize and discuss our findings.

Limiting the Program

According to previous research, limiting the number of student participants in the Kids Connection program was recognized as a potential solution to many problems the program faces, including behavioral issues, keeping students engaged, allowing limited staff and volunteers to be effective, and to assure that when students attend the program they are willing to devote time to academics. However, after staff and volunteer interviewees acknowledged these potential

benefits, most were quick to state that they would be hesitant to deny students an area of socialization and safety. One college aged-volunteer expressed belief that limiting the program would make it run smoother yet stated, “I would hate to cut kids off academically or socially.” Another paid staff member believes that the program’s current structure is “doing well” but realizes that difficult situations often arise from having more students than the program can handle all of the time (this reflected our literature review, where we found that many other researchers have noted the importance of having a low student to staff ratio). Again, this staff member “does not want to turn kids away” but wonders how to serve all students most effectively with the current staff to student ratio.

Both college volunteers and teacher or staff members who were sympathetic towards limiting the program felt that clear and explicit guidelines of what is expected of students is necessary for students to not be distractions for those who are fully using the academic help. It appears, from our interview responses, that many staff and volunteers are simply overwhelmed at times with the situation facing them and consider limiting the program a viable option to both make their own work more effective as well as better serve students. However, the large majority of those interviewed seem unable to unequivocally state, “Yes, I believe the program should be limited,” as they are reluctant to turn students away.

It is clear that those in charge of the program value the academic side of the program first and foremost. We received many responses that limiting the program would most assuredly benefit the students who are attending for academic reasons. However, this valuation of academics is not absolute, as all staff and volunteers wrestled with denying many students what they (the students) view as their only place to be with friends. Furthermore, Kids Connection is (to our knowledge) the only free after school program at the middle school. As the program

director stated, “children in poverty simply have fewer opportunities”. However, the program currently faces many difficulties that limit any academic help to purely homework assistance. Again, the program director recognizes this as important, but feels it “helps them pass classes” only and does not foster true academic development. In light of this, limiting the program may allow staff and volunteers to not only help students ‘keep up’ with their work but also leap ahead.

Related to this negotiation, the trend that emerged out of responses from staff and volunteers was that the amount of students would not be the issue if there were more adults or college aged volunteers to give the program more structure and direction; the structure of the program needs to be more objective and explicit. A volunteer noted that a handful of students come to socialize and end up distracting the “devoted” students. However, it is difficult to distinguish between “who wants it [help/the program] and who doesn’t”. This opinion reveals that the number of participants in the program would not diminish the functionality of the program if there were sufficient staff or volunteers. However the lack of objectivity and structure is a difficulty currently facing the program that is limiting academic productivity. This problem was accentuated in the response of another volunteer who claimed, “A problem with the ‘size’ issue is that the program is simply unpredictable, the need for so many volunteers or staff changes all the time”.

3-Week Curriculum

Similar to limiting the program, another proposed structural change includes introducing a 3-week curriculum into the Kids Connection program. This idea was met with general distaste from our interviewees; most were immediately opposed to the idea, claiming that

it would have “too high of a buy-in price” and that “students would not stay interested or want to do just one thing” for 3 weeks. The main drawback that these interviewees expressed was that a 3-week curriculum would simply not benefit the students academically and in fact would decrease interest in homework help offered to them. Furthermore, when a similar structure was attempted in the past and offered small, short terms programs for the students (crafts, cooking, etc.), these programs were met with disinterest and have since been discontinued as a regular portion of Kids Connection.

However, some interviewees expressed support that the program would gain more structure if a 3-week curriculum were introduced. In the words of a teacher at the middle school: “I feel the students have a harder time with unstructured time, many of them do not know how to manage their own time or be entirely independent”. It is clear that this interviewee strongly values clear and explicit goals and directions for students to meet rather than loosely organized “homework time.” This teacher does not help directly with the program, but hears from her students in middle school classes as well as the program director that many of the students treat the homework time during Kids Connection as casual time that *can be* used for homework but does not have to be.

