

**Philadelphia Practitioner Fellowship Program**

**October 2008 – June 2009**

**Evaluation Report**

Submitted to:

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## **Executive Summary**

The National Institute on Out-of-School Time (NIOST) at the Wellesley Centers for Women at Wellesley College and the National Writing Project (NWP) launched the National Afterschool Matters Philadelphia Practitioner Fellowship Program in October 2008. The Practitioner Fellowship Program is a professional development and leadership initiative. Fellows in the Practitioner Fellowship Program were selected by application. The selected Fellows participate in a year-long program that includes activities to inform program quality and improve practice through reflection and inquiry.

NIOST engaged the Out-of-School Time Resource Center (OSTRC) to evaluate the Philadelphia Practitioner Fellowship Program. The OSTRC designed a mixed-methodology evaluation that included pre and post surveys and focus groups. The OSTRC staff also attended program sessions as participant observers, a qualitative method in which they engaged in the learning environment of the Fellows.

The evaluation results showed positive changes in the Fellows' knowledge relating to practice, particularly their confidence in conducting research. In addition, the Fellows' professional identity increased significantly, further confirming the positive impact of the year-long Fellowship program. The following emerged from the evaluation:

### **Pre-Survey**

- The Fellows agreed that they were members of a professional out-of-school time (OST) field and that their organizations support them when using new resources or strategies in their programs.

- The Fellows were confident in their writing skills, but less confident in their ability to conduct research.
- The Fellows typically did not use writing to reflect upon their work and share their experiences with others.
- Demographically, the Fellows were primarily female, white or Caucasian with a bachelor's degree.

### **Post-Survey**

- The Fellows more strongly agreed that they are members of a professional OST field—the overall mean increased by .6 points to 4.9.
- The Fellows' perception of their leadership skills increased significantly from 3.5 to 4.4.
- The Fellows' confidence in their writing skills remained the same, but their confidence in their ability to conduct research increased dramatically—3.4 to 4.5.
- The Fellows are now more likely to use writing to reflect upon their work and share their experiences with others.

### **Session Observations**

- Facilitators kept Fellows highly engaged through dynamic public speaking, eye contact, visuals, and prepared activities.
- Due to late arrival time of some Fellows, the meetings typically did not start on time.
- Sessions offered different learning formats including group discussion, hands-on activities, lecture, and one-on-one exchange.
- Sessions focused primarily on understanding and implementing the process of inquiry.
- Guest speakers led discussions about OST or the Fellows spontaneously initiated OST discussions; facilitators seldom initiated OST discussions.

- Facilitators followed the syllabus, but allowed for flexibility in assignments based on the group's concerns and needs.
- Facilitators and Fellows created a safe and trusting environment to share both successes and challenges.
- Some Fellows expressed apprehension about writing and reading assignments in the beginning of the program.
- Fellows expressed a desire to continue the Fellowship for a second year to further their inquiry and to keep in touch with one another.

### **Fellows Focus Group**

- The Fellows' expectations differed from their experiences with the PFP. Many expected more information on 'best practices' and OST.
- The Fellows provided overwhelmingly positive feedback about the facilitators.
- The Fellows requested a structured time period for informal networking.
- The Fellows would have liked more OST-related literature in their reading assignments and class discussions.
- All of the Fellows strongly agreed that the PFP had been a valuable professional development experience and that they were enhancing their research and writing skills.

### **Facilitators and Philadelphia Writing Project (PWP) Director Focus Group**

- The facilitators were pleased with the program, the curriculum, the Fellows, and the Fellows' interactions.
- The facilitators would have liked more involvement in the application process, and thought the program application could have a more academic tone.

- The facilitators believed the program budget should be increased, particularly for facilitators' salaries.
- The facilitators suggested that Fellows visit one another's sites during the year in order to generate a dialogue about socio-economic differences and its impact on programs.
- The facilitators recommended that the Fellows receive a certificate of completion and continuing education credits.
- The facilitators would like next year's Fellows to publically present their final research findings and publish their work at the end of the program.
- The facilitators recommended using former Fellows as a resource to the program, involve current Fellows as presenters, and assign Fellows' papers as readings for this year's program.

**The OSTRC recommends the following:**

- Increase communication between facilitators and program administrators about the following:
  - The application process
  - Public meetings and presentations
  - Program evaluations both internally (by the Philadelphia Writing Project) and externally (by the Out-of-School Time Resource Center)
- Use a more academic tone in the application form.
- Include facilitators in the application design and review.
- Provide more OST literature, research, resources, and references to current events.
- Include readings about professional development and working with staff.
- Obtain the Fellows' feedback when scheduling meeting dates and times.
- Consider implementing a full day meeting in lieu of the two, three-hour monthly meetings.
- Provide structured time for the Fellows to informally network and problem-solve.

- Use research from former Fellows as examples of inquiry. Invite former and current Fellows to present on certain topics.
- Create a follow-up “senior” program for Fellows interested in continuing their inquiry.
- Organize a presentation, conference, or publishing opportunity so that next year’s Fellows can formally share their final research.
- Provide continuing education credits and a certificate of completion for next year’s Fellows.
- Consider increasing the facilitators’ salaries.

## Introduction

The National Institute on Out-of-School Time (NIOST) at the Wellesley Centers for Women at Wellesley College and the National Writing Project (NWP) launched the National Afterschool Matters Philadelphia Practitioner Fellowship Program in October 2008. The Practitioner Fellowship Program is a professional development and leadership initiative. Fellows in the Practitioner Fellowship Program were selected by application. The selected Fellows participated in a year-long program that included activities to inform program quality and improve practice through reflection and inquiry. Those selected for the Practitioner Fellowship Program were expected to:

- Become part of a community of practitioners. Fellows would work collaboratively to study effective practices and investigate the structures in which effective practice happens – at the program, activity, curriculum, and individual level.
- Learn strategies to engage in program reflection and inquiry. Fellows would learn approaches and strategies to help them become better at program observation and analysis.
- Improve programs and practice. Fellows would identify and investigate effective instructional strategies and bring these strategies back to OST programs.
- Engage in leadership activities. Fellows would present their work to peers and administrators, parents and community members. They would be encouraged to design and deliver workshops based on their work to share new expertise with others in the field.
- Disseminate program improvement strategies. Fellows would create products including briefing papers, events, curriculum, as well as articles for professional journals.

