After-School Care Essay, Research Paper

Posner and Vandell?s article, “Low-Income Children?s After-School Care: Are There Beneficial Effects of After-School Programs” provides valuable research to support the need for quality after-school programs for low-income children. Low-income children need after-school programs like UCLinks because “poverty affects children directly because it limits the material resources available to them and indirectly because of the psychological distress it engenders in parents, which in turn negatively influences parental behavior.”(1) The time a child spends after-school is also important to their academic and social development. The quality and type of after-school care a child receives directly correlates to their performance in school and growth in academic abilities. The UCLinks program was created to offer low-income children a quality, academic after-school program. In the UCLinks program, they have children develop their academic skills in language arts, reading comprehension, off-computer activities, and mathematics. The UCLinks after-school program works on bringing the children up to grade level or furthering their development. It does not serve as a homework center for children. Instead, the UCLinks program concentrates on fostering their academic talent in an organized environment. In Posner and Vandell?s article, they document research that promotes organized, academic after-school care, “Children?s academic and conduct grades were positively related to time spent in one-to-one academic work, with an adult, whereas academic and conduct grades were negatively correlated with the amount of time spent in outdoor unorganized activities.” (454) The children of the UCLinks program work with a mentor in 1-1 or 1-2 setting, where mentors specifically focus on academic areas they need to improve or help them develop their abilities to the fullest.

1B. The UCLinks program understands how important reading skills are to children?s success in school. If children do not learn to read at grade level, they have a greater risk of falling behind in class work and eventually dropping out. The UCLinks program uses a combined approach to reading instruction with whole language and specific skills development. In each mentoring session of the UCLinks program, the mentors practice whole language instruction. Children have the opportunity to read one on one with their mentor. Bill Honig advocates this interaction with the children, “Teachers classroom routine should include reading good literature to students and discussing it with them, especially by asking questions that stretch children?s minds beyond the literal meaning of the text.”(3) The active participation the children engage in while reading to their mentors is productive because the children are able to practice decoding, automatic recognition of words, and improve their reading comprehension. Mentors ask their students relevant questions about the book that pertain to the plot, main points and theme of the story. The UCLinks program also practices the specific skills development with their students. Specific skills development focuses on phonemic awareness, phonics, print awareness, word structure, and word-attack and self-monitoring skills. Honig recommends specific skills development, “Students should be taught these skills in an active, problem-solving manner that offers plenty of opportunities to practice the skills in actual reading and writing situations.”(13) Children work on computer software like Kid Phonics to develop these specific skills which will ultimately help them read better. The children of the UCLinks program can also spend off-computer time writing stories and poems which immerses them in print awareness and word structure.

1C. In “Children, Mathematics, and Computers” by D. H Clements, he writes “It appears the dominant focus of school mathematics instruction in the last decade has been on computational skills(which students are learning fairly well), but that the development of problem-solving skills and conceptual understanding has been inadequate.”(1) The focus on computational skills rather than the problem-solving and conceptual understanding hinder the mathematical abilities of students. As math becomes more abstract, they do not have the required mind state to solve problems with higher level concepts. The UCLinks program supports the teaching of relational mathematics, according to Skewer, knowing what to do and why, over rote learning with their students. The solid mental foundation relational mathematics builds will increase the mathematical abilities of the children and help them problem-solve as math becomes more complex and abstract. The teaching of relational mathematics in the UCLinks program can be observed with the use of pencil and paper, manipulatives, and computers to help children understand mathematical concepts and problem-solving. These practices are further supported in Clements article, “National Council of Teachers in Mathematics recommends that students be actively involved in learning, experimenting with, exploring, and communicating about mathematics.”(4) The development of children?s mathematical abilities increases when they actually learn the concepts behind the math problems and how to solve them on their own. The interaction children have with pencil and paper and manipulatives stimulates their thought process and helps them understand why. Computers also present an interesting new way to learn mathematics with software like Math Blaster and Mighty Math Heroes. Children need to learn mathematics solutions that actively engage them. If they are strictly prohibited to computation, children will lose their interest in mathematics as they grow older.