This “open attitude” towards homework time was reflected in many of our student interviews; two 6th grade Hispanic boys both claimed that they like the fact that they “can do whatever we want” while using the computers during homework time. Despite the possibility for structure, however, many volunteers and staff members who work directly with the students during Kids Connection were not attracted to the idea of a 3-week, rotating curriculum, fearing it would remove the focus from all homework subjects or simply not be attractive to the students. Many students, when interviewed, seemed somewhat ambivalent towards changing the

curriculum; students are very happy with the current structure as it allowed them to seek help when they wish but also “do whatever [they] want” when that help is not wanted.

Volunteer and Staff Retention

In contrast to the responses we received when researching structural changes, information about this topic was not sufficiently uncovered during our interviews. Our research group had learned from talking to the program director that staff and volunteer retention is difficult and an area where the program falters, yet we did not receive any explicit responses regarding staff or volunteer retention outside of a single interview with a volunteer.

This college aged volunteer expressed her concern that college age volunteers are difficult to entice to coming to the program for reasons of time, scheduling, or awareness of the opportunity. This volunteer also feared that including training in the volunteer process would make it even more difficult to find willing student volunteers for the program. However, a second volunteer did recall experiencing a lack of preparation upon initial participation in the program. During his initial days with the program he felt “intimidated” by the sheer number of students and what he perceived to be cultural differences between himself and the students; outside of these two interviews, we did not receive any other responses regarding volunteer retention or training.

The first student mentioned in this section wished there were more awareness of the volunteering opportunity on the two college campuses in Northfield, MN and that college students studying related academic fields (education, social work, et cetera) would view the volunteer experience as both personally and academically rewarding. This volunteer also noted

that while there were more volunteers last year (2011-2012 academic school year), this year has seen as decline in number.

Other than this instance of retention issues being explicitly discussed, we did not receive any responses from our interviewees about their opinions or thoughts on the staff and volunteer retention problem outside of acknowledgement that it was indeed another challenge the program faces.

Students' Level of Interest in the Program

Students were, by and large, enthusiastic about their time at the program. Many students who were interviewed were quick to first express their enjoyment of the free-time and recreational time and how much they enjoyed coming to the program to play or hang out with their friends, yet this was nearly always coupled with a (sometimes sheepish) recognition that they did use the homework help and are happy the homework time is there for them when they need it. Whether for social or academic reasons (or both), the vast majority of students were pleased with the existence of the program and felt they would rather be here than elsewhere.

It is clear that some students primarily value the program for the social and 'fun' activities they are able to engage in when attending. A significant portion of the students attending the program value it as a dual social-time and homework-time, while others view it as purely social and still another group understand it as mainly based on homework help or developing other academic skills. Many volunteers value the program in similar ways; college-aged volunteers often expressed their desire to be more of a mentor or trusted adult rather than teacher and tutor. These volunteers have allowed the program to be valued dually as academic

and social, and many students have taken advantage of this dual-purpose and focused primarily on the social while using the academic only when it is necessary.

One middle school teacher, who does not work directly with the program, readily stated that many of the students she teaches throughout the school day attend the program and have many positive things to say about it. She also notes that “about 40-50% of her ESL students (mostly Somali) attend the Kids Connection program and speak positively of it during passing time in school.” Volunteers also note the positive attitude that many students express towards the program, regardless if that attitude is from academics or social time. There was a general attitude among students that, if the program were academically favored rather than balanced, there would be little interest or desire to attend. This is in stark contrast with the ‘original’ purpose of the program as defined by the program director; it is meant to foster academic development. The clash between these capitals often results in disputes among students, volunteers, and staff members.

Staff and Student Relations

Similarly, one theme that was consistently represented in our data was generally positive attitude in regards to student and staff relations. Somali, Hispanic, and White participants were largely enthusiastic regarding the support they were acquiring from volunteers, staff, and the program director. Volunteers in particular are seen as very “fun loving” and accommodating to the students’ individual needs and desires. One Somali student interviewee commented that their supervisors are “good at persuading us to do homework and draw...[they] make it fun”. By unifying the values of academics and enjoyment, many volunteers and staff members are able to engage students in academically productive activities without making these

activities seem boring. Some students said that they spend a large amount of their time at the program with college volunteers and staff, interacting with them and having polite conversations, rather than spending time playing with friends; we likewise heard of similar positive reinforcement from the staff who work with the kids on a daily basis. The staff was quick to emphasize the connection and rapport that has been built between them and students in a general basis. One staff noted that her continuing loyalty to the program stems from the fact that “she loves the kids, and she feels a connection with the students.”