## Purpose and Objectives

NIOST engaged the Out-of-School Time Resource Center (OSTRC) to evaluate the 2008 – 2009 Philadelphia Practitioner Fellowship Program. The OSTRC designed a mixed-methodology evaluation that included pre and post surveys, session observations, and two



focus groups (one with the Fellows and one with the facilitators and Philadelphia Writing Project Director), to evaluate the program. The evaluation sought to answer the following questions:

1. Does participation in the Fellowship result in a positive change in knowledge relating to practice?
2. Does participation in the Fellowship result in a positive change in professional identity?
3. Does participation in the Fellowship result in a positive change in program quality?

The pre and post surveys served as the primary quantitative indicator to measure change in the Fellows' knowledge, belief, and skills. Session observations allowed the OSTRC to learn about the group dynamics, the level of engagement of Fellows, and the quality of facilitation. The intent of the Fellows focus group was to learn about their understanding of, expectations for and preferences regarding the Fellowship Program. The purpose of the facilitator and Philadelphia Writing Project (PWP) Director focus group was to understand their roles in the preparation and implementation of the program as well as their insights into and recommendations for the upcoming year.

## **Evaluation Strategy**

Surveys. The OSTRC created the quantitative surveys in collaboration with NIOST and the NWP. The quantitative survey measured the following:

- Professional Identity
- Institutional Support
- Research Skills
- Writing Skills
- Extension
- Self-Esteem (completed on-line)
- Locus of Control (completed on-line)

For all questions, the Fellows self-reported their agreement with statements using a five-point Likert scale. In addition, the pre-survey captured demographic information. All of the Fellows completed the paper, pre-survey at the first program meeting on October 7, 2008 and the on-line survey prior to beginning the program. The OSTRC distributed the post-survey at the final

program meeting on June 22, 2009. Ten Fellows completed the paper, post-survey and on-line survey (91% response rate).

Session Observations. The initial evaluation strategy proposed that the OSTRC would observe the sessions using a structured observation tool; however, while attending the sessions, the OSTRC staff participated in many of the activities, which shifted their role to a "participant-observer." The OSTRC used the structured observation tool as a guide to take comprehensive notes during and after the meetings. During the course of the year-long program, one or two OSTRC staff attended eleven sessions. Two OSTRC staff attended the "Going Semi-Public – Sharing our Research in Progress" event. OSTRC staff did not attend the GSE conference or the two-day writing retreat.

Fellows Focus Group. The OSTRC conducted a mid-year focus group with the Fellows on January 22, 2009. The Fellows received the book, *Bringing Yourself to Work*, for participating in the focus group. An experienced moderator led the focus group and one additional OSTRC staff person observed the session and typed the notes in real-time. The OSTRC developed the focus group protocol and NIOST provided feedback on the protocol.

Facilitator and PWP Director Focus Group. An OSTRC staff person conducted a focus group with the two program facilitators and the PWP Director one month after the conclusion of the PFP. The purpose of the focus group was to identify successes, challenges and suggestions for future programs.

## **Pre and Post Survey Results**

Eleven Fellows successfully completed the year-long program. Ten Fellows completed the pre, post and online surveys. The Fellows supplied a unique identification that the OSTRC used to match the data for analysis.

The pre-survey revealed that, in general, the Fellows agreed that they were members of a professional OST field and that their OST organizations supported them when using new resources or strategies in their programs. In addition, the Fellows were confident in their writing skills, but less confident in their ability to conduct research. The Fellows did not typically use writing to reflect upon their work and share their experiences with others.

The post-survey data showed dramatic increases for nearly all of the questions. The Fellows' perception of themselves as members of a professional OST field and as leaders among their OST peers increased .6 and .9 points respectively. The Fellows' confidence in their writing skills essentially remained the same; however, their confidence in their ability to conduct research increased by .9 points. Further, the Fellows' use of writing to reflect upon their OST work and share their professional experiences showed impressive increases: .7 and .4 points respectively.

### ***Application and Extension***

The pre-survey data showed that the Fellows were neutral about collaborating with their colleagues both within and outside their workplaces. In addition, the Fellows were more likely to agree that their participation in a PD opportunity has a positive impact on their program compared to the impact it may have on their students.

The post-survey revealed that the Fellows' collaboration with OST colleagues within their workplaces remained the same, but their collaboration with OST colleagues outside of their

workplaces increased significantly by .6 points. The Fellows' belief that their participation in PD opportunities positively influences programs and youth also increased by .4 points each. Table 1 in Appendix A presents the mean score for each survey question.

## Demographics

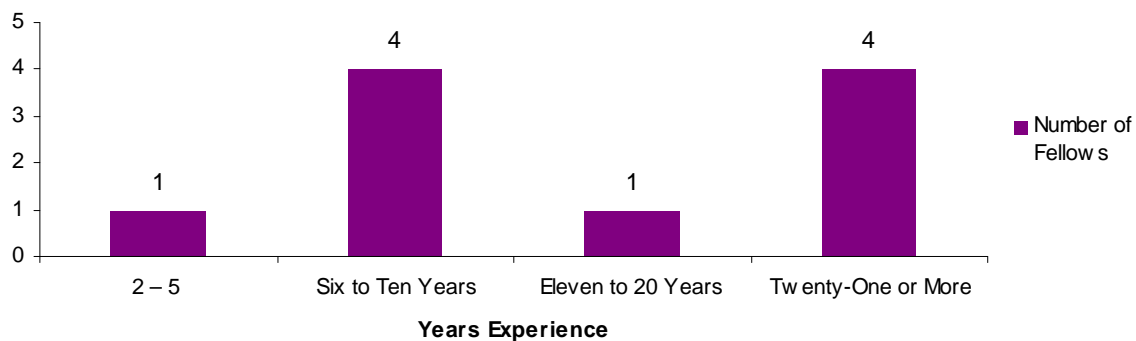
The demographic section includes only data on the ten Fellows who submitted completed pre and post surveys. The Fellows were primarily female, white or Caucasian with a bachelor's degree (Table 2).

