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"Duck Hunters on the Ohio River"
William Louis Sonntag, 1850

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From the Editors

This issue of JPNA is comprised of articles which address issues that cut across the public, private, and nonprofit sectors. First, Alicia Schatteman and Ben Bingle examine the differences in public funds and private donations in the revenue mix for local libraries. Second, Michael Ford applies the public policy windows framework to the case of school voucher programs in Milwaukee. The final two manuscripts each focus on nonprofit collaboration in after school programs: Hee Soun Jang and colleagues examine diversity in the formalization and governance of organizational partnerships in Communities in Schools programs, and Natalie Webb and colleagues present a case study of a community inclusion program for children with autism spectrum disorders.

Robert J. Eger III, Ph.D.
Editor in Chief

Vickie Edwards, Ph.D.
Associate Editor

Bruce D. McDonald III, Ph.D.
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Call for Papers: 2016 Midwest Public Affairs Conference

Integrating Public Policy Analysis and Management Research

Hosted by the John Glenn College of Public Affairs
The Ohio State University
Columbus, OH
June 2-4, 2016

To perform efficiently and effectively, governments at all levels are being asked to collaborate closely across agencies, other levels of government, and with the business and nonprofit sectors. Given this, it is important that research analyzing public policy also integrates the managerial challenges inherent with the policy process. MPAC 2016 will explore how public policy analysis can be better integrated with management research. Can such an integrated investigation better help our understanding of government collaboration?

We encourage proposals that contemplate these questions, but need not address the conference theme. Opportunities include paper presentations, roundtables, workshops and panels; and we encourage participation from academics, practitioners and students. Our reviewers will accept proposals that entail research in progress, though they should have enough content to facilitate participant discussion. Relevant papers may be asked to submit to a symposium by the conference's affiliated publication, Journal of Public and Nonprofit Affairs. More details on this and other opportunities will be available from the organization's website, midwestpac.com

Philanthropy Supporting Government: An Analysis of Local Library Funding

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This paper explores revenue sources of public sector organizations and how some rely on philanthropic funding to supplement public tax dollars. Data from the Institute of Museum and Library Services Survey are combined with financial information from library friends and foundation nonprofit organizations to understand the extent to which public libraries in Illinois are supported by philanthropic funds. A survey of library directors is used to provide additional context. The findings suggest a geographic disparity in finances among libraries in Illinois. These results allude to the phenomena of "donation over taxation" among some public sector organizations.

Introduction

Governments at all levels continue to face extraordinary financial challenges as the aftershocks of the Great Recession ripple through the contemporary public sector landscape. This has led some scholars to suggest that a "new fiscal ice age" has begun (Kiewiet & McCubbins, 2014). Fiscal challenges are, however, no recent phenomena (Cohn, 1907; MacDonald, 1948; Manvel, 1957; Schiff, 1918). Public organizations have been threatened by huge cutbacks many times before, particularly during the Great Depression. During the 1930s, local services were cut and budgets shrank. The Chicago Public Library faced severe cutbacks in hours, but they were eventually restored because of massive outpouring of support by Jane Addams and others (Herdman, 1943). State and federal governments stepped in to assist these libraries as they pulled out of the Depression. Yet, The Great Recession that began in 2007 has had overwhelming effects on the fiscal landscape that have been virtually unparalleled since the Great Depression. At the local level, governments encounter shrinking budgets, increasing demand for services, declining revenues, and costly infrastructure upkeep. In some instances, local governments have cultivated relationships with nonprofit organizations to help alleviate some of this strain, particularly in the area of service provision (Considine, 2013; Meek & Thurmaier, 2012; Feiock & Jang, 2009; Milward & Provan, 2000; Smith & Lipsky, 1993). Receiving less attention is local governments' use of nonprofit organizations to leverage revenue in the form of charitable gifts.

New theories are needed to explain what is occurring when public goods become quasi-public goods, when tax dollars are leveraging philanthropic dollars. Many services began by being almost entirely funded by philanthropic dollars at the turn of the 20th century (e.g., health care and schools); next, they moved to being almost entirely funded by government, and then became totally reliant on government funding. Irvin and Carr (2005) are the only researchers that have attempted to examine philanthropy's role in "forming separate 'Friends of' structures and

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foundations" for public services (p. 44). They suggest that libraries fall under nonessential government services, and therefore, during economic downturns, citizens may want to donate to that government service to preserve it. The donors may be negatively and personally affected should a public service, such as libraries, be reduced or harmed. Irvin and Carr (2005) call this the donor impact model. Furthermore, there needs to be an organizational structure put in place such as a foundation or a set of written procedures in order for local governments to receive philanthropic dollars. The authors suggest that further research is needed to determine how government "efforts provide the most efficacious way to attract private gifts" (Irvin and Carr, 2005, p. 45).