Despite the buoyant interaction that exists between volunteers, staff, and students, there is sense of disparity between the various levels of hierarchy at the program; this specifically manifests itself as a lack of understanding between staff and volunteers as one group and the students as another, yet also occurred between the staff and volunteers themselves. One volunteer noted that though “she views herself as a friend and a trusted adult”, she wants to emphasize both the academic and human side of the program; this role has sometimes been questioned by other staff members- there seems to be a lack of cohesive agreement on what the volunteers’ roles should be. The values of the program are not entirely universal or clear to all staff or volunteers; this is perhaps due to the lack of formal training that many college aged volunteers when they begin their work at the Kids Connection program. Furthermore, many staff and volunteers expressed concern over an amount of ambiguity that comes from not having some form of regular meetings or updates on the status of the program or the direction the program is heading.

While the student and adult relationships are positive in many ways, there are also great divides between the students and those in charge of the program. These divides come from an imbalance of social capital in which the students are not seen as possessing valuable or

productive skills and are encouraged to work harder and in a more focused manner to achieve what is expected of them. This symbolic violence often leads to students getting in trouble with staff, volunteers, or the program director and results in a student being asked to leave the program for a period of time.

Feelings of Belonging

One of the emerging themes that we found in our data was the need for social integration across racial/ethnic lines. Students noted that cultural gap between Somalis, Latino, and White students affected their level of comfort at the program. Students from an ethnic minority in the program felt that at times they were left out because friendship ties and social groups were usually made according to their racial/ethnic group. One Latino student insisted that “there are no Mexicans here”, expressing that he often felt uncomfortable playing with a majority-Somali group and that he sometimes felt ostracized due to his ethnicity. Additionally, a Somali girl was quick to note this in her response, stating, “I feel comfortable only when people who I fit in with are here”.

This racialized student response to the program arises from the fact that the majority of students attending Kids Connection are Somali- while the program is not intended to serve students of a single racial/ethnic group or students with English difficulties, it has historically found itself attended by students of Somali and immigrant background.

Despite the need for cultural integration/socialization, students generally reported a strong sense of comfort and belonging when at program. Most students emphasize that they felt good when they were at the program, because they had the chance to hangout with their friends and get their homework done. This feeling of belonging was considered one of the main values

the program had to offer in the minds of students. Likewise, many staff and volunteers recognize that the program serves as a space for students to simply be with or find friends. However, some students who were interviewed did not appear happy with their time at the program and generally kept to themselves, not attempting to make connections with other students or adult staff. In general, students expressed a sense of belonging at the program, if only because they felt they had no place else to go in which they could form social ties and friend groups. To the students, this ability for socialization is perhaps the most important facet of the program.

Balance Between Academics and Playtime

Stemming from this sense of belonging, students who felt that socialization was important to them did not express interest in altering the program in a way that might remove recreational time. This opinion changed between and was reflective of the various social groups with different capitals we interviewed. Students were generally opposed to the idea of change; many students are content with the way the program is currently balanced and felt they were able get all the homework help they need when they want it yet can engage in fun activities all other times. They insisted the current structure gives students an incentive to attend the program through significant recreational time. Furthermore, they seemed to insist that any change in the program that would significantly reduce playtime would remove the incentives that some students see in attending the program. One student noted “what would be the point of it (program) if all we did was homework?” Though opposed to change in this balance of homework and recreation, we did discover a desire for a more diversified range of activities and exercises during both academic and playtime. Students were frustrated with the program’s lack of engaging activities and wished there were more variety of activities to choose. This claim was

indicated in the response of a Hispanic student who stated that he “wants more to do, I don’t want to be forced to do something that’s boring”. Another student pointed out that he was annoyed by the fact that “I have to still sit there even when I don’t have homework”. However, it should not be assumed that only games or social time are valued as ‘fun’ or ‘not boring’ - two Hispanic boys interviewed together reported that their favorite activities were cooking classes and crafts which are not as reliably offered any longer.