**Table 2: Demographics (N=10)**

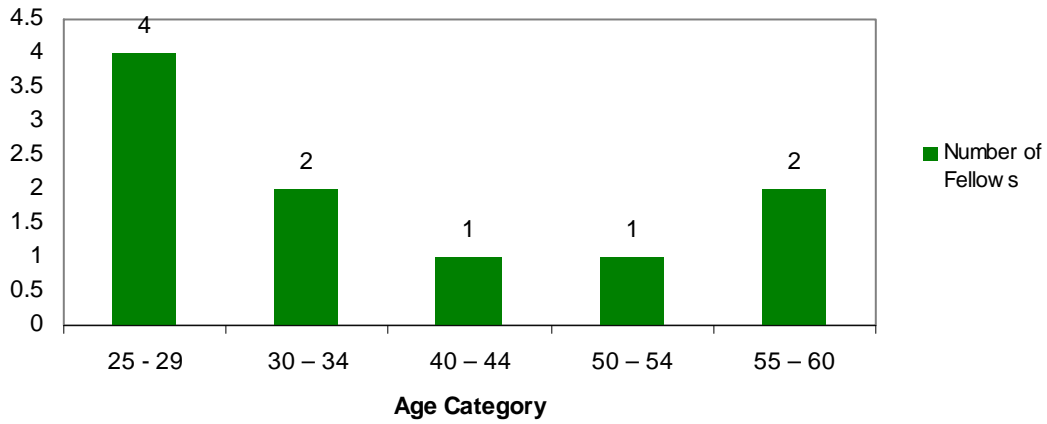
Gender	Number	Race	Number	Education	Number
Female	8	Black/African American	1	Bachelor's Degree	8
Male	2	White or Caucasian	7	Master's Degree	1
		Asian	1	Other	1
		Hispanic or Latino	0		
		Multiracial	1		

The Fellows span the spectrum in terms of years experience and age (Figures 1 and 2). A majority of the Fellows have either between six to ten years, or more than twenty-one years experience working on behalf of or with youth programs. Most of the Fellows were between the ages of 25 – 34.

**Figure 1: Fellows' Years of Experience**

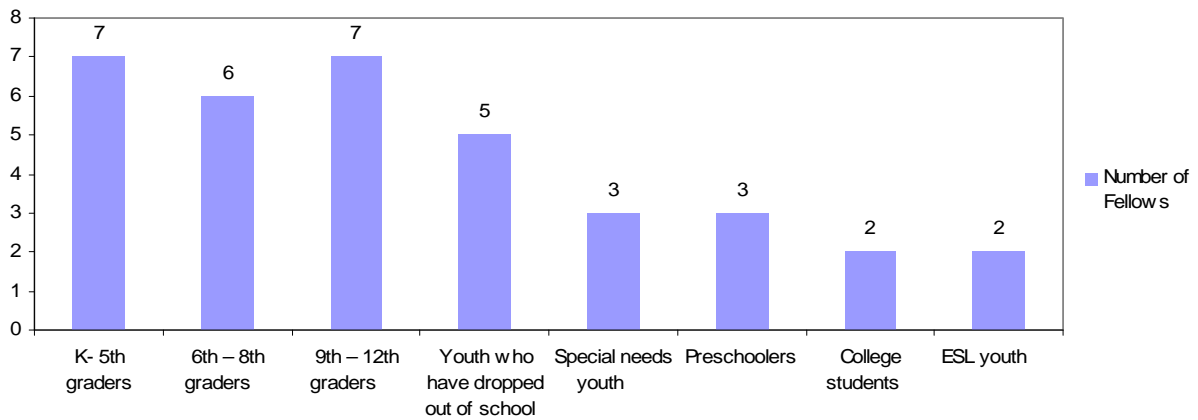


**Figure 2: Fellows' Ages**



A majority of the Fellows work with school-age youth (K – 12). Several Fellows also work with youth who have dropped out of school, special needs youth and pre-school children (Figure 3).

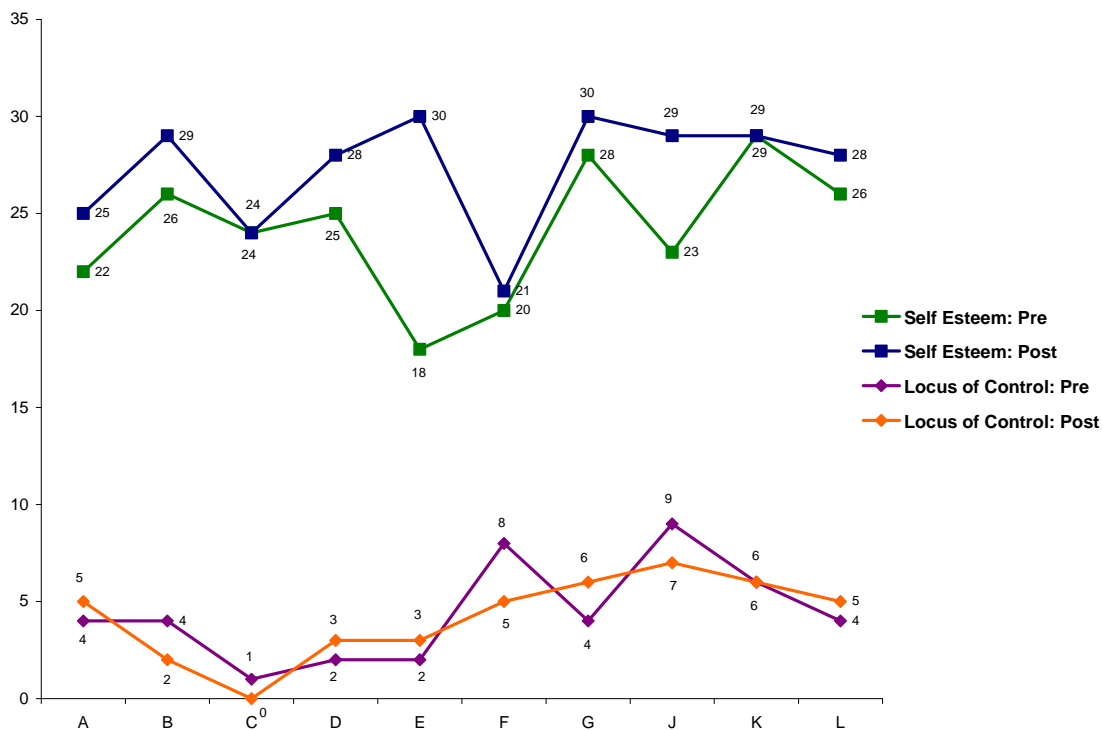
**Figure 3: Youth Populations Served by Fellows**