If philanthropy is to become part of a revenue strategy for local government, then local governments need to understand the benefits as well as the costs. Nonprofit organizations, on the other hand, need to appreciate the potential impact of philanthropic dollars becoming a more integral part of government revenue at the local level, and how this will impact their own ability to engage in fundraising activities in the same philanthropic space. Local governments may create nonprofit "arms" to focus on fundraising efforts, which these "arms" can do much more effectively because of the 501(c)3 status that they may hold. This has happened in a number of different areas such as public schools and museums, for example. Governments provide the public service but they rely upon philanthropy to provide the funding. This indicates the phenomenon of the preference for donation over taxation. In essence, we have a lack of will between citizen expectation of services and government willingness to pay. This reality places public entities (i.e., libraries) in competition with nonprofit organizations for scarce community philanthropic dollars. Moreover, while local governments may focus on leveraging public tax dollars, nonprofits need to know how this new environment might affect their own ability to raise philanthropic dollars.

This research focuses on public libraries in Illinois, their finances, and their use of friends groups or foundations (i.e., nonprofit "arms") to supplement existing revenue streams. We begin with a contextual overview of libraries in the United States before arguing that existing theories are inadequate for explaining the phenomenon of donation over taxation. Finally, an original dataset that combines survey data from the Institute of Museum and Library Services with philanthropic donation data from Guidestar, an organization that gathers and disseminates information on nonprofit organizations in the United States, is used to answer the following research questions: To what extent are libraries supported by public tax dollars?; To what extent do libraries have nonprofit fundraising organizations associated with the library?; and, To what extent are public libraries focused on fundraising beyond government support?

Public Libraries in Context

Public libraries date back to the earliest days of this country, with Benjamin Franklin starting the first lending library in 1731 (Library Company of Philadelphia, 2014). Today, there are nearly 10,000 public libraries in the United States, which can be found in almost every community, large or small. These institutions bring the community together and support a knowledgeable citizenry through public and open access to information. According to the Pew Research Center, nearly half of all Americans over the age of 16 used a public library in 2014.

Because they are public entities, many libraries have additional financial resources beyond tax dollars. They earn revenue from program fees, fines, or dues, but they may also seek additional funding from grants as well as gifts from individuals. As such, and despite being public organizations with taxing authority, libraries still rely on other sources of revenue. Scholarly research on library finances is quite undeveloped; however, there are a few examples of

scholarship on the topic (e.g., Stenström & Haycock, 2014; Kinnucan, Ferguson, & Estabrook, 1998; Mason, 1981; Molz, 1978; Prentice, 1977). Analyses of philanthropic support of libraries are even less abundant. The most applicable may be Patrick Valentine's (1996) case study of philanthropy's role in public library development in North Carolina during the first half of the twentieth century. While his finding that philanthropy serves as a catalyst for bringing community resources together rather than acting as a primary driver of library development is important, Valentine's study—by his own admission—is limited by "social, cultural, and political realities of the time and place" (p. 272). Attention now turns to a set of theories that arguably could provide insight to the topic at hand.

Literature Review

We primarily use a resource dependency lens to explore our research questions as they relate to public libraries' reliance on public taxes. Resource dependency theory (RDT) "has become one of the most influential theories in organizational theory and strategic management" (Hillman, Withers, & Collins, 2009, p. 1404). RDT views organizations as dependent upon their environment for scarce resources that ultimately help the organizations survive and thrive (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). A resource is considered to be anything that is deemed valuable, such as information, capital, or other materials (Tillquist, King, & Woo, 2002). The interaction with those other entities produces dependency, which gives them some control or power over the dependent organization (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). The central premise of resource dependency theory comes down to survival: "the key to organizational survival is the ability to acquire and maintain resources" (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978, p. 2). Furthermore, organizations seek to obtain resources to help avoid too much external control and maintain their own autonomy (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). Resource dependency theory is relevant to this study because libraries, through philanthropy, are diversifying their revenue streams and therefore protecting themselves financially against fiscal shocks. However, libraries are in a unique position in that they have a mandated revenue stream (i.e., public taxes), and therefore, diversification is a result of turning away from taxes to philanthropy by choice or, perhaps, political culture. This theory has not been extended in this way in previous studies.

Hypothesis #1: Public libraries are dependent on public funding to support operations.

Hypothesis #2: Reliance on public funding for public libraries varies with the library's location (urban, suburban, and rural).

Hypothesis #3: Public libraries rely on fundraising to diversify their revenue.

For the purposes of this research, understanding principal-agent theory—the relationship between the public entity (i.e., library) and a fundraising arm of that library (i.e., friends group or foundation nonprofit)—is also useful. Young (1999) suggests that the relationship can be supplementary, complementary or adversarial. In the supplementary form, a nonprofit fills a need unmet by government. Nonprofits may also collaborate with government, acting as partners in the complementary relationship type. Feiock and Andrew (2006) further expanded Young's typology into six categories: autonomous service provider, coordinated service ally, subsidized provider, contractor/agent, strategic competitor, partner, and advocate/lobbyist.