The staff and volunteers had similar views that the student regarding the current balance between academic and playtime. One emerging theme among the staff was the need to have a fair and attractive balance of schoolwork and social time since students generally needed both to continue to show interest in the program. One volunteer noted that “I find a large strength in the program in the fact that kids simply show up and find some value in the academics, they come for a space to be, a place to have friends, a place for homework”. This volunteer did note, however, that she wishes there could be an implementation of ‘general learning time’ in order for students to further development their academics and intellectual growth outside of simply finishing their homework.

Punitive Measures

During several of our interviews with students and college volunteers it was suggested that the forms of punishment taken by the program director are either reactionary or too harsh. Among students, it was felt that actions which are punished are actually minor issues or trivial and do not deserve such harsh punitive measures. A student noted that she hates it “when we get kicked out...kicks us out a lot...I get kicked out a lot”. This idea was supported in a response of a college volunteer, who noted, “She [the program director] likes to kick kids out”. This

volunteer views the way the director deals with behavioral problems as harsh or trying to ‘make an example’ of students who do not act agreeably. The volunteer would rather “just kind of sit down with them and talk to them about it” rather than use punitive measures. Furthermore, the students at Kids Connection criticize the punitive measures used by the authority figures in the program. One student was quick to acknowledge that the repressive form of punishment taken by authority is one thing she dislike the most; when asked her least favorite part of program, she stated, “When [the director] yells at the group, and tells them to act their age”. It was broadly indicated by students that the punitive measure were understood as repressive.

These views, however, must be balanced by the order and structure necessary to keep the program operating with so many students and so few adult staff. The program director recognized that she often plays the role of disciplinarian and expressed dismay that she was trapped in this role. She felt that she would rather use her skills from her teaching background to help the students develop intellectually and foster academic growth. The program director is not the only adult to recognize that all behavioral problems are directed to her; volunteers and other staff (as well as students) often said that many behavioral problems are not dealt with as they occur by staff or volunteers but rather are redirected to the program director to handle. As all behavioral discrepancies are funneled to the director, she finds she has no choice but to be quick to pass judgment that hopefully eliminates further behavioral problems.

SUGGESTIONS

Initial identification of key interest areas, discussions with individuals involved in Kids Connection’s after school programming, and data collected from interviews and program observation have served as the basis on which this ethnography will make particular

recommendations and suggestions for how the program should proceed. As previously discussed in this ethnography, the following represent areas of interest, improvement, and restructuring for the program:

1. Evaluation of volunteers and staff interactions with the program. This includes a consideration of volunteer and staff roles, relationships with students, efficacy, and attitudes.
2. Consideration of youth's experience with the program. This includes an evaluation of student's attitudes towards the recreational and academic components of program, feelings of inclusion, and level of interest in the program.
3. General evaluation of program's existing structure and practices and whether they meet, fulfill, and facilitate the expressed goals of the program.

These points of evaluation seek to address broader issues such as the academic achievement gap, social adjustment/acculturation, positive youth development, and teaching strategies for educating underserved youth. When considering these suggestions it is imperative to bear in mind the significant limitations of our research due, in part, to constraints such as time and data availability.

Volunteer and Staff Retention

Emphasis on role and efficacy of volunteers and staff: Data suggests that volunteers and staff are highly valued and integral components of the after school programming. Data suggests that a positive relationship between students and volunteers/staff results in youth's positive academic and social development. Therefore, we recommend developing the follow volunteer- and staff-related areas:

- Training/preparation that clearly and comprehensively communicates expectations and roles pertaining to work done by volunteers and staff. Specifically, greater emphasis should be placed on communicating positive and beneficial skills that will enable volunteers and staff to serve students effectively. These skills include, but are not limited to, interpersonal skills, sensitivity to diversity, and patience. Expectations and roles can be communicated in the context of an "orientation session" for all new volunteers before beginning work with the program.