## Locus of Control and Self-Esteem

The Fellows completed an on-line survey to measure their self-esteem and locus of control before the program commenced and at the conclusion of the program. The OSTRC used the Rosenberg (1965) self-esteem scale and the Rotter (1966) locus of control scales. Each question on the self-esteem scale is scored from zero to three, with a possible high score of thirty. Higher scores for the scale suggest higher levels of self-esteem. As Figure 4 shows, the Fellows entered the program with high self-esteem (green line). Even though the group entered the program with high levels of self-esteem (mean score of 24.1), they reported even higher levels of self-esteem at the conclusion of the program (blue line and mean score of 27.3). Self-esteem increased for eight Fellows and remained the same for two. Fellow E's self-esteem dramatically increased from 18 to 30. Their scores ranged from 18 to 29 for the pre-survey and 21 to 30 for the post-survey.

Figure 4: Summary of Self-Esteem and Locus of Control



Locus of Control refers to an individual's perception that destiny is controlled by internal forces (e.g., personal decisions or effort) or by external forces (e.g., fate, luck). The Rotter scale measures a person's locus of control on a continuum ranging from internal to external. Higher scores suggest a higher external locus of control. The possible scores for the scale used in the pre-survey range from zero to thirteen. Typically, a stronger internal locus of control (i.e., lower number) is viewed as desirable because it suggests that one perceives control over situations and can influence the outcomes. In addition, research suggests that individuals with a strong internal locus of control are less affected by job stress and feel more empowered<sup>1</sup>. As Figure 4 shows, most of the Fellows entered the program with strong internal loci of control (purple line). A few Fellows (PFP Fellow F, J), had higher levels when compared to the group. Even though the group entered the program with strong internal loci of control (mean score of 4.4), they reported even stronger internal loci of control at the conclusion of the program (orange line and mean score of 4.2). The locus of control score decreased for four Fellows, increased for five Fellows and remained the same for two Fellows. Fellows F and J's loci of control decreased the most: 3 and 2 points respectively.

While these scales provide interesting data into the personality characteristics of the Fellows and provide another dimension through which to evaluate the PFP, it is important to note the scales' limitations. The scales are quite dated (mid 1960s) and as such may not incorporate culturally or socially relevant questions. In addition, many of the Fellows reported that they were confused and put off by the questions and had a difficult time answering them.

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<sup>1</sup> Bernardi, R.A. (1997). The relationships among locus of control, perceptions of stress, and performance. *Journal of Applied Business Research*, (3).

## ***Defining Practitioner Inquiry, Writing and Program Expectations***

The pre-survey included open-ended questions that asked the Fellows to define practitioner inquiry, describe how they use writing personally and professionally and articulate their expectations for the program. Tables 3 – 5 provide their verbatim responses. The Unique Identifier allowed the OSTRC to match the Fellows' responses to the first two open-ended questions.

**Table 3: Define Practitioner Inquiry**

<b>Pre Survey</b>	<b>Post Survey</b>
To critically question the work that one does as a professional in a particular field.	The practice of looking at your own work in an attempt to make it better.
Someone who continually questions their current knowledge, skills, abilities to make improvements on what they are already doing professionally.	Taking a step back, then a step in, then a look around the work that one is involved in and to question what is happening, collect data then action to make positive change.
Being reflective about the work you do-asking questions about what you are doing and why you are doing it-constantly working to improve	Paying attention to what you are doing and what is going on in your program as if you were an outsider looking in.
The practice of reflecting upon one's own work and making adjustments appropriately	PI is the systematic method a professional who works in a field undertakes to investigate his/her practices and act upon the findings.
Our experiences questioned for the greater good.	The process of being in the work and reflective of the work at the same time.
Inquiry is discovery based learning. I would guess that it means that as practitioners, we continually try to improve ourselves.	PI is the process of front line staff asking open-ended questions about their work.
Seeking knowledge and/or solutions through various means including reading, research, and peer networking.	PI is seeking knowledge about my work and myself as a professional from a variety of sources in order to enhance my practice.
One's ability to question current practices and raise questions that will advance the work/mission.	Questioning and research relative to one's work in a defined field. The practitioner is the actual "hands on" professional in a field.
Teachers asking questions about why they are doing what they are doing	PI is to form a question arising from your work, collect data to gain answers, organize and analyze the data and make it public to be seen by others.
Investigating how a program works and where it can be improved.	Practitioner Inquiry is a form of research through which practitioners in a field systematically question, observe, and record dynamics in their field.



