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A study for comprehensive and collaborative relationships: Partnering public schools and nonprofit outdoor programs

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Abstract
My research paper will explore the divide between urban youth and their participation in outdoor programs. In an effort to provide a foundation of reason for the lack of participation in outdoor programs by urban youth, this study will be completed through an abstract approach on heuristic research and constraint theory. Heuristic research can be defined as the process of researching a "personal venture in search of understanding one's self and the world around them" (Moustakas, 1990). In addition, constraint theory focuses on the barriers individuals face in regards to participation in activities or the completion of a goal (Samdahl & Jekubovich, 1997). By delving into the literature surrounding this topic I will identify the barriers that are keeping public schools from utilizing the opportunities that quality outdoor programs may offer as well as the pedagogies and methods of a few successful outdoor programs who seek to foster the development of healthy intrapersonal and social skill sets of urban youth (Outward Bound, 2010; Elkind, 2007; Kolb, 1984). I will also research current educational institutions in the Des Moines Metro to determine potential partnerships. The other purpose of this study is to research and explore ways urban classrooms and outdoor programs may partner to offer both their curricula to youth with the intent of fostering active and more effective contributing members of a rapidly changing society.

A STUDY FOR COMPREHENSIVE AND COLLABORATIVE RELATIONSHIPS: PARTNERING PUBLIC SCHOOLS AND NONPROFIT OUTDOOR PROGRAMS

A Research Project Submitted In Partial Fulfillment

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Master of Arts

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has been approved as meeting the research paper requirement for the Degree of Master of Arts

_____   _____

Date   Dr. Rodney Dieser, Chair

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Acknowledgments

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I would not have been able to keep my sanity had it not been for the friends and family who helped me through the semesters and coursework necessary to complete this project. Finally, my deepest thanks is reserved for my professors and classmates. Though the coursework may have been challenging, it was the support of the friendships and professional relationships developed through this process that helped me be successful.

Chapter 1

Introduction

A young girl from inner city Kansas City approached me a number of years ago when I was directing camp. She was not sleeping well and was unknowingly causing problems for her counselors and the rest of her unit. Her counselors had asked me to come help put the kids to bed and I found myself talking with this young girl outside her tent. She was hesitant to tell me what was wrong at first, but after a few minutes of conversation she shared what was bothering her. Though the camp was still close to the city, you would not know that by the environment and sounds. Having grown up with a wide variety of outdoor activities to enjoy, I loved the quiet environment free from the hustle and constant noise of the city and never realized that the lack of city noise could be a stressor. This young urban girl had been hearing rustling behind her tent at night and was afraid that if she entered her tent the homeless man who lived back there would murder her in her sleep.

I was utterly blown away by her observation. Not only was there not a homeless man living behind her tent, I also realized the communication failure of educating these young girls on the night noises they would hear while sleeping outdoors. Once she understood that it was probably a raccoon or squirrel, she had a

much better experience. I had always associated nature with relaxation and rejuvenation, not fear and anxiety. This was the moment I began to really see the disconnect between the experiences of urban youth and nature.

As a program manager and camp director for six years, the director of operations for one year at a camping organization, and now the coordinator of outdoor experiential education programs for a state university, I have had a number of opportunities to see youth experience nature for the first time in their life. Because of these experiences, I have become invested in youth programming at its most foundational level as it relates to a young person's education inside and outside the classroom.

Purpose of the Study

My research paper will explore the divide between urban youth and their participation in outdoor programs. In an effort to provide a foundation of reason for the lack of participation in outdoor programs by urban youth, this study will be completed through an abstract approach on heuristic research and constraint theory. Heuristic research can be defined as the process of researching a "personal venture in search of understanding one's self and the world around them" (Moustakas,

1990). In addition, constraint theory focuses on the barriers individuals face in regards to participation in activities or the completion of a goal (Samdahl & Jekubovich, 1997). By delving into the literature surrounding this topic I will identify the barriers that are keeping public schools from utilizing the opportunities that quality outdoor programs may offer as well as the pedagogies and methods of a few successful outdoor programs who seek to foster the development of healthy intrapersonal and social skill sets of urban youth (Outward Bound, 2010; Elkind, 2007; Kolb, 1984). I will also research current educational institutions in the Des Moines Metro to determine potential partnerships. The other purpose of this study is to research and explore ways urban classrooms and outdoor programs may partner to offer both their curricula to youth with the intent of fostering active and more effective contributing members of a rapidly changing society.