- Clear and consistent communication with volunteers and staff concerning expectations and definition of roles. Consider sending out weekly bulletins that give notes on the program and ask for feedback regarding attitudes towards the program.
- In order for volunteers and staff to meet their primary goal of assisting students academically, careful attention should be paid to balancing the friendship and academic advising components of the relationship between volunteer/staff and student.
- Consider incorporating into staff position an emphasis on their role as behavioral managers. This may include identifying more experienced staff that have built a positive rapport with students but have demonstrated ability to effectively manage behavior. Data suggests that this will create an environment conducive to positive and productive recreational and academic activities. However, this should be done in such way so as not to jeopardize the creation of meaningful relationships.
- Consider emphasizing volunteer recruitment of individuals, particularly college students, who have a background working in educational contexts with youth. For example, these may be students in the education department at either college in Northfield or students who have had prior experience mentoring or tutoring youth.
- Creating mentor-mentee relationships college volunteers/staff and students. This would capitalize upon the already positive relationships and would help to create consistency around student-staff/volunteer interactions. Mentor-mentee relationships would be beneficial in the context of academic and recreational interactions. This may be challenging to implement in light of student-staff/volunteer ratio but could be achieved if mentors work with different mentees on a rotational basis.

These suggestions are drawn from data that suggests that greater cohesiveness is needed in order to accomplish the program's objectives. This can be done through greater and more frequent communication between leadership and volunteer/staff.

Punitive Measures

The most frequent punitive measure to be taken at Kids Connection is to suspend a misbehaving child from the program for a designated period of time. Our data suggests that this period can be anywhere from one week to a couple at a time. This method has been chosen and implemented because it removes the contagious behavior from the program entirely. Our data indicates, however, that an alternative disciplinary style may be considered to increase the effectiveness of discipline in the program.

We recommend an increased responsibility for the staff of Kids Connection regarding disciplinary measures. As our data indicates, there is some confusion regarding the disciplinary role of staff in the program. It appears as though there is a need to increase the disciplinary force on the part of staff, thus relieving the program director of her entirely discipline-based role in the program. Our data also suggests that the college volunteers are unclear as to their disciplinary role; we are suggesting the college volunteers maintain their more personal role with the students in order to continue these special relationships and allow staff to deliver more punitive measures. This will allow for more personal discipline, increased respect towards all staff and volunteers, and a more balanced and equal staff/volunteer discipline force. By clarifying and encouraging the volunteer and staff's responsibility to discipline, more opportunities arise for the following suggested punitive measures:

- Personal conversations between staff/volunteers and students.
- In-program alternative disciplinary measures

Our data indicates that staff and volunteers wish to have more personal one-on-one conversations with students regarding inappropriate behaviors. These conversations may shed more light on the inappropriate behavior, as well as increase the personal responsibility of students, as they would be held directly responsible for their own actions while at the program.

With a stronger authoritative force from the entire staff, this becomes a possibility, as disciplinary concerns are no longer brought solely to the program director. This relieves the disciplinary pressure off of the program director and encourages students to see each volunteer and staff members with increased respect and authority.

Restructuring the Program

For restructuring the program, we are not able to offer any conclusive suggestions about either the possibility of limiting the number of students who attend Kids' Connection or creating a rotating academic curriculum that focuses on one subject at this time due to limited information. Limiting the number of participants is an obvious and practical solution to improving the quality of the after school program as it would solve problems such as behavior issues, keeping students engaged, allowing staff and volunteers to be more effective and mentor individual students more regularly and only drawing students who are committed to academics, however, there is much ambivalence from volunteers and staff members about denying any student the opportunity to benefit from tutoring services and a safe space to socialize with friends and engage with staff members and volunteers. There is a general consensus that restructuring the program to make it more effective without cutting students could be possible and is desirable. For instance, staff members and volunteers have pointed that increasing the number of volunteers would significantly improve the quality of the program by providing more support and one-on-one attention to students.