**Table 4: Role of Writing—Professionally and Personally**

Pre-Survey	Post-Survey
As a professional who develops curriculum, writing plays a huge part in what I do professionally, and as a playwright, it serves as a creative outlet in my personal life.	I often have to write reports at work to let my colleagues know about the programming that I am doing.
Professionally, I mainly write memorandums to facilitate my work. Personal life writing is mainly small notes to friends and family/email.	Writing will play a more important role in my professional life from this point forward now that I am comfortable with OST research.
Mostly base communication-emailing-sharing information-I don't do much journaling or other writing.	I write a lot of emails! I was journaling, but stopped. Will try to start again.
Professionally I write to my staff, produce reports and materials for various stakeholders, students school staff, etc. and maintain a program blog.	I write to staff and students and encourage them to do so. I also write to colleagues and other individuals and organizations in the field. Personally, all writing I do is informal.
I enjoy writing immensely but seldom find time to do it.	Through writing I have found voice that communicates my experience to the betterment of my youth and to be a more ethical practitioner in the OST field.
I develop curriculum as a large part of my job as well as grant-writing.	I now feel reasonably comfortable with writing to be heard in OST. I want to write to share my professional ideas. Unfortunately, I have not had any time to write anything personal, although I hope to go back to it.
It is something which I enjoy and sometimes 'dabble in,' yet is an area of professional insecurity for me.	I do a great deal of writing every day in my work, but most of it is tedious. I enjoy writing creatively for newsletters and personal projects.
Not enough as various entities demand personal and professional time.	I write reports and testimony on a frequent basis. Some writing notes, documentation, etc.
I learn better when I write things down. I try to help my children become better writers. Occasional newsletter articles.	Writing is used to plan program, document behavior, communicate with coworkers/family, stay organized.
At work, do writing mostly in the context of curriculum development, reports and grants. Outside of work, research and analytical writing, research, networking, and program development and management skills.	Writing is a great way of sorting out thoughts for me in both my professional and personal life. It also serves as a powerful way to share a perspective that may be absent from the common discourse.

**Table 1: Program Expectations (Only Pre-Survey)**

I hope to be able to build better programs through evaluation and assessment of our current offerings.

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I hope to learn from fellow Fellows/to grow as an OST professional/bringing back to my job current and best practices for AS programs.

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I hope to get to a place where reflection is a reflex-I want to learn and get ideas from others doing the same type of work.

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To become more aware of what others are doing in the field and bring good ideas back to my program.

---

A new set of skills that will help me reflect critically on my work and equip me to write about that.

---

I hope to gain evaluation skills and techniques and learn how to communicate them effectively.

---

I hope that in addition to broadening my perspective on my field, it will force me to face my insecurities about professional writing.

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Taking the time to reflect and write on the topic of out-of-school time. To be more plan-full and proactive.

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I hope to experience a new endeavor that challenges me and teaches me something new to work on in the field.

---

I hope to improve my writing, research, networking and program development and management skills.

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## **Session Observations**

During the course of the year-long program, one or two OSTRC staff attended eleven sessions. The OSTRC staff attended the program sessions as participant observers, a qualitative method in which they engaged in the learning environment of the Fellows. The OSTRC used a structured observation tool as a guide to take comprehensive notes during and after the meetings.

## ***Structural Elements***

The Philadelphia Practitioner Fellowship held its kick-off meeting on October 7, 2009. Sessions were held twice a month at a classroom at the Philadelphia Writing Project located at 4201 Spruce Street. The time and dates for the sessions were scheduled at the beginning of the year. Each meeting was designed to be a three-hour session for 11 Fellows. Attendance varied at

each meeting, though it became higher and more regular in the spring. Both breakfast and lunch were provided.

Two facilitators and the Director of the Philadelphia Writing Project organized and led each session. The Director of the Philadelphia Writing Project substituted as a facilitator during some of the fall sessions, because one of the facilitators was teaching full time during the first semester.

The meeting space was the right size for the number of Fellows. There were enough tables and chairs for all Fellows, though the arrangement of tables was not always conducive to the meeting activities. For example, the tables often obstructed the creation of group circles or were in the way of Fellows trying to move around the room during interactive activities. The tables were necessary, though, for writing activities and meals.

Most of the Fellows arrived at the 10am starting time; however, some Fellows showed up after the designated time—some as late as 10:30am. Sessions normally started 15 minutes late: around 10:15am and typically ended on time at 1pm. Many would stay afterwards to talk to other Fellows and eat the provided lunch.

Dietary restrictions were always taken into account when ordering meals. The facilitators and Writing Project staff were sensitive to the dietary needs of individuals in the group.

### ***Meeting Elements***

Each session focused on a “step” of research. The sessions included a variety of formats. Fellows engaged in reading and writing activities, group discussions, and some short lectures provided by facilitators and guests.

The meeting structure allowed many opportunities for the Fellows to engage with one another. Each session included time for sharing progress on individual research, small group discussions, one-to-one exchange, and time for questions and concerns with the whole group. The first half of each session focused on discussing and interpreting academic readings to understand the concept of inquiry. Typically, the two facilitators led these discussions in two small groups. By January, the focus shifted to individual research plans and the methods of conducting research.

The sessions included a strong emphasis on writing. Apart from homework assignments, several activities ended with a writing exercise. For example, after reading *Be Good to Eddie Lee* with the group, a children's book about a child with Down's Syndrome, facilitators asked the Fellows to write reflection pieces based on their connection to the story, either personally or professionally. Fellows were encouraged to share excerpts from their written reflection after the time allotted. Though some Fellows struggled with the writing "jargon," (such as their assignment to write a "vignette"), they would often speak up about their confusion and ask for clarification immediately.

All of the sessions included hands-on activities. For example, Fellows brought in visuals of their data collection to share with the group. They also marked their position on a toy roadway with post-it notes to express where their progress with the research. The toy roadway had many loops, detours, and obstructions so that the Fellows could talk about "blocks" and tangents in their research process. Hands-on activities often served as entry-ways for discussions on the research process.

The activities provided the opportunity for Fellows to speak up about their ideas, questions and concerns during sessions. The variety of formats created movement in the room and encouraged Fellows to talk to everyone—not simply the Fellows seated next to them. The

activities also opened discussion about the Fellows' general feelings about writing, research, and life experiences, which generated a community of safety and trust.

### ***Facilitators***

The facilitators provided a detailed syllabus during the first session. It included the reading and writing assignments that needed to be prepared for each session. They presented the syllabus in a binder with all of the assigned readings. At each session, the facilitators handed out additional worksheets for the activities of the day.

The facilitators acquainted themselves with the Fellows through reading their applications. Beyond this information, the facilitators also requested each fellow to submit a "What I Bring" essay. This essay asked Fellows to provide information about their experience in OST, their understanding of practitioner inquiry, and their concerns with the program. To encourage follow-up and assistance, the facilitators used an online forum to communicate with the Fellows. The facilitators would remind and clarify the assignments through an electronic message board. They often stayed until 2pm talking to individual Fellows about their research. They also went on a series of site visits to understand each Fellow's work and research. At the end of each session, the facilitators collected feedback by asking Fellows to complete a brief reflection sheet.

The facilitators kept Fellows constantly engaged in activity and dialogue. They used eye contact and visuals while speaking. They shared information through the variety of activities they planned for the sessions. Facilitators answered questions and addressed the Fellows' need for clarity immediately. They often shared their own experiences with inquiry with the group. By asking Fellows to bring a variety of materials for their research, they encouraged an open-minded approach to data collection.

In order to adapt to the variety of learning styles, the facilitators provided support and a level of flexibility for the Fellows. When Fellows felt uncomfortable or frustrated with the amount of academic reading or described a sense of pressure to complete several assignments, the facilitators divided the work so that the Fellows could focus on one particular assignment. They also designed a variety of activities, such as group reading, or writing prompts, that provided Fellows different ways to engage in the session.

There was a sense of balanced leadership between the facilitators. They cooperated with one another and they were always prepared for who was leading the next activity. They provided introductions to guests and allowed the guest speakers to lead group discussions and activities.

The facilitators had a vast knowledge and background in practitioner inquiry, writing and research. Most of the sessions focused on the discipline, methods and tools needed for research. Neither facilitator possessed a strong background in OST. Guest speakers led lectures about the OST field. Apart from these guest speakers, the facilitators did not use a guided format to discuss relevant issues in the OST field. These discussions usually occurred spontaneously through the discussion among the Fellows.

In the beginning, the facilitators seemed unclear about the role of the OSTRC in the project. At the kick-off meeting, the OSTRC staff introduced and clarified their evaluation for the facilitators and the Fellows. Despite the initial confusion, the facilitators encouraged the OSTRC to attend and participate in sessions.

## ***Fellows***

Throughout the year, there was a high level of engagement among the Fellows. The Fellows actively participated through responding to the facilitators' questions, asking their own questions,

and interacting with one another. They expressed a general openness about experiences; both successes and struggles in programming and research. All of the Fellows participated in hands-on activities, group discussions, and writing assignments prompted by the facilitators.

In the first few meetings, some Fellows expressed a general discomfort and nervousness with entering the writing process. These Fellows said that they had not been in an academic setting for fifteen or twenty years. Several Fellows spoke up about these feelings of apprehension. Other Fellows were uncomfortable with the reading assignments, questioning the relevancy to their practice. One person noted that she did not enjoy the academic theory because she could not translate it to her work as an OST practitioner. Another Fellow worried that the limited OST research would affect her ability to conduct her own research. She described her nervousness about the research process as “flying blind.”

Fellows felt encouraged during the session that focused on the OST field. Some Fellows stated that they had never heard of their work as a “field,” and were delighted to be discussing their work as professionals. They also were encouraged by the facilitators to continue reading about inquiry to understand better its role in their work. When given a particular reading assignment as opposed to many, Fellows were more confident in sharing their understanding of the article.

By the spring, the Fellows were sharing components of the research process and engaging in data collection and writing. Some Fellows kept journals and used their spare time to write in it. Many of the Fellows shared their research with one another and presented each other's progress during group discussions.

Some Fellows expressed that they had never had a professional development opportunity that was as helpful as the Fellowship program. One person noted, “In my experience of over 30

years of working in out-of-school time, the Fellowship has been the most interesting, engaging, and relevant professional development I have ever had.”

At the last session, in which the Fellows shared their research, each Fellow brought food for a potluck celebration. Several Fellows expressed sentiments to continue the Fellowship into a second year. They felt that they had created a community through the program that they never had before in the out-of-school time field. The Fellows encouraged each other to stay in touch via the online “hub” set up for the Fellows in the beginning of the year.

### ***Roundtable Discussion***

At the end of May, Fellows participated in a “semi-public” roundtable to present their research to invited friends, mentors and colleagues. Approximately 30-35 participants attended the final roundtable. Fellows sat at several tables with the invited guests. Each Fellow presented for five to eight minutes on his/her research. They provided handouts so the guests and other Fellows could follow along with their presentations. The audience provided structured feedback to the Fellow through replying to a series of questions supplied by the facilitators. The Fellows took notes on the comments as they had one month to complete their research and final papers. Fellows expressed their gratitude for the experience and the guests were impressed and engaged in the information presented.

### **Fellows Focus Group**

The purpose of the mid-year focus group was to learn about the Fellows’ understanding of, expectations for and preferences regarding the PFP. Nine of the twelve Fellows participated in the focus group. All of the Fellows were actively engaged during the focus group, responding to questions when prompted and offering thoughtful feedback. The moderator began with an



overview of the purpose and the format for the focus group. Everyone agreed to the simple ground rules: speak one at a time and respect everyone's opinions.

### ***Initial Expectations of the PFP***

First, Fellows discussed their initial expectations of the PFP. The responses reflected a common theme—to participate with other like-minded professionals in a stimulating professional development experience. A few of the Fellows expected to obtain best practices as illustrated by the following statement:

I always look at programs as ways to be better. Instead of reinventing the wheel I was interested in seeing what other have done. I was expecting a more classroom/didactic approach with “best practices.” Instead, we have been working on how to do research. It has motivated me to continue to be interested in my job. It has helped me reinvest my energies.

