

Learning In Afterschool

Preparing Youth for the 21st Century

A project of Temescal Associates and The Sunset Neighborhood Beacon Center



If afterschool programs are to achieve their full potential, they must become known as important places of learning. Below are learning principles that are supported by new brain research and what we know about children and their learning. These principles should be reflected in quality afterschool programs. For more information and to sign on as a co-signer, go to: www.learninginafterschool.org

1. Learning that is Active

Learning and memory recall of new knowledge is strengthened through different exposures – seeing, hearing, touching, and doing. Afterschool learning should be the result of activities that involve young people in “doing” – activities that allow them to be physically active, stimulate their innate curiosity, and that are hands-on and project-based.

2. Learning that is Collaborative

Knowledge should be socially centered, as collaborative learning provides the best means to explore new information. Afterschool programs are well positioned to build skills that allow young people to learn as a team. This includes listening to others, supporting group learning goals, resolving differences and conflicts, and making room for each member to contribute his or her individual talents. Collaborative learning happens when learners engage in a common task where each individual depends on and is accountable to each other.

3. Learning that is Meaningful

Young people are intrinsically motivated when they find their learning meaningful. This means having ownership over the learning topic and the means to assess their own progress. Motivation is increased when the learning is relevant to their own interests, experiences, and the real world in which they live. Community and cultural relevance is especially important to new immigrant youth and those from minority cultures. Rather than learning that is focused on academic subjects, afterschool programs should help young people apply their academic skills to their areas of interest and real world problems. Also, when learning involves responsibility, leadership, and service to others, it is experienced as more meaningful.

4. Learning that Supports Mastery

Young people tell us they are most engaged when they are given opportunities to learn new skills. If young people are to learn the importance and joy of mastery, they need the opportunity to learn and practice a full sequence of skills that will allow them to become “really good at something.” Afterschool activities should not promote the gathering of random knowledge and skills. Rather, activities should be explicitly sequenced and designed to promote the layering of skills that allow participants to create a product or demonstrate mastery in a way they couldn’t do before. They achieve this by designing activities that lead to a culminating event or product that can be viewed and celebrated by peers and family members.

5. Learning that Expands Horizons

Young people, especially those from low-income families and neighborhoods, benefit by learning opportunities that take them beyond their current experience and expand their horizons. Learning about new things and new places promotes a greater sense of potential of what they can achieve and brings a sense of excitement and discovery to the learning environment. Afterschool programs have the flexibility to go beyond the walls of their facilities. They use the surrounding community as a classroom and bring in individuals and businesses that young people may not otherwise come into contact with. Expanding young people’s horizons also includes helping them to develop a global awareness. This includes increasing their knowledge of other cultures and places and their understanding of the issues and problems we have in common across cultural and political divides.