Students' Attitudes Towards the Program

An important component of our research is gauging students' level of interest and attitude towards the program. The success of the program relies on students' willingness to attend the program and their understanding of the primary function of the program, which is to receive academic support, as well as social acclimation and mentorship. Our suggestions for improving students' attitudes towards the program include the following:

- Organizing occasional group activities in order to facilitate interaction across ethnic lines between Latino, Somali, and white students. Activities can encourage student participants to develop a mutual respect and understanding of cultures outside of their own and helps to alleviate alienation of individual students, as well as minority ethnic

groups, such as white and Latino students. Organizing more group activities encourages students to come more in contact with other students outside of their social group and can even forge friendships and most importantly, familiarity and camaraderie between students. This can greatly improve students' attitudes towards the program and feelings of belonging.

- Creating activities that allow students to contribute their own experiences, strengths, and skills to the program. This may increase the students' feeling of belonging, importance, and investment in the program. This could manifest itself, for example, in the form of students sharing about their cultural background or hobbies they enjoy. Particularly, sharing of cultural background may facilitate cross-cultural sensitivity and awareness.
- Communicating clear expectations with student participants about the purpose and importance of utilizing homework help. This will help bring a focus to the program environment, and allow the participants to have a clear goal in mind, which is to improve in their academics. Encouraging students to also explicitly outline academic goals at the beginning of the year can help students remain focused on their studies and can also encourage students to be held more accountable for this academic tasks.
- Spending more time discussing behavioral issues with students to help them understand why their behavior is a problem. If students are made aware of problems in their behavior in more constructive and positive ways, this can help students process and reflect on their behavior and goals can be set for students for improving their behavior in the future. Student participants will then have a clear understanding of behavioral expectations and how they can improve their behavior to match those expectations.

In general, the program is successful in creating a safe and positive environment for students as most students reported high levels of satisfaction and positive feelings towards the program, as well as staff members and volunteers. For instance, many students remarked that they were excited and happy to be around their friends and to talk with various staff members and volunteers. For many of these students, it is a unique opportunity for them to receive help with their homework and be mentored by college students, while socializing with friends they otherwise would not have the opportunity or space to socialize with. Most students used the homework help offered and recognized the value of having staff members and volunteers help them with homework when needed. For example, one student remarked that she significantly improved her grade in her English class because of the time she spent being tutored on her homework and practicing her English using Rosetta Stone. Most students are there by choice and

expressed that they would much rather be at Kids' Connection than go straight home where they don't have much to do and are far from friends.

PROGRAM EVALUATION

In preparation for our program evaluation of the after school program at Faribault Middle School, we examined the process outlined in a publication issued by the University of Idaho Extension called "The Logic Model for Program Planning and Evaluation" (year?). This Logic Model outline provided us with a basic understanding of how to go about conducting a program evaluation, in addition to consulting the existing literature on program evaluations. In a given situation there are three main elements of the Logic Model: Inputs, Outputs, and short, medium, and long-term Outcomes.

The situation we identified was one in which students of ethnic minorities face issues concerning the academic achievement gap and social adjustment and development as a result of recent immigration and the inability of the American public school system to address all children's' distinct and unique needs in light of cultural and developmental differences. The Kids' Connection after school program has a specific set of Inputs, such as the staff and volunteers, as well as their time, money acquired through grants, the middle school facilities (computer lab, cafeteria, outdoor recreational facilities). The Outputs from the program are homework assistance for the students that choose to participate, structured activities, and transportation from the program to the students' neighborhoods. Another aspect of Output are the participants of the program, which are the students at the middle school, specifically those of Somali, Latino, and other minority heritage.

Due to the nature of our evaluation, we were focused more on the program's efficacy in meeting the needs of the program participants rather than observing outcomes of the program. In our interviews and observations, we were able to notice some short-term outcomes of the program. We have observed changes in the participants' social growth and ability to complete their homework assignments during the time they spend at the program because of the help received by volunteers and staff members. The students are able to socialize with their friends during the "club time" period of the program, although they tend to socialize with other students from the same cultural background. We used our interviews with the students, staff, and volunteers as measures of these short-term Outcomes. Further research and more in-depth interviews over a longer period of time is needed to determine medium- and long-term Outcomes of this after school program, such as increased academic achievement, displaying more respectful behavior, and in the long run, the betterment of socioeconomic situations (as a result of academic achievement) for the families of these minority students and perhaps greater political representation in local and state governments.