In addition, one Fellow expected to examine programs in general and found it “interesting and unexpected” to focus on one program. A couple of the Fellows stated they were interested in research and wanted to learn more about implanting research into their programs. One Fellow's expectation differed greatly and she described it as the following:

An atmosphere for professionals to talk about out-of-school time, possible grants funding, other programs. I am new for administering afterschool, so I am looking to improve professionally. It turned out to *not* be that. Instead though, it has been just as beneficial.

Finally, one Fellow expected a more formal environment and was “pleasantly surprised” that the program is not as “formal” as she expected. Although the expectations varied, the Fellows generally expressed positive experiences with the PFP.

### ***Experiences with PFP***

The Fellows stated the camaraderie and informal conversations had been quite beneficial; however, they expressed the desire to have more time for informal networking, brainstorming

and in-depth conversations. Most often, the informal discussions occurred during lunch or when walking back to the train.

The Fellows further stated that the PFP had challenged them to take responsibility to evaluate and observe their actions. For example, one Fellow stated, “The greatest challenge is to see myself as an observer of my actions. I expect my youth to do it and I realized the double standard. It is really practical and puts me in the place of my youth.” A few of the Fellows also stated they felt compelled to share what they have learned with their colleagues.

### ***Research***

Many of the Fellows expressed confusion about the research they would be conducting. For example, one Fellow stated, “I thought that we were *creating* the research. Most of the articles have been education based but not geared towards OST. It was my understanding that there has not been much about OST.”

### ***Writing***

Several of the Fellows stated they enjoyed the writing and were becoming more confident in their writing. One Fellow stated, “I have started to write after work, there is so much information running through my head and writing it down help untangle it. I have always taken notes but taking notes observing myself has been important.” They also stated they were pleased that the facilitators are accommodating and flexible regarding the writing assignments.

### ***Logistics***

The Fellows had mixed points of view on the issue of the starting time. Some stated the 10:00 am starting time was “awkward,” while others appreciated this time because they could avoid morning traffic. Several stated that the meeting times conflicted with organizational meetings. Many of the Fellows stated the meeting times should be longer because, “...the meatier

information comes out near the end.” One individual suggested meeting for an entire eight-hour day in lieu of two three-hour sessions.

Several Fellows would have preferred more Internet discussions (e.g., blackboard) and informal discussions in between sessions about the articles and readings. That way, there would be more time for teamwork and networking during the meetings. In addition, all of the Fellows stated that the meeting schedule should be distributed farther in advance, and all would like to have been included on setting the meeting dates and times.

### ***Facilitators***

The Fellows provided overwhelmingly positive feedback for the facilitators. Some of the comments included the following:

- The facilitators are open to discussions;
- they are awesome, and compassionate, and have been so open-minded;
- down to earth;
- very intelligent; and
- they have different personalities and it is a good balance.

### ***Workload***

All of the Fellows stated that the workload was “a lot.” Specifically, they stated there were too many readings that were often repetitive. Many of these readings focused on the theory of teaching as opposed to more practice-oriented theory. In addition, the Fellows stated there had not been enough reading on OST.

### ***Suggestions for Remainder of Year***

The Fellows provided the following suggestions for the PFP:

- Conduct individual check-in and follow-up with the Fellows;
- Include a half-hour discussion on problem solving at each session;

- Provide specific office hours for the facilitators to be available to the Fellows;
- Include agenda items on-line;
- Offer directed guidance for the research;
- Offer a 9-10 AM optional networking period before each formal meeting; and
- Integrate more OST-related readings.

### ***Suggestions for Future PFP***

Many of the Fellows did not know about the PFP and learned about it “last minute.” Given this, they suggested a wider dissemination strategy for advertising next year’s PFP.

### **Facilitator and PWP Director Focus Group**

The purpose of the facilitator focus group was to learn about the facilitators’ expectations, experiences and recommendations regarding the program. The two program facilitators and PWP Director participated. One OSTRC staff person conducted the focus group one month after the last program session.

### ***Experiences with the PFP***

Overall, the facilitators and PWP Director were very pleased with the program design and the Fellows’ participation. They described the Fellows as being “hungry for conversation and community.” They liked the size of the group and were happy with how the Fellows interacted with one another. They also appreciated the ethnic and demographic diversity of the group.

The Fellows’ dedication impressed the facilitators and PWP Director. Despite the lack of formal accreditation associated with the program, most of the Fellows kept up with the demands of the program. The facilitators were surprised and pleased that they did not have to “sell” the inquiry stance to the Fellows.

The facilitators and PWP Director thought that the readings, activities, events, and facilitators themselves were very balanced, engaging, and effective. They felt that they prepared the Fellows for the intensity of research through introducing the group to a variety of formal and informal writing styles.

Beyond the bi-monthly program sessions, the group thought that the site visits and the two-day writing retreat were important program events. Though the site visits were time-consuming, they stated that the visits were, “incredibly important to creating trust between the facilitators and the Fellows.” Each program site was handled differently based on the inquiry of the Fellow. The facilitators noted that it was important for the writing retreat to be a two day experience. They hope next year’s retreat can be an overnight experience so that the Fellows’ writing flow will not be disrupted.

### ***Communication***

Because the two main facilitators knew each other from previous work experience, they felt they were able to collaborate effectively. They said that they did not “have to keep score” on the amount of work each one was contributing and that that this trust allowed them to work well both inside and outside the sessions.

### ***Challenges***

Initially, the facilitators and PWP Director expressed concerns about replicating the original New York City program. They did not know what was expected of them from NIOST and Afterschool Matters in terms of their syllabus. Over the course of the summer, they became more comfortable about creating their own curriculum.

The facilitators expected to be working primarily with direct-line staff instead of a mixture of staff, which included coordinators and administrators. Further, during the course of the year, some of

the direct-service staff transitioned into administrative positions at their programs. The facilitators were not aware or prepared for the changes that some Fellows experienced at their workplaces.

Each of the facilitators agreed that the program was more time consuming than they expected. Though the group agreed that site visits were important to understanding the Fellow's programs and research, this aspect of the program was particularly time consuming. The Fellows needed access to the facilitators beyond the program sessions and on-line communication. One facilitator noted that it was difficult for her to be a facilitator and maintain a full-time job.