Research Questions

The fundamental qualitative research question that is associated with the purpose of this study is what, if anything, are urban youth currently receiving in regards to skill-based education that will assist them in becoming active members of their communities? I will discuss how schools and nonprofit

programs can develop partnerships and successful working relationships. I will investigate what kind of program(s) would encourage urban youth to participate in outdoor experiences as well as the benefit for urban youth who participate in outdoor programs. Finally, I will apply these findings to the future and discuss how and when collaborations between classroom teaching and outdoor experiences can occur.

This information is important to ascertain as educators and community members struggle to improve the quality of education for the young members of their community. Currently, educational policy makers are debating year-round schooling, restricting or removing funding for activities such as the arts, while class sizes are rising and health disorders in youth, such as ADD, ADHD, stress, and obesity, are steadily increasing. Allowing youth the opportunity to spend time outdoors where they can discover things on their own and at their own pace, to be as loud or as quiet as they want for a period of time; productively addresses the needs for the physical and mental health development of youth. The research conducted in this paper will explore potential links to classroom and outdoor learning so that today's youth can better face challenges ahead.

Scope of the Study

The scope of this study will consist of a literature review and a specific regional investigation. To establish a general context for my focus, I will garner information from relevant authors and sources (Elkind, 2007, Louv, 2005, Godbey, Crawford, & Shen, 2012, etc.), and current research (Office of the Surgeon General, 2001, Rideout, Roberts, & Foehr, 2005). The other part of this project consists of three areas of examination. In conjunction with my own experience as an outdoor professional, I hope to discover if and how participation in such outdoor programs can complement classroom education for public schools. My aim is to identify the shortcomings of local urban schools to provide opportunities for life skills development and explore how a partnership with outdoor programs can provide such opportunities so that students can have a comprehensive educational experience. This research seeks to find ways to work through the constraints urban youth face by researching how other programs have overcome them, and if that information can be applied to the educational experience of urban youth in my community.

This paper will delve deeply into the work of organizations that are currently developing and implementing programs that emphasize character development in youth. In particular, I hope to learn how the programs in these organizations reach urban

youth, what barriers they face, and if the youth experiences have proven to be beneficial. Not only will I utilize the research on current programs, I will also study literature that is paramount in outdoor education and helping urban youth take part in urban programs. A foundation of literature will include Louv (2005), Kolb (1984), Elkind (2007), and Cornell (1979). I will also research articles written by individuals and organizations such as Warren (1998); Ridout, Roberts, and Foehr (2005); American Camp Association (2010); and the Office of the Surgeon General (2001).

By researching select current programs with records of meeting their respective goals, I hope to learn which elements are working well and what may not be working as well as it could. Another factor that may positively influence the collaboration I seek is the current debate surrounding year-round schooling. Outdoor programs can and will take a backseat to schooling unless schools and local parks and recreation organizations work together to help each other. I will use this research paper as a way to find opportunities to merge these two educational programs. To do this, the research I do on programs like the Outward Bound Expeditionary learning school and initiatives like Play Again will be important. Although school education is important, I believe public schools and outdoor

programs that have an opportunity to work together and utilize skills in both areas that would be useful for youth of all ages.

My intention is for this research paper to be utilized by organizations seeking to provide holistic programs for urban youth and classrooms. The relationship between the public education system and nonprofit organizations can sometimes be tense and uncertain, but there is potential for collaboration and support from both sides.

Definition of Terms

Adventure Education: For the purposes of this study, this term is defined as an education experience based in challenging outdoor settings that promote communication and leadership skills as well as strengthen relationships and environmental impacts.

Environmental Education: This term goes one step further under the umbrella of outdoor education. Environmental Education teaches participants how to learn about and investigate their surroundings and as a result make intelligent, informed decisions about how they can take care of mature (North American Association for Environmental Education, 2011). These programs are commonly taught in locations such as classrooms, nature

centers, and zoos. The topics vary from biology and chemistry to social studies and math.

Experiential Education: A philosophy that informs many methodologies educators use with learners in an environment with direct experience and focused reflection in an effort to increase knowledge, develop skills, clarify values, and develop participant's capacity to contribute to their workplaces, schools, local communities, and world (Association of Experiential Education, 2012).

Outdoor Classroom: An outdoor classroom is an outdoor location that helps youth develop mastery of skills, grow in gross and fine motor skills, as well as develop socially and emotionally. These classrooms develop a familiarity with and appreciation of nature as well as providing a wide and expansive view of how the world works. By providing opportunities for youth to develop stewardship skills for the environment, youth become physically active, develop stronger problem-solving and communication skills, as well as have a positive self-esteem (The Outdoor Classroom Project, 2015).

Outdoor Education: This is a broad term that includes all forms of outdoor programs that promote personal, social, and educational enrichment (Institute for Outdoor Learning, 2005). For the purposes of this study, we will define it as the

development of skills and education through partnerships with outdoor education or recreation organizations.

Partnerships: Throughout this study, partnerships will be used in conjunction with schools and communities. It is identified as collaborative activities that would not have been able to be completed without the help and teamwork of two or more organizations in the surrounding community (Hands, 2014).

Resiliency: The idea of experiencing growth through a disruptive life event (Richardson, 2002)

Urban Core: This is a term that covers a specific location. For the purpose of this study, this term is defined as the highest populated areas in cities population core of cites with a population of 150,000 or more. According to the US Census, the urban core must have a population of at least 50,000 persons.

Urban Youth: This term is under the umbrella of Urban Core. For the purpose of this study, this term is defined as the youth whose residence is in the Urban Core.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Section 1: Youth in Nature

Richard Louv stressed the art of play in his book *Last Child in the Woods*. He spoke a lot about his childhood and climbing trees, building forts, and discovering the nature that surrounded his environment. In a recent article he wrote for *Orion Magazine,* he asked adults around his hometown if children (or adults for that matter) have the right to walk in the woods. A story he tells with regard to this question is about a little girl in his hometown who when he asked about their experiences in nature told him about a place that she had. It had a waterfall and a creek, and she would go there sometimes with a blanket or a tent and sleep there. She went on to say they had to cut the woods down, and "it was like they cut down part of me (Louv, 2009)."

The adults, while debating if people had the right to walk in the woods, began speaking about other rights they have; the "right" to have cable television, the "right" to a parking spot, and even the "right" to live in a neighborhood where children are not allowed to live. We all have "rights", and as follows with the rules associated, everyone can choose whether they have

the "right" to do something or not. His final thought caught me:

> "The little girl in Raytown, MO may not have a specific right to that particular tree in her chosen woods, but she does have the inalienable right to be with other life; to liberty, which cannot be realized under protective house arrest; and to the pursuit of happiness, which is made whole by the universe."

The idea that many adults and children believe that their "right" to taking a walk in the woods on a beautiful October evening to watch the leaves change color or to smell fall in the air or to taste the sweetness of the air is hard to grasp. Their "right" to happiness is not being taken away by other people; it is being taken away by themselves.

Molly Baker writes about landfullness and landlessness in her article *Landfullness in Adventure-Based Programming*. Baker (2008) defines a landless trip as "traditional programming objectives centered on inter/intrapersonal skill development, coupled with students' tendencies to focus first and foremost on the technical and social aspects." She goes on to quote S.J. Meyers:

> We cannot come to know a place by rushing in and rushing out. I often wonder just what it is that people see in the

wilderness when they come for a week or two each year. I

imagine their spirits are refreshed and their time here is

quite pleasant. I know they learn a great deal. But what

do they see? I believe there are some things that can only

be seen if you stay awhile. Others become visible only to

those who gaze at a landscape and think, this is my home.

(Meyers, 1989, p. 112)

Landlessness is becoming a strong objective to youth today.
They would like to have a job to accomplish and when they are
through they can do what they want to do. They are so
determined to find the purple salamander on the ground, they
miss the bald eagle perched on a branch thirty feet above them.
Meyers is right when he states that "we cannot come to know a
place by rushing in and rushing out (Baker, 2008)," it isn't the
point of nature.

Molly Baker continues with an explanation of what landfull
experiences are, she says that "the key is for students to
discover an engagement with the land that extends beyond simply
knowing the names of trees, to include a personal approach of
relating to the land (p361)." How can we promote understanding
the land on a personal level? Knowing our audience would be the
first step. Knowing how to meet the needs, goals, and
limitations of the group would be the second. Nobody is going

to send a participant off a rock cliff without first giving prior background knowledge.

Taking multiple things into consideration is important, weather, access, handicap accessibility, safety and security. Landfull experiences can be truly usable only if the participant can get something out of it. "The essence of landfullness is when the personal process becomes less intentional and more of a part of our identity – in other words, relating to the land is a part of who we are (Baker, 2008)."

Baker (2009) describes the four levels of landfullness as 1) being aware, 2) interpreting land history: natural and cultural history, 3) sensing place in the present, and 4) connecting to home. Each of these steps brings us closer to a full nature experience. Baker states that in the stage of being deeply aware, one asks questions like where am I, or who is around me? These questions bring the essence of nature into a person by making it personal.

The second stage is interpreting land, natural and cultural history. By taking students to a place and teaching them about the history and what used to be located there, gives them a sense of responsibility to keep the place natural or in good condition. The third stage is sensing place in the present. This step helps the students to see what is unique about where

they are that they cannot discover elsewhere. This may be the way a tree grows sideways out of a rock or how the river changes elevations through a course of waterfalls and rapids.

The fourth and final stage is connecting to home. Baker empresses the importance of being able to take the pieces discovered while in nature and apply them to life. Each of these stages is important to encourage children to accept the beauty of the outdoors. With the fast pace of the world, children rarely stop and look at what is around them. This will help them have a sense of accomplishment and a feeling of connection with the environment around them.

Rachel Carson introduced the concept of the sense of wonder.

> "It is a state in which one is actively interacting with another entity, whether it be tangible, or intangible; this interaction engages the person mentally through the processes of inquiry, physically through the senses, and emotionally through feelings. It represents the reflection and processing step that is integral to the experiential learning process (Baker, 2009).

Joseph Cornell (1979) brings a different perspective and relates it more on how these activities can be led by the instructor. The first step is to teach less and share more.

Joseph follows the idea that instead of quoting from a textbook, putting the questions and thoughts into his own words and experiences is easier for children to understand. He explains that it is also a way for children to know that it is okay to feel something about nature and what they can experience. "I believe it is important for an adult to share his inner self with the child. Only by sharing our deeper thoughts and feelings do we communicate to, and inspire in others, a love and respect for the earth (Cornell, 1979)."

The Effects of Outdoor Programs and Education on Urban Youth

Richard Louv states in his book that children who spend more time outdoors have a much lower likelihood of having ADD or ADHD. These disorders, among many other problems, are what cause much of the bad behavior of youth in school (Louv, 2005). When children have no way of releasing energy or excitement, they begin to cause problems in classrooms and become a distraction to other students. Giving children some time to spend outdoors exploring nature can be the start of a solution for disorders such as ADD and ADHD.

When speaking of Paulo Freire, Mary Breunig (2008) remarks that Freire sees teachers as somewhat manipulating the educational system, at least what he believes the education

system should be. This happens when teachers "spoon feed students a narrow view of knowledge and truth (Breunig, 2008)." When I first read that sentence I made a note and placed it on the page that said "this is also the fault of the students". Now as I look back I wonder if the students even have the educational knowledge to ask the right questions so it is not so narrowly viewed. If we are unable to teach our students and participants how to ask the right questions then how can I expect them to take the blame on poor education?

   What happens when the school system fails the students? The Obama Administration, along with the help of Arne Duncan, the United States Secretary of Education, is looking at the No Child Left Behind Policy which has caused a stir of emotion. Talk of year-round education and the merging of classes and schools echoes through halls and offices around the country. Does this mean that schools are improving the education of their youth? What about providing them with the outdoor experience during the summer? The American Camp Association (ACA) has researched the impact that outdoor experiences and schooling can have on our youth that will impact their future. Some of their research states that many camps partner with schools, but do not follow through at a high enough level. The research states that 55% of camps offer programs specifically for school groups with the primary goal of generating revenue, followed by keeping

youth engaged throughout the year at 43% (American Camp Association, 2010). Some camps even collaborate with the teachers prior to programs to offer specialized activities and lessons based on what the students are currently learning.

A disheartening portion of this study is that 88% of camps and other outdoor programs are not partnering with the schools regarding grants and Department of Education programs. The Title I program is a key example showing that camps have the ability to partner with schools. "More than 50,000 public schools across the country use Title I funds to provide additional academic support and learning opportunities to help low-achieving children master challenging curricula and meet state standards in core academic subjects (U. S. Department of Education, 2008, para. 8)." This program focuses funds towards public schools that will have a certain percentage of low income families. The Title I program provides services to struggling children who are failing due to lack of opportunities or support within their school and neighborhood. This ensures that children will have the opportunity to improve their reading and mathematics scores through special tutoring, after-school programs, and summer programs.

There are a number of outdoor programs that focus on at-risk youth who are on the brink of a downward spiral into

delinquency. Trained staff take them into the outdoors in hopes of developing a stronger connection for communication, but also to teach outdoor education. Outward Bound has begun a program for urban core youth that takes them outside their school and into their community to learn how they can be agents of change and develop their character (Outward Bound, 2010). There are programs at camps around the nation that do structured activities for school groups year-round focusing on environmental education, teambuilding and outdoor living.

Experiential education is an ever-changing entity that mirrors those that surround it. Every generation brings in their own experiences and learning styles to share, it is how we listen that is what is successful. Presenting nature to children is something that will change just about as much as the seasons change, but it is not what an educator teaches them so much as what the educator allows them to learn and discover. Every child has the right and privilege to discover what is inside them and around them, it builds a sense of understanding and a motivation to be stewards to other people and to this earth. Richard Louv (2005) wrote, "at a deeper level, nature gives itself to children – for its own sake, not as a reflection of a culture. At this level, inexplicable nature provokes humility." If children have an opportunity to believe in themselves and in what they can do, if they can build their

self-esteem through their discovery of nature, then we, as experiential educators, have done our job.

Section 2: Level of Support in Urban Communities

In the first chapter of *Savage Inequalities*, Jonathan Kozol speaks of the political, economic, and environmental challenges that the city of East St. Louis has been living with for many years. The problems from the streets have flowed into the public schools; school needed to be called off for over 16,000 students because of a sewage leak that flowed through the basement, kitchen, and through the auditorium. That same week, there were "280 teachers and 166 cooks and cafeteria workers that were laid off in hopes to save money to fix the school (Kozol, 1991, p.23)." The deferred maintenance had been stacked up through the years to the point where the heating system in the building worked only in the summer and some classrooms were closed for fear that the ceiling would cave in.

The students tell Kozol that East St. Louis is between two chemical corporations. One is a factory that makes paint and pigments, the other factory incinerates toxic waste. With the city in the middle, there is no option but to be surrounded by a toxic environment. Sewage and waste water from the factories run down the streets, the air pollution is high, and the soil

pollution is beyond hope. Classroom sizes continue to decline as children drop out as early as ninth and tenth grade. High school girls are pregnant because they do not see opportunity outside of a family in East St. Louis. "Of the 55% that graduate, 20% may go to four-year colleges: something like 10% of any entering class (Kozol, 1991, p. 29-30)." Teachers are afraid to come into the city to teach because of the challenging job or fear itself.

There are many factors that can play an important role in the culture of violence and intolerance in a group of young people, one of those being socioeconomic status. Studies show that "depressed economic conditions, coupled with individual cases of unemployment and limited economic opportunity contribute to higher levels of violence in a given community (National Youth Violence Prevention Resource Center, 2010)." Research is showing that youth who live in poverty are more likely to engage in violent and aggressive behaviors due to desensitization to violence. Though this research is not promising in regards to the future of our youth, there are some protective factors that can help build resiliency and reduce the risk of violent behaviors at the environmental level. Programs on the local, state, and national levels that support youth involvement in their communities and environment are shown to

decrease the numbers of youth resorting to violence (National Youth Violence Prevention Resource Center, 2010).

Other community factors contributing to the risk for youth violence include the availability of weapons and drugs. The availability of drugs or weapons within a community may vary and can be greatly influenced by the pre-existing presence of active drug use and gang violence. A community's infrastructure can be identified as a protective factor against youth violence. By creating opportunities for success, decision making, and giving youth choices, it helps them to develop their self-confidence, build skills, and it gives them a chance to make a difference in their community (Office of the Surgeon General, 2001).

Trends, Risk Factors, and Prevention of Youth Violence

The Surgeon General's executive summary on youth violence found interesting data on trends in youth aggression (Office of the Surgeon General, 2001). Since the early 1980's there has been a markedly large increase in youth violence including school bullying, homicides and rape. Those youth at greatest risk of being seriously injured or even killed in school-associated violence are those from a racial or ethnic minority and urban school districts (Office of the Surgeon General, 2001).

There are two differing perspectives that this summary on youth violence takes. The first is the developmental perspective which "considers a range of risks over the life course, from prenatal factors to factors influencing whether patterns of violent behavior in adolescence will persist into adulthood (Office of the Surgeon General, 2001, para. 9)." The second approach taken in this research is the public health approach. This perspective provides a variety of research and intervention techniques drawn from a number of diverse disciplines. It provides primary prevention strategies through identification of behavioral, environmental, and biological risk factors that are associated with youth violence. With all the research completed by the public health and developmental perspectives they found that first and foremost, searching for and finding solutions to the issue of youth violence remains an enormous challenge. Secondly, "the most urgent need is a national resolve to confront the problem of youth violence systematically, using research-based approaches, and to correct damaging myths and stereotypes that interfere with the task at hand (Office of the Surgeon General, 2001, para.16)."

Some of the major research findings and conclusions on youth violence from the last decade touch on quality experiences outside of school for youth. Reports state that the opportunity for effective change in the lives of youth begins early and

rarely, if ever, ends. There are five key elements in their research: trends in youth violence, pathways to youth violence, risk and protective factors, preventing youth violence, and a vision for the future (Office of the Surgeon General, 2001).

Trends in youth violence show there was a surge in arrests for violent crime committed by youth. Violent crimes in this research are considered homicide, rapes, aggravated assaults, homicides, and robbery. When a select group of high school seniors were asked in a confidential survey if they had committed an act of serious violence, 13-15% said yes (Office of the Surgeon General, 2001).

While research looked at what has led youth toward violence, it has been discovered that "violence stems from a complex interaction of individuals with their environment at particular times in their lives (Office of the Surgeon General, 2001, para. 20)." One of the major findings made was that "most youth violence begins in adolescence and ends with the transition into adulthood (Office of the Surgeon General, 2001, para. 21)." This tells me that there is the potential for growth in schools and intervention programs in communities to involve adolescents in helping make their community a better place.

Prevention programs and strategies can be effective in stopping forms of violence in general populations of youth, high-risk youth, and even those who are violent already. If organizations look closely at the components that address both environmental and individual risks, they will be better able to provide programs that will improve the schools, family life, and youth involvement with peer groups. The quality of the program also makes a difference on if it is effective or not.

This gives caregivers a unique opportunity to provide support to their children by helping to emphasize the importance of education through support and affection. Parental communication and being active in their child's life will provide the support needed to lead youth in a positive direction. Organizations are beginning to focus on the aspect of family taking part in the lives of their children. By offering programs focused on family relationships and family dynamics, parents and caregivers are provided with opportunities to get to know their children better. These programs can be found throughout communities through parks and recreation services or through local churches and even schools. Many parents and caregivers are interested in experiencing educational and outdoor opportunities with their children. Whether it is to spend time with them or help them become accustomed to the outdoors, it is an opportunity for growth in

relationships. Providing programs for families that encourage teamwork and communication begins building a foundation of experience, knowledge children can carry into the future.

On an individual level, research indicates that failing at academics can be a contributing factor to violence in youth (National Youth Violence Prevention Resource Center, 2010). There are some proactive efforts that can be made within our schools and society that will help youth commit to success. Instilling a purpose or even a belief that they can do something important in their lives is a start; developing a commitment to education and learning will help them to become independent and strong citizens within their community. Providing them with opportunities to develop critical thinking and conflict resolution skills are additional aspects that will help protect youth from violence (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 1999).

Section 3: Community Partnerships

The opportunity for community organizations to partner with urban schools gives local organizations an opening to provide much needed support to local educators. Norton and Watt (2014) completed research on the impact of positive youth development programs that utilize aa mentor-supported wilderness experience to combat risk factors in urban youth, such as poverty, exposure

to gangs, drugs, and community and family violence. Throughout this research, they discovered that positive youth development is especially key to low-income youth in urban environments where they are susceptible to a number of risk factors (Roffman, Pagano, & Hirsch, 2001)

Outdoor programs in the United States have a strong history of success with youth. Programs such as Outward Bound, who have been in existence since the early 1960's, use leadership, character development, as well as cooperative peer and adult relationships in an outdoor environment to be successful (Norton & Watt, 2014). These programs have a significant impact for youth to help them master assertiveness, self-efficacy, and decision making skills.

Recently, the Adventure Learning Center, a program of Iowa State Extension and Outreach in Polk County began a partnership with Scavo Full-Service High School, located in Central Campus in Des Moines. We were asked to develop a three-stage leadership program that would promote communication and also pull the youth into an outdoor experience. A number of authors have suggested that adventure-based programs can be effective in enhancing levels of resilience. Not only due to spending time in a pristine environment, but also due to the separation from normal life, social support, and the intensity and challenging nature

of the experiences (D'Amato & Krasney, 2011; Ewert & Yoshino, 2011). This program provided proof that partnerships between experiential education programs and educators can benefit youth. Not only did the students learn more about leadership, but they were also put into situations they were unfamiliar with in an effort to build strong supportive relationships. Their positive outcomes not only exceeded our expectations, but they proved that opportunities like that can make a large difference to an underserved youth population.

According to Scales et al (2006), "Caring adults outside of young people's own families play significant roles in providing a number of the developmental assets and, therefore, in the promotion of adolescent well-being" (p. 402). Though there is extensive support for youth mentoring programs, there is a general need to address and analyze different practices, contexts, and models in which the relationships can develop. According to Rhodes, Reddy, Roffman, and Grossman (2005), supportive nonparent adult relationships can greatly influence the course and quality of a youth's life, but many youth never have this type of relationship.

Taking this a step further from peer/mentor relationships, students develop a level of resiliency through the use of specific training or outdoor experiences. According to a study

completed by Beightol, Jevertson, Carter, Gray, and Gass (2012),
the inclusion of adventure education activities in an anti-
bullying program positively affect the level of resiliency in
students. While most research on resilience focuses on traumatic
situations, or recovery from highly stressful life experiences
(Ai & Park, 2005), it has also been understood that resilience
can arise from everyday situations (Masten, 2009).

So, who determines the nature of the partnership activities
between a school and a community organization? In a recent study
focusing on school-community partnerships, it was found that
students value collaborative partnerships between schools and
community organizations (Hands, 2014). The study elicited ideas
from students about what types of activities and partnerships
they wished to have with the school, then encouraged the
students to follow through with the leadership in those
partnerships. Though, there is still a potential for resistance
among stakeholders who are not involved in decision-making
capacities with those partnerhsips (Datnow, 2000; Fullan, 1991).
"For students, this may mean disengagement from education and
the very activities that were developed with them in mind"
(Mitra, 2007; Smyth, 2007). Oftentimes, the partnership research
is carried out by school personnel and does not involve the
relationships of the youth who are participating in the
partnerships and activities. In order to examine students'

perceptions and involvement in collaborative relationships, the researchers asked such questions as "what is the nature of the interaction between students and community members in the development of partnerships? What conditions influence interest and involvement in school-community partnerships? In what ways can students be involved in the school-community partnerships?" (Hands, 2014).

Through the use of social capital, author Lin identifies three components necessary in developing partnerships: group assets (such as trust and norms); accessible social resources; and the mobilization of resources through the use of contacts (Lin, 1999). Through these components, we learn that with a strong commitment to the success of the partnerships and more importantly the students, an academically challenging and supportive learning environment for students can be developed.

Finally, the important question of the role of the students in the collaboration and development of the partnership becomes key. Research shows that youth involvement in decision-making helps the partnership be notably more successful. By integrating the knowledge and perspectives of students, they improve the outcomes and participation in the event. For example, in 2014, the Adventure Learning Center attempted to build a leadership collaboration with a local school. Most of the conversations

happened with the educators and key members of the school, not students. The implementation of the program was to happen in the spring of 2015. Though it was a great idea and great program, without the student's buy-in, the program was unsuccessful. From a varying perspective, the Adventure Learning Center staff attempted to implement a similar program with an urban school. This time, student leaders were involved with the planning process and helped motivate other students to participate. For that reason, we believe the abundant success of the Phoenix Ambassador Leadership Program was based on the fact that the students were involved in every step of the planning process. According to Eckert, Goldman, and Wenger (1997), learning activities in which a student collaborates with other students and adults to examine local problems can help build community and lead to greater learning. The same strategy goes for building learning partnerships with community organizations.

Chapter 3

Summary Analysis

In large urban areas such as Des Moines, many youth have few experiences with nature. Yet, the schoolyard as well as the surrounding community can be a key source of scientific inquiry throughout the school year. These experiences require a shift in the perception of school administrators and teachers about the meaning of "classroom" (Ferreira, Grueber, & Yarema, 2012). Through this study, I have reasoned that community partnerships with schools not only benefit the community organization, but more importantly the success of the school and the students it serves. These relationships not only benefit the future success of the students, but it develops stronger ties within the communities serving these students.

By utilizing the models set by organizations such as Outward Bound and Upward Bound, as well as communicating with local schools, nonprofits and educators alike are able to develop programs that serve the specific needs of their youth. Educators crave the support of community organizations to help them educate their students. By building relationships not only with the educators, but also with the students, the mentors in the community have the unique opportunity to help build

resiliency and self-efficacy among today's urban youth. These are key skills to the future success of youth as they graduate and in turn hunt for positions that will help further their career goals.

"Humanity is facing, and must deal with, enormous ecological and social problems and challenges. This situation has created an urgent and compelling need centered on how the future citizenry of the industrialized West will be prepared relative to addressing and dealing with these problems and challenges" (Cassel & Nelson 2010).

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