FUTURE RESEARCH

This ethnographic research project began with the objective of conducting a thorough and systematic program evaluation of the after school program Kids Connection. We hoped to conduct numerous interviews with numerous stakeholders in the program such as students, volunteers/staff, school counselors, and ESL instructors. However, due to a limited time frame in which to conduct this research, we were unable to cover the full scope of individuals and interested parties who would have benefited this research initiative. This was due, in part, to our inability to secure timely approval from the Institutional Review Board for our research

initiative. Future research initiatives may explore the possibility of interviewing more parties within the school administration who are players in the scope of this program's objectives.

Additional shortcomings of the project are as follows:

- Participant selection. Participant selection was volunteer-based in nature. We were only able to collect data from those in our immediate vicinity who were ready and willing to share their experiences. Participant selection was also recruitment-based thus our data collection was limited to the network of informants, however valuable, provided to us by the community partner. Future research may consider expanding the network of informants to those who are not directly connected to the program but, nonetheless, can offer important insights.
- Inability to measure outcomes based on lack of data. Through our numerous staff, students, volunteer, and teacher interviews, as well as program observation, we were unable to collect data in a comprehensive and systematic manner. This resulted in a collection of "snapshots" rather than a complete picture of what was occurring at the program. With more time, we may have the opportunity to corroborate various points of data given to us by various informants. Comparing and contrasting the testimonies of informants, future research may be able to create a more even and holistic portrait of the program.
- Length of study. The brief length of the study prevented us from measuring long term outcomes based on the program's inputs. For instance, through long-term observation of the program's academic component, followed by an evaluation of students' test scores, we may have been able to ascertain which instructional and educational methods were producing desirable outcomes.
- Improved communication with community partner. This research initiative was intended to be collaborative and community-based in nature. The objectives of this research were intended to continually align with the community partner's objectives for the outcomes of the program and the research initiative. Our inability to maintain consistent communication was largely due to the limitations of group members' schedules. This is accentuated by the relatively large distance of the research site from the college. Though our initial collaborative identification of key research areas did much to structure the trajectory of the research, continuous and intentional collaboration may have benefited our initiative. By ensuring that our strategies and goals remained in line with the community partner's objectives, our research initiative may have produced a report that better served the community partner's expressed needs. Future research may consider constructing a timetable in which communication with community partner, at crucial points of the research, is expected.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

While acknowledging the setbacks and challenges we had during our research, we are hoping the given data analysis and suggestions will benefit Kids Connection and assist in the

program's successful development. Our analysis details only one account of the numerous strides currently being made to bridge the achievement gap and build a stronger foundation for all of today's youth. Hopefully, this program analysis can supplement the existing materials detailing the work to improve underrepresented youth's experience in the American education system and assist in the development of such crucial programs as Kids Connection.

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Appendix 1: Interview Questions

*“F” indicates follow-up question

Questions for Volunteers:

1. Are you a community volunteer or college volunteer? (If college go to next question; if community go to question four)
2. What year are you?
 - F: What is/are you major(s) and concentration(s)?
3. How long have you been volunteering here?
4. What draws you to volunteering at the program?
5. Have you had any prior experience working with underrepresented students? If so, could you tell me about it?
6. What do you feel your role is at the afterschool program?
 - How do you feel about this role?
7. What do you feel is the nature of the relationship between you and the students that you serve?
8. Do you perceive differences between your students who have resided in the states longer opposed to those who are newcomers? If so, what are they?
 - F: What do you think is the biggest challenge that your students face in school?
9. How effective do you feel as a volunteer? Why do you feel that way?
 - F: How has the program worked to prepare you as an educator and mentor to the kids?
 - F: Do you feel prepared?
 - F: Do you have any suggestions or recommendations for how the program might better prepare volunteers for working here?
10. What do you feel the afterschool program's biggest strength is in serving its students?
11. What is its biggest weakness?
12. What are your main concerns about the afterschool programming at the Faribault Middle School?
13. How do you feel the basic structure is working?
 - F: Do you feel restructuring would be positive? If so, how would you suggest restructuring it?
14. How big of an issue do you feel behavioral problems are?