The facilitators and PWP Director did not immediately understand the role of the OSTRC. They first viewed the evaluation as "information for funders." After that, however, the OSTRC staff were genuinely integrated into the sessions.

### ***Suggestions for Next Year***

The facilitators and PWP Director would like next year's facilitators to have better communication with the program administrators responsible for the application process. They believe that the facilitators should have more input into the application process and acceptance procedure. They recommended writing the application form in a more academic tone so that Fellows understand the rigor of the program.

They also would like to have prior knowledge of the diverse job descriptions of the Fellows. Had the facilitators known this information earlier, they would have included readings on professional development and staff training for the administrative Fellows.

Everyone agreed that the facilitators' salaries should be increased based upon the hours expended this year that extended beyond the program session hours. The facilitators noted that the extra hours should be delineated by a separate line item which would include time devoted to course development and contact hours.

When asked about the incorporating writing and discussions of OST, the facilitators and PWP Director suggested using former Fellows as resources for next year. They also suggested using the new Fellows as presenters and including this year's research papers as assigned readings. Ideally, the facilitators and PWP Director would like next year's program to emphasize the process of sharing research through organizing a final public presentation and offering sessions at conferences. They would also like the Fellows to work on publishing their research in relevant journals and newsletters. Furthermore, they would like to see next year's Fellows receive a certificate of completion and continuing education credits.

The facilitators and PWP Director noticed a great diversity in populations served by the Fellow's programs. From this observation, they were interested in facilitating discussions about socio-economic disparities and their impact on OST programming. They recommended rotating site visitations or "exchanges" among Fellows to generate this conversation.

## Summary and Recommendations

The evaluation showed that the year-long Fellowship program positively impacted the Fellows in multiple domains. As discussed in the beginning, the evaluation sought to answer the following research questions:

1. Does participation in the Fellowship result in a positive change in knowledge relating to practice?
2. Does participation in the Fellowship result in a positive change in professional identity?
3. Does participation in the Fellowship result in a positive change in program quality?

The evaluation results showed positive changes in the Fellows' knowledge relating to practice, particularly their confidence in conducting research. In addition, the Fellows' professional identity increased tremendously, further confirming the positive impact of the year-long fellowship program. We are unable to answer question three definitively, but the Fellows' perception of the impact their participation in OST professional development activities has on programs and students increased by .4 points. This suggests that the Fellows more positively perceive that OST professional development influences programs and students. In addition, even though the Fellows entered the program with high levels of self-esteem and strong internal loci of control, both their self-esteem and internal locus of control modestly became stronger at the conclusion of the program.

Based on the session observations, both the facilitators and Fellows created an engaging and trusting environment. The diversity of activities and formats allowed for a high amount of participant involvement.

The Fellows Focus Group revealed that the Fellows' expectations differed from their experiences with the PFP. Despite this, they typically provided positive feedback about the PFP



and the facilitators. The focus group also revealed that many of the Fellows felt more confident about their work and becoming part of a growing field. They noted that their work as an OST professional had been supported and confirmed through participating in the PFP. The Fellows offered constructive feedback for improving the PFP such as including time for informal networking and having a monthly full-day meeting instead of two three-hour meetings per month. Another theme that emerged from the focus group was the lack of information about OST. The Fellows expressed the need for more articles and discussion of OST. All of the Fellows strongly agreed that the PFP had been a valuable experience and that they are enhancing their research and writing skills.

During their focus group, the facilitators and PWP Director reported that they were pleased with the program, the curriculum, the Fellows, and the Fellows' interactions. They noted that the number of Fellows who were program administrators, and the amount of work involved in organizing the program sessions, were more than they expected. They also voiced a need for a larger budget and improved communication during the application process.

Given the results of this evaluation, the OSTRC recommends the following:

- Increase communication between facilitators and program administrators about the following:
  - The application process
  - Public events
  - Program evaluations both internally (by the Philadelphia Writing Project) and externally (by the Out-of-School Time Resource Center)
- Use a more academic tone in the application form.
- Include facilitators in the application design and review.
- Provide more OST literature, research, resources, and references to current events.

- Include readings about professional development and working with staff
- Obtain Fellow feedback when scheduling meeting dates and times.
- Consider implementing a full day meeting in lieu of the two three-hour monthly meetings.
- Provide structured time for the Fellows to informally network and problem-solve.
- Use research from former Fellows as examples of inquiry. Invite former and current Fellows to present on certain topics
- Consider a follow-up “senior” program for Fellows interested in continuing their inquiry.
- Organize a presentation, conference, or publishing opportunity so that next year’s Fellows can formally share their final research.
- Provide continuing education credits and a certificate of completion for next year’s Fellows.
- Consider an increase in the facilitators’ salaries.

## Appendix A: Summary of Survey Questions with Means

Survey Question	Mean (5 is highest)	
	Pre-Survey	Post-Survey
I am a member of a professional OST field.	4.3	4.9
I have a group of OST professional peers from whom I get support.	3.8	4.4
I am a leader among my OST peers.	3.5	4.4
My OST organization supports me when I use new resources and strategies.	4.0	3.8
I am confident in my writing skills.	4.1	4.2
I am confident in my ability to conduct research.	3.4	4.5
I am confident in my ability to train other OST professionals in using new resources and strategies.	3.5	4.3
I have access to professional OST resources.	3.4	3.8
I can recognize quality resources-those that will enhance my OST work.	3.7	3.9
I use new resources and strategies in my OST work.	3.5	3.7
I collaborate with OST colleagues in my workplace.	3.3	3.2
I collaborate with OST colleagues other than my co-workers.	2.9	3.5
I use writing to reflect upon my OST work.	2.3	3.1
I use writing to share my OST professional experiences with others.	2.5	2.9
When I participate in OST professional development activities, it has a positive impact on my program(s).	3.6	4.0
When I participate in OST professional development activities, it has a positive impact on my students.	3.3	3.7