In the context of principal-agent theory, the nonprofit as agent is the most relevant for this paper. The objectives of the principal (i.e., the municipal government) are likely clear to the agent (i.e., an associated nonprofit organization like a foundation or friends group), although there may be some ambiguity in the nonprofit's goals and effective control mechanisms (Hansmann, 1987).

While government cost savings is typically the reason given for engaging in contracting-out with nonprofit organizations, other reasons may actually be the case. In a study of local government and nonprofit managers, VanSlyke (2003) notes, "contracting for social services with nonprofit providers was used for politically symbolic reasons to demonstrate that government is getting smaller, working more efficiently by disengaging itself from direct service delivery and not encroaching on private markets" (p. 307). Therefore, government does shrink and public administrative capacity is reduced. In the case of public libraries, there is little incentive on the part of the nonprofit to increase earnings which may ultimately reduce investment by the municipal government over time. Further confusing the management situation, the nonprofit has a board of directors that is distinct from the municipal board which oversees the entire library. They legally operate separately and yet, are inextricably linked together by working toward the same financial mission. The nonprofit operates as an economic agent in the case of public libraries, but the existing body of literature does not address this distinction. Furthermore, nonprofits may be subsidizing the provision of public services through the use of their own resources like volunteers and endowments.

Hypothesis #4: The majority of public libraries have nonprofit fundraising organizations associated with the public library.

Hypothesis #5: The majority of public libraries are fundraising to diversify their revenue.

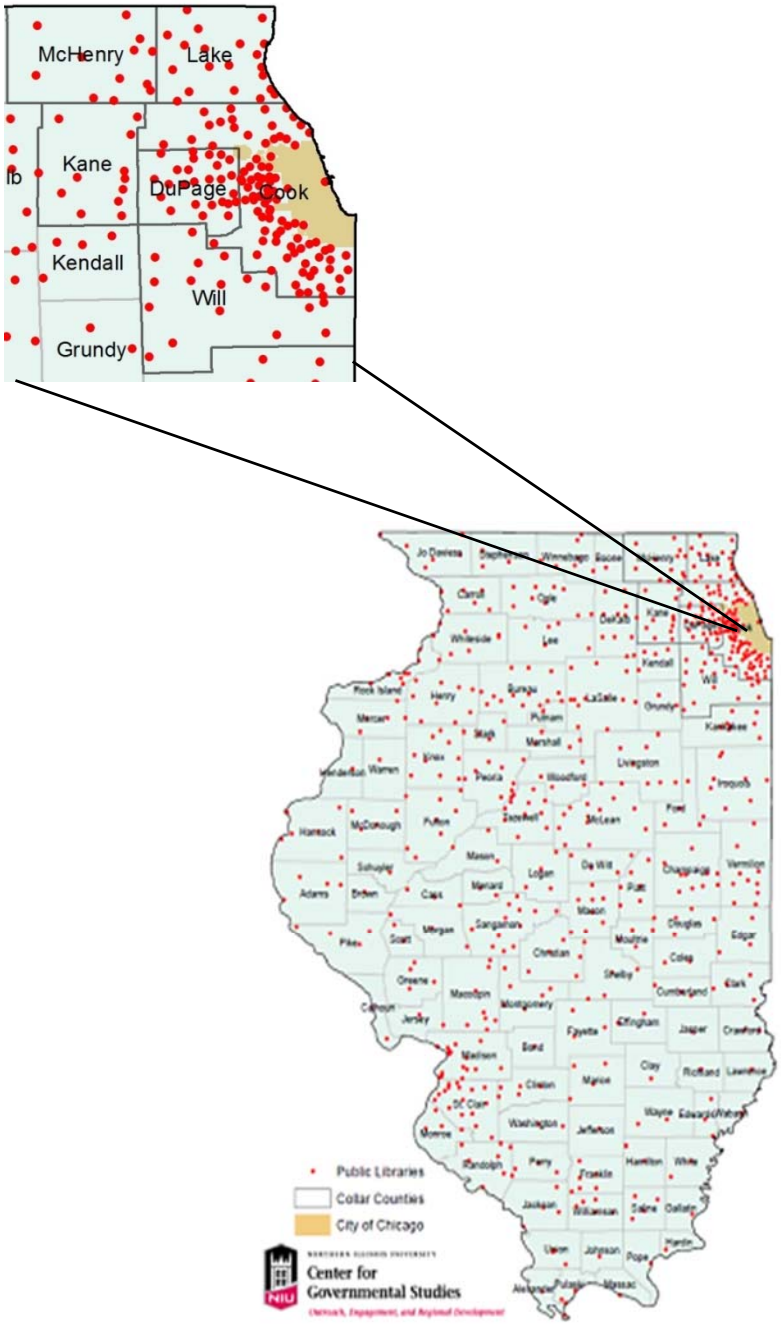
Methