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Organized Activities as Developmental Contexts for Children and Adolescents

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School-age children in the United States and other Western nations spend almost half of their waking hours in leisure activities (Larson & Verma, 1999). How young persons can best use this discretionary time has been a source of controversy. For some, out-of-school time is perceived as inconsequential or even counterproductive to the health and well-being of young persons. Consistent with this view, the past 100 years of scientific research has tended either to ignore this time or to focus selectively on the risks present during the out-of-school hours (Kleiber & Powell, chap. 2, this volume). More recently, however, there is increased interest in viewing out-of-school time as an opportunity for young persons to learn and develop competencies that are largely neglected by schools. Researchers are beginning to recognize that along with family, peers, and school, the organized ac-

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tivities in which some youth participate during these hours are important contexts of emotional, social, and civic development. At the same time, communities and the federal government in the United States are now channeling considerable resources into creating organized activities for young people's out-of-school time (Pittman et al., chap. 17, this volume). The primary aim of this volume is to bring scientific research to bear on how this time can be used constructively.

In this chapter, we overview central issues in the field of research on organized activities to provide a background and framework for the chapters that follow. Four main areas are addressed. First, we discuss definitional issues in the field and clarify what is meant by organized activities within this volume. Second, we outline the available research indicating that participation in these activities affects short- and long-term development. Third, we consider the features of organized activities thought to account for their developmental impact and, lastly, we review evidence on factors that influence participation in these activities and whether youth benefit from their developmental potential.

WHAT ARE ORGANIZED ACTIVITIES?

This volume focuses principally on formal activities for children 6 to 18 years of age that are not part of the school curriculum. By "organized," we refer to activities that are characterized by structure, adult-supervision, and an emphasis on skill-building (e.g., Eccles & Gootman, 2002; Larson, 2000; Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003). These activities are generally voluntary, have regular and scheduled meetings, maintain developmentally based expectations and rules for participants in the activity setting (and sometimes beyond it), involve several participants, offer supervision and guidance from adults, and are organized around developing particular skills and achieving goals. These activities are often characterized by challenge and complexity that increase as participants' abilities develop (e.g., Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Larson, 1994). In general, organized activities share the broad goal of promoting positive development for the participants.

A variety of labels have been used to describe organized activities for young persons. They usually denote the *who* (school-age, child, adolescent, youth), *where* (school-based, community-based), *what* (activities, programs, organizations), and *when* (after-school, extracurricular, summer, nonschool, out-of-school) elements of participation. These descriptors are meaningful and do clarify the phenomenon of interest. Accordingly, we use the term *organized activities* to refer to these variations collectively. The word *organized* is also used to make clear that so-called *unstructured activities* (e.g., watching television, listening to music, "hanging out" with peers, and "cruising" in cars) and other forms of passive leisure (e.g., eating, resting, and personal

care) are not the focus of this volume, except as a backdrop of what else youth might be doing during their after-school hours (Kleiber & Powell, chap. 2, this volume; Osgood et al., chap. 3, this volume).

Breadth and Diversity of Activities

The range of organized activities available to children and adolescents in the United States and other Western nations is substantial (Carnegie Council, 1992; Eccles & Gootman, 2002; Quinn, 1999). They include nationally sponsored youth organizations and federally funded after-school programs (e.g., Boys and Girls Clubs, YMCA, YWCA, 21st Century Community Learning Centers, 4-H, Boy/Girl Scouts, Camp Fire). They involve community, school, and locally organized programs: autonomous grassroots youth developmental organizations, faith-based youth organizations, and activities provided by parks and recreation services, museums, libraries, youth centers, youth sports organizations and amateur leagues (e.g., little league), school-sponsored extracurricular and after-school activities, and community service programs. They also include specific types of activities (e.g., sports, music, hobby clubs, social clubs, religious, service activities) that can be differentiated on the basis of activity-related goals, atmosphere, and content (Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003).

This volume considers organized activities across this diverse range. Methodological and logistical challenges make it difficult to study national organizations and little research is available at this level of assessment. By contrast, considerable research has been conducted on community-sponsored programs and activities (e.g., Eccles & Gootman, 2002; Kirshner et al., chap. 7, this volume; McIntosh et al., chap. 15, this volume; Stattin et al., chap. 10, this volume), and school-based extracurricular activities (e.g., Barber et al., chap. 9, this volume; Eccles & Templeton, 2002; Pedersen & Seidman, chap. 5, this volume). Recently, school-sponsored after-school programs for elementary and middle-school youth have been increasing dramatically and research is beginning to be conducted on these activities (Casey et al., chap. 4, this volume; Vandell et al., chap. 20, this volume; Weisman et al., chap. 21, this volume). Finally, developmental research that compares different types of activities is relatively new and featured in several chapters (e.g., Barber et al., chap. 9, this volume; Eccles & Barber, 1999; Hansen, Larson, & Dworkin, 2003; Jacobs et al., chap. 11, this volume; Pedersen & Seidman, chap. 5, this volume). Studies of specific activities have been common in the fields of leisure studies and sports psychology and are also considered here (e.g., Duda & Ntoumanis, chap. 4, this volume; O'Neill, chap. 12, this volume; Scanlan et al., chap. 13, this volume).

ORGANIZED ACTIVITIES AND SALIENT
DEVELOPMENTAL TASKS FOR YOUNG PERSONS

In order to evaluate how these organized activities contribute to development, scholars are examining whether they help children and adolescents address the developmental tasks associated with their age periods—how they help youth achieve age-appropriate competencies. During childhood, key developmental tasks in our society include (a) acquiring habits of physical and psychological health, (b) forming a positive orientation toward school and achievement, (c) getting along with others including peers and adults, and (d) acquiring appropriate value systems about rules and conduct across different contexts. These issues remain important during adolescence, but are renegotiated in the light of interdependent changes in the bio–psycho–social system (Eccles, Barber, Stone, & Templeton, 2003; Mahoney & Bergman, 2002). In addition, new tasks such as identity formation, personal mastery/efficacy, intimacy with peers, and preparation for the transition to adulthood and postsecondary education or work become increasingly important across adolescence (Brown, Clausen, & Eicher, 1986; Collins, 2002; Levesque, 1993). In the global world of the 21st century, the development of competencies to move between diverse contexts defined by ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, and other forms of difference is increasingly important (Larson, Wilson, Brown, Furstenberg, & Verma, 2002).

Achieving competency at these tasks allows an individual to take advantage of personal and environmental resources that promote positive functioning in the present, reduce the risk for developing problem behaviors, and increase the likelihood for healthy adjustment in the future (Eccles et al., 2003; Mahoney & Bergman, 2002; Masten & Coatsworth, 1998). Research shows that participation in organized activities can have a range of positive influence on children and adolescence. We now highlight some of this evidence for school-sponsored extracurricular activities, and community-based and after-school programs.

Extracurricular Activities and Community Programs

Involvement in organized activities such as sports teams, lessons, and clubs is relatively common during adolescence. For example, among youth ages 12 to 17 from the National Survey of Families (NASF; 1997), 57% participated on a sports team, 29% participated in lessons, and 60% participated in clubs or organizations after school or on weekends during the last year. Recent reviews support the conclusion that participation in organized activities helps young persons negotiate the salient develop-

mental tasks of childhood and adolescence (e.g., Eccles & Gootman, 2002; Eccles & Templeton, 2002).

Increased Educational Attainment and Achievement.   A long-standing finding from quasi-experimental and experimental studies is that participation in extracurricular activities and community programs promotes education attainment. This includes low rates of school failure and dropout (e.g., Hahn, Leavitt, & Aaron, 1994; Mahoney & Cairns, 1997; McNeal, 1995), high rates of postsecondary school education, and good school achievement (e.g., Eccles & Barber, 1999; Mahoney, Cairns, & Farmer, 2003; Marsh, 1992; Otto, 1975, 1976). Explanations for these education gains include the association of participation in organized activities with heightened school engagement and attendance, better academic performance and interpersonal competence, and higher aspirations for the future (e.g., Barber, Eccles & Stone, 2001; Grossman & Tierney, 1998; Lamborn, Brown, Mounts, & Steinberg, 1992; Mahoney et al., 2003; Newman, Wehlage, & Lamborn, 1992).

Reduced Problem Behaviors.   A number of studies indicate that participation in organized activities is associated with reduced problem behaviors across adolescence and into young adulthood. For instance, earlier work in sociology shows that activity participation is related to low rates of delinquency (e.g., Elliott & Voss, 1974; Hanks & Eckland, 1976). More recent developmental research shows that involvement in organized activities reduces the likelihood of developing problems with alcohol and drugs (Grossman & Tierney, 1998; Youniss, Yates, & Su, 1997, 1999), aggression, antisocial behavior, and crime (e.g., Jones & Offord, 1989; Mahoney, 2000; Rhodes & Spencer, chap. 19, this volume), or becoming a teenage parent (Allen, Philliber, Herrling, & Gabriel, 1997). Activity-related affiliations with nondeviant peers, mentoring from adult activity leaders, and the fact that organized activities represent a conventional endeavor that is highly valued, challenging, and exciting represent the main explanations why organized activities protect against problem behaviors (e.g., Barber et al., chap. 9, this volume; Fletcher, Elder, & Mekos, 2000; Larson, 2000; Rhodes & Spencer, chap. 19, this volume).

Heightened Psychosocial Competencies.   Organized activity participation is positively associated with psychosocial adjustment in a number of areas (Eccles & Gootman, 2002). For instance, participation is related to low levels of negative emotions such as depressed mood and anxiety during adolescence (Barber et al., 2001; Brustad, Babkes, & Smith, 2001; Larson,

1994; Mahoney, Schweder, & Stattin, 2002). Motivation for learning and high self-efficacy is linked with participation (Catalano, Berglund, Ryan, Lonczak, & Hawkins, 1999; Duda & Ntoumanis, chap. 14, this volume). These contexts also appear ideal for promotion of a more general psychological capacity—initiative—which involves the application of extended effort to reach long-term goals (e.g., Larson, 2000; Larson et al., chap. 8, this volume). Finally, maintaining or increasing self-esteem (e.g., McLaughlin, 2000; Rhodes & Spencer, chap. 19, this volume) and developing a clear and civic-minded identity (McIntosh et al., chap. 15, this volume; Youniss, McLellan, Su, & Yates, 1999) appear to be positively influenced by activity participation. The unique combination of psychological features and opportunities for social relationships and belonging are main factors thought to impact these psychosocial processes.

Extracurricular Activities During Childhood.   Although most investigations of organized activities have been conducted with adolescents, available research suggests that children benefit from participation as well. For example, consistent participation in extracurricular activities during kindergarten and first grade is related to high reading and math achievement (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development [NICHD] Early Child Care Research Network, 2004). A moderate level of participation during the first grade has also been associated with high levels of social competence several years later (Pettit, Laird, Bates, & Dodge, 1997). Similarly, participation in extracurricular activities during middle childhood is indicative of positive achievement and emotional adjustment (McHale, Crouter, & Tucker, 2001; Posner & Vandell, 1999), and predicts perceived competence and values during adolescence (Jacobs, Lanza, Osgood, Eccles, & Wigfield, 2002; chap. 11, this volume).

After-School Programs

Owing in large part to increases in maternal employment, after-school programs now provide a common form of child care and adult supervision for over 7 million American children with working parents (Capizzano, Tout, & Adams, 2000). In addition, many after-school programs are implemented with the goal of providing safe environments and alternatives to self-care, as well to take advantage of opportunities for social and academic enrichment during the nonschool hours (Vandell et al., chap. 20, this volume). These programs are oriented to children in the elementary and middle-school years.

Relative to children in other after-school arrangements, quasi-experimental longitudinal studies show that consistent participation in af-

ter-school programs promotes positive academic performance and reduces behavior problems such as aggression (Pettit, Laird, Bates, & Dodge, 1997; Vandell et al., chap. 20, this volume; Weisman et al., chap. 21, this volume). Similarly, formal evaluations of after-school programs comparing participants and nonparticipants over time have found fewer school absences, higher school achievement, and improved work and study habits for participants.[1] Parents of participants also report that after-school programs support their work schedules and that they worry less about their children's safety. These benefits are frequently stronger for disadvantaged children, those with social, academic, or language deficits, and families residing high-risk neighborhoods.

Overall, after-school program participation appears to promote competence in several key developmental tasks during middle childhood including academic performance, school engagement, and social behaviors and relationships. The likelihood for beneficial outcomes appears greatest for: (a) after-school programs of higher quality and those in later stages of development, (b) students who show greater consistency in their program participation, and (c) programs serving low-income and low-achieving students at high risk for developing social–academic problems. However, many after-school programs focus on academic achievement rather than aiming to promote competence in personal and interpersonal domains (Vandell et al., chap. 20, this volume). Future research will need to examine what types of programs best serve the needs of young persons in the short and long term (Quinn, chap. 22, this volume).

The 21st-Century Community Learning Centers. Funding that supports the 21st-Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLCs) provides a major source of after-school programs in the United States. A national evaluation of the 21st CCLCs was recently undertaken by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. A report describing the first-year findings of the evaluation purports that the 21st CCLCs had little impact on the academic or social behavior of the participating elementary and middle-school students (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Under Secretary, 2003). This provided the basis for a proposed 40% budget reduction for the 21st CCLCs in 2004 (Education Budget Summary and Background, 2003). However, there are several limitations with the evaluation. For instance, the elementary school sample was not representative of the larger population of elementary schools receiving 21st CCLC funds. Comparison groups in the middle-school sample were not equivalent; the after-school

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[1]See, for example, after-school evaluations of the YS-CARE After School Program http://www.gse.uci.edu/asp/aspeval/resources/YSCARE13.pdf, LA's Best http://www.lasbest.org/learn/eval.html, The After-School Corporation http://www.tascorp.org/pages/promising_es1.pdf

participants were at much higher risk at the beginning of the study. The absence of certain baseline data, treatment and comparison group contamination, and issues surrounding the evaluation's timing and measurement were also methodological concerns in the National Evaluation (Bissell et al., 2003; Mahoney, 2003). Finally, the quality of the programs included in the evaluation was not systematically considered. As already noted, the quality of after-school programs is very important for their effectiveness. Due to these several limitations, making generalizations about the effectiveness of the 21st CCLCs based on the reported first-year findings do not seem warranted. Extrapolation to after-school programs in general is not possible on the basis of the 21st CCLC evaluation, particularly in light of the several carefully controlled intervention studies that provide solid evidence of the effectiveness of high quality after-school programs.

Summary

Organized activities are important contexts that help young persons build competencies and successfully negotiate the salient developmental tasks of childhood and adolescence. Participation is associated with academic success, mental health, positive social relationships and behaviors, identity development, and civic engagement. These benefits, in turn, pave the way for long-term educational success and help prepare young persons for the transition to adulthood. However, although the research findings are generally positive, variations across the types of programs and the participants suggest the need for researchers to differentiate the features of programs that facilitate development and the conditions under which the benefits is most likely to occur.

FEATURES OF ORGANIZED ACTIVITIES THAT PROMOTE DEVELOPMENT

The preceding section makes it clear that organized activities are contexts in which children and adolescents develop a range of important competencies. But why is this so? Why should activities such as playing hockey for the school team, singing in a youth community chorus, participating in school government, or spending afternoons in after-school program activities matter?

To address this question, a committee of scholars appointed by the National Research Council and Institute of Medicine recently evaluated what features of contexts promote positive development (Eccles & Gootman, 2002). By looking at research on development in contexts such as families and schools, they derived the list of eight key features in Table 1.1 that are proven to facilitate positive growth (see also Blum, 2003;

TABLE 1.1
Features of Contexts That Promote Positive Development

1. *Physical and psychological safety.* The context provides secure and health-promoting facilities and practices, allows for safe and appropriate peer interactions, and discourages unsafe health practices and negative or confrontational social interchanges.

2. *Appropriate structure.* The context provides clear, appropriate, and consistent rules and expectations, adult supervision, guidance, and age-appropriate monitoring in a predictable social atmosphere where clear boundaries are known and respected.

3. *Supportive relationships.* The context offers stable opportunities to form relationships with peers and adults wherein social interchanges are characterized by warmth, closeness, caring, and mutual respect, and where guidance and support from adults is available, appropriate, and predictable.

4. *Opportunities for belonging.* The context emphasizes the inclusion of all members and maintains a social environment that recognizes, appreciates, and encourages individual differences in cultural values, gender, race/ethnicity, and sexual orientation.

5. *Positive social norms.* The context maintains expectations and requirements for socially appropriate behavior and encourages desirable and accepted values and morals.

6. *Support for efficacy and mattering.* The context allows for and supports autonomy, values individual expression and opinions, concentrates on growth and improvement rather than absolute performance, encourages and enables individuals to take on challenging responsibilities and to carry out actions aimed at making a difference.

7. *Opportunity for skill building.* The context offers opportunities to learn and build physical, intellectual, psychological, emotional, and social skills that facilitate well-being in the present and prepare individuals for health and competent functioning in the future.

8. *Integration of family, school, and community efforts.* The context provides opportunities for synergistic experiences that integrate transactions across family, school, and community.

Note. Taken from the findings of the Committee on Community-Level Programs for Youth (Eccles & Gootman, 2002).

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Lerner, Fisher, & Weinberg, 2000; Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003). The panel cautioned that no single feature from this list is sufficient to ensure positive development, but also that few contexts are likely to provide optimal experiences in all of these areas. They also cautioned that future research can be expected to add to or refine this list. Nonetheless these eight features represent the state of the art for thinking about what might make organized activities such as hockey, student government, or an after-school program an effective context of development.

These features can be considered as explanatory mechanisms or mediators by which participation in organized activities affect the development process. The available research evaluating these features for organized activities is limited but generally indicates, first, that many organized activities are high on several of these features and, second, that these features are linked to the positive outcomes described. On the first point, organized activities typically offer a context of safety during the after-school hours (e.g., McLaughlin, 2000), often provide opportunities for skill building and efficacy (Larson, 2000), and are frequently important contexts of supportive relationships with adults and peers (e.g., Barber et al., chap. 9, this volume; Hansen et al., 2003; Mahoney et al., 2002; Rhodes & Spencer, chap. 19, this volume).

Although research specifically linking these features to outcomes is rare, the National Research Council committee concluded that successful youth programs are characterized by many of these features. The most successful programs provide integration between a youth's family, school, and community experiences, engage youth in relationships with caring adults, and provide many of the other positive features (Eccles & Gootman, 2002; Pittman et al., chap. 17, this volume; Walker et al., chap. 18, this volume). Targeted research that begins to critically test the specific linkage between some of these features and positive development is only beginning. As one exemplar, Mahoney et al. (2003) used longitudinal data to show that the fostering of interpersonal skills in youth programs is a mediator of high aspirations for the future in adolescence and high educational attainment—including college attendance—at young adulthood.

Furthermore, we are only beginning to understand how the different combinations of features in organized activities interact to promote positive development. For instance, although participation in organized activities appears to affect complex processes such as identity formation and the development of initiative, this seems to depend on an appropriate balance of many of the features already summarized (e.g., Barber et al., chap. 9, this volume; Larson et al., chap. 8, this volume; McIntosh et al., chap. 15, this volume). Although expert youth workers have developed a fund of practitioner wisdom for understanding these balancing processes (Pittman et al., chap. 17, this volume; Walker et al., chap. 18, this volume), researchers are

far behind in subjecting this wisdom to critical test. Precisely which features are involved and how they co-act to produce specific developmental changes have not yet been evaluated. Thus, one task for researchers is to understand better the interplay between these features, which patterns are most critical for promoting different competencies, and how these relations may change over development. A second and related task will be to assess how and why some organized activity contexts are more effective at providing these positive features than others (e.g., Stattin et al., chap. 20, this volume; Vandell et al., chap. 20, this volume). Both tasks will require researchers to conduct process-oriented studies focused on individual change that are explicitly designed to assess a broad array of structural and process quality parameters in the activity context.[2]

FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE ACTIVITY PARTICIPATION AND EFFECT DEVELOPMENTAL OUTCOMES

The preceding sections have described different benefits and positive features associated with organized activity participation. However, the extent to which organized activities influence development can vary across individual youth, programs, and community contexts. To derive the greatest benefit from organized activities, a youth must participate.[3] The selection processes affecting whether an individual participates and continues to participate is complex. To begin with, the degree to which a youth can actually "select" to participate in organized activities depends on the individual considered, his or her family, and the community in which he or she resides (Caldwell & Baldwin, in press; Elder & Conger, 2000; Furstenberg, Cook, Eccles, Elder, & Sameroff, 1999). Activity selection involves a reciprocal process between contextual constraints and opportunities for participation, and the individual's motivation and ability to perceive and act on them.

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[2]In contrast to the variety of measures for assessing program quality during early childhood, there are few established instruments to evaluate out-of-school programs for school-age children or adolescents (e.g., Harms, Jacobs, & White, 1996). The diversity of program content and goals that characterize activities and programs for older children and youth may account for this discrepancy. One possibility is to define the process quality of out-of-school activities in terms of the eight features of positive youth contexts summarized in this chapter.

[3]Intervention research shows that a treatment can be beneficial for persons who do not directly receive the treatment. This phenomenon—known as *spread of effect*—may also be true for organized activities. For example, whether or not youth participate in organized activities, problem behaviors are lower if their peer group (Mahoney, 2000) or their parents (Mahoney & Magnusson, 2001) are participants. Similarly, making organized activities available to adolescents has been linked to decreased levels of juvenile antisocial behavior in the community (Jones & Offord, 1989).

Demographic and Familial Influences

Availability and affordability of activities are the most basic factors affecting participation. The presence of resources such as parks, community centers, playing fields, and the availability of willing and competent adults to provide the activities are requisites. The provision of programs for youth is generally less in poor urban neighborhoods and isolated rural areas (Carnegie Council, 1992; Pedersen & Seidman, chap. 5, this volume). Beyond availability, factors such as transportation and a family's economic means to pay the costs of activities, as well as cultural and ethnic factors, have considerable influence on participation rates (Elder & Conger, 2000; Furstenberg et al., 1999; Villarruel et al., chap. 7, this volume). These factors—availability, economy, and culture—are often interrelated and likely account for the relatively low-participation rates among economically disadvantaged children and adolescents and those from traditionally defined minority groups (e.g., Hultsman, 1992; Jackson & Rucks, 1993; Pedersen & Seidman, chap. 5, this volume). It may also explain why income support programs and the provision of culturally appropriate activities appear to increase participation rates (Casey et al., chap. 4, this volume; Villarruel et al., chap. 6, this volume).

Parents' desire to enroll their children in organized activities and their ability to manage their children's participation in such activities differ. If parents work full time and children need transportation to get to organized activities, then it may be quite difficult for a child to get and remain involved in such activities. Similarly, if parents fear the types of children and adolescents likely to participate in the organized activities, they may prefer to keep their children at home (Furstenberg et al., 1999; Jarrett, 1997; Stattin et al., chap. 10, this volume). Finally, if parents rely on their children for help at home, they may not encourage their children to participate in organized activities (Elder & Conger, 2000; Fletcher et al., 2000).

Individual Characteristics

An individual's competence, age, and developmental status can constrain participation in organized activities. For instance, because skill level can determine access to some organized activities, particularly in adolescence, early activity involvement may be required for some forms of later activity participation (McNeal, 1998). Therefore, children who do not (or cannot) become competent in the skills developed through organized activities early on are likely to find that opportunities for involvement in such activities diminish across childhood and adolescence. It is no small irony that organized activities are particularly

effective at building the very competencies that would facilitate participation (Larson et al., chap. 8, this volume).