F: How do you feel behavioral problems could be best handled in the Kids Connection program?

15. What do you see as the biggest challenges facing the program?
16. Do you have any suggestions for dealing with these challenges, and if so, what are they?
17. Do you have any other comments or suggestions for the program, for volunteers or for SHAC staff?

Staff Questions:

1. How long have you been working with the students?
2. What brought you to the program?
3. Do you have prior experience working with underrepresented youth?
4. How effective do you feel as a staff member? Why do you feel that way?
F: How has the program worked to prepare you as an educator and mentor to the kids?
F: Do you feel prepared?
Do you have any suggestions or recommendations for how the program might better prepare staff members for working here?

5. What is most challenging aspect of your work and why?
6. What is the most rewarding and why?
7. How are students recruited for the program?
8. Why do you think students come to the after school program?
9. Do you believe the program is meeting the needs of the student? Why or why not?
10. What are the most effective teaching methods you've discovered?
F: Why do you think these have been effective?
F: What hasn't worked well with the kids and why?
11. Do you perceive differences between your students who have resided in the states longer opposed to those who are newcomers? If so, what are they?
12. How do you feel about the structure of the program?
F: Do you feel there is a proper balance between academic and 'fun' time?
If not, how would you recommend changing it?
13. Do you believe the program can be altered to make your work more effective and easier? If so, how?

F: Do you feel that introducing limited participation selection to the program would be beneficial? To the students? Your experience?

F: Do you feel that a 3-week curriculum, focusing on a specific subject, would benefit the program?

F: Do you think more staff would benefit Kids Connection?

14. How big of an issue do you feel behavioral problems are?

F: How do you feel behavioral problems could be best handled in the Kids Connection program?

Teacher Questions:

1. How long have you taught at Faribault Middle School?

What subject(s) do you teach?

2. How many students in your classes are involved in Kids Connection?

3. Can you pinpoint any improvement in the area of literacy with any of your students?

F: Improvement in your particular area?

4. What are some of the characteristics/behaviors of your Kids Connection students in the classroom?

5. Do you perceive differences between your students who have resided in the states longer opposed to those who are newcomers? If so, what are they?

6. What do you think challenges your students the most and why?

7. What do you see your students excel at the most in the classroom and why?

8. Do you see any needs that the Kids Connection program is not currently meeting? If so, what are they?

9. How big of an issue do you feel behavioral problems are?

F: How do you feel behavioral problems could be best handled for students involved in Kids Connection?

Students:

1. How old are you?

2. What grade are you in at Faribault Middle School?

3. What is your favorite subject at school?

F: What is your least favorite subject?

4. What is your favorite thing to do for fun?

5. What do you want to be when you are older?

6. How many days a week do you go to the afterschool program?
7. How long have you been going to the afterschool program? (weeks, months, years)
8. What do you usually do when you come to the program?
9. What is your favorite part of your time at the program? Why is this your favorite part?
10. Your least favorite time?

F: Why is this your least favorite part?

11. Which adults and/or college students do you spend time with?

What do you do when you spend time together?

How do you feel about working with the adults and college students?

12. If you could do anything with your time at the afterschool program what would it be?

If you could change anything about your time at the afterschool program what would it be?

13. Why do you come to the afterschool program?

F : Would you attend the afterschool program if you had another place to go afterschool?

How would you feel if the afterschool program had more homework and learning time and less playtime?

14. How do you feel when you're at the afterschool program?

15. Why do you think that the college students and adults organize the program?

How do you feel you are treated by your teachers and other grown ups here?

16. When did you immigrate to this country?

17. Do you have any other siblings participating at Kids Connection?

18. Do you have any siblings in college?

19. What are your favorite things to do for fun? Favorite thing to do for fun?

20. What do you want to be when you grow up?