The maturity of the youth may also lead some adolescents to drop out of organized activities. In general, participation in many out-of-school organized activities declines as children move into and through adolescence (Eccles & Gootman, 2002).[4] This reflects (a) a decline in some organized programs for older children, (b) an increase in competition for membership in available activities that excludes some youth from participating, (c) the fact that programs do not always provide the kinds of activities likely to be of interest to adolescents, (d) diminished school budgets that fund extracurricular activities, and (e) the increase in adolescent employment during the nonschool hours. Programs that are successful at retaining their adolescent members offer increasing opportunities for leadership, decision making, and meaningful service (Kirshner et al., chap. 7, this volume; McLaughlin, 2000; Pittman et al., chap. 17, this volume; Walker et al., chap. 18, this volume); in other words, they offer opportunities that fit the maturing adolescents' sense of self and expertise.

In addition, individual and social-contextual factors ordinarily interact to affect opportunities for participation. Individuals participate in organized activities for different reasons. Sometimes they participate of their own volition because they want to participate (they select to be involved). In other cases, they are recruited by peers, parents, and/or activity leaders to participate based on personal characteristics, ability, or social connection (they are socialized to participate). Often, both of these processes—selection and socialization—are at work in the decision to participate. Furthermore, because participation itself is a socializing experience, experiences while involved can both increase and decrease the likelihood of continued participation. Thus, continued participation reflects both of these processes.

Finally, greater benefits tend to be evident for students who show consistent participation in organized activities. For instance, children's rate of attendance in after-school programs is positively associated with gains in school achievement and work habits (Cosden, Morrison, Albanese, & Macias, 2001; Marshall et al., 1997; NICHD Early Child Care Research Network, in press). Similarly, Barber et al. (chap. 9, this volume) and Mahoney et al. (2003) find that whether participation in school-based extracurricular activities is transient or stable affects the developmental process and related outcomes. These findings are consistent with the broader literature on effective school and community interventions (e.g., Catalano

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[4]Participation in school-based extracurricular activities has been found to increase, rather than decline, across adolescence in some studies (e.g., Kinney, 1993; Mahoney & Cairns, 1997). The increase in participation may reflect the relatively small number of extracurricular activities available to students prior to middle school and the rapid expansion of extracurricular activities in high school.

et al., 1999; Durlak & Wells, 1997; Eccles & Gootman, 2002). Building relationships, forming new behavior patterns, and acquiring competencies take time. However, the fact that selection and socialization processes interact to initiate and maintain participation makes it difficult to evaluate the effectiveness of long-term participation in organized activities.

Program Resources and Content

As with all programs for children and adolescents, the extent to which organized activities are beneficial depends on their quality and content. Quality is partly defined by whether a program offers the eight features shown in Table 1.1. But, it is also affected by the material and human resources within a program. Indeed, these are likely to be vital to the program's ability to provide the eight features. After-school programs for children provide a good example. Considerable variation exists in program resources, as evident in child-to-staff ratios, staff education, and staff turnover. Research shows, in turn, that these are related to developmental outcomes for children in the expected direction (e.g., Vandell et al., chap. 20, this volume). Children attending programs that are low on these factors may either fail to benefit or may develop increased rates of problem behaviors relative to children in alternative and high-quality after-school arrangements. In this volume, chapter 17 by Pittman et al. provides a valuable discussion of what communities need to do to build a robust system of high-quality programs to meet the needs of youth.

The content of activities within programs is also likely to affect a youth's developmental experiences. Although there is great variability in how adult leaders organize a given activity, preliminary research suggests that differing activities may provide distinct developmental opportunities and liabilities. Associated changes in substance use, antisocial behavior, school achievement, and self-esteem vary across different activities (Barber et al. 2001, chap. 9, this volume; Pedersen & Seidman, chap. 5, this volume; Stattin et al., chap. 10, this volume). For instance, in a survey in one community, Hansen et al. (2002) found that high-school youth reported more experiences related to identity exploration and emotional learning in sports compared to other organized activities, but also more negative peer and adult interactions. Consistent with this, a controlled longitudinal study found that sports participation was associated with increases in both academic achievement and alcohol consumption (Eccles & Barber, 1999).

It is important to caution that these differences are not likely to inhere in the activity itself. They could, for example, reflect how the current generation of coaches or music directors construct the culture, values, and goals youth experience in that specific activity. They could also reflect the current peer culture associated with the activity. Finally, they may also reflect the se-

lection of youth to activities that provide a culture and experiences in line with their current values and desires. Much future research is needed to begin to separate out how developmental opportunities are shaped by the type of activity and numerous interrelated factors.

Problematic Activities. To be sure, not all youth activities and programs are beneficial and some are quite limited in the number of positive features they possess. Some structured activities are organized in ways that do not facilitate positive development and may be harmful. One example is provided by mentoring programs. Volunteer mentors are often a valuable resource in remedying the decreased availability of adult guidance for youth and facilitate perceived self-esteem and school achievement. However, the program may pose a risk if the mentoring relationship is short-lived or fails (Rhodes & Spencer, chap. 19, this volume). A second example involves participation in youth recreation centers that provide relatively low structure and lack skill-building aims. Regular involvement in these settings appears to facilitate deviant peer relationships during adolescence and persistent criminal behavior into adulthood (e.g., Mahoney, Stattin, & Magnussen, 2001; Stattin et al., chap. 10, this volume). This is likely to be particularly true if such centers attract youth who are already involved in problematic behaviors and activities (Dishion & McMahon, 1998; Dishion, McCord, & Poulin, 1999; Dishion, Poulin, & Burraston, 2001; Marshall et al., 1997; Pettit, Bates, Dodge, & Meece, 1999; Pettit et al., 1997; Reid & Patterson, 1989). These examples serve as a powerful reminder that organizing out-of-school activities appropriately is critical and essential.

Other Factors Influencing Program Impact

There are numerous other factors that may affect the impact of organized activities. Studies have suggested that high-risk youth may benefit more from organized activities than other youth (Eccles & Templeton, 2002; Mahoney, 2000). The likely explanation is that these youth have less access in other parts of their lives to the types of resources and developmental experiences that these activities provide, thus the impact is likely to be greater (Elder & Conger, 2000). Little research has been done to evaluate how gender and ethnicity may influence a child's likelihood of gaining from a program (Pedersen & Seidman, chap. 5, this volume). It should not be assumed that a single program will be equally beneficial to youth with differing backgrounds. An important horizon of future research is to understand how the fit between a youth program and the characteristics of individuals shapes development (Eccles & Templeton, 2002).

OVERVIEW OF THE CONTENTS

This book presents conceptual, empirical, and policy-relevant advances in research on children's and adolescent's participation in the developmental contexts represented by extracurricular activities and after-school and community programs. Many of the issues brought to light in this chapter are taken up in greater detail in the chapters to follow.

The volume is organized into three main sections. Part I discusses social and cultural perspectives on organized activity participation. It begins with the historical evolution of leisure activities in the United States and the associated risks inherent in a leisure experience that is unstructured and lacks involvement in organized activities. Next, new perspectives on the role of organized activity involvement in the development of youth from low-income families and those from traditionally defined minority groups are provided. Finally, the involvement of youth as participants in the research process itself is considered. Part II provides a collection of new empirical studies on how participation in organized activities affects developmental processes and outcomes. Across the chapters, particular attention is given to the developmental experiences provided through participation in difference types of organized activities, and how the experiences translate into psychosocial adjustment and competence. It concludes with a commentary by Jacquelynne Eccles that discusses chapters in Parts I and II of this volume. Part III links the conceptual and research knowledge base on organized activities to practice and policy issues surrounding out-of-school time for young persons. This includes empirically based and practical guidance for developing effective organized activities in general, and specific insights into optimal practices for community and after-school programs. This section concludes with a commentary on out-of-school practices and policy considerations by Jane Quinn.

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Organized Activities
as Contexts of Development
Extracurricular Activities, After-School and Community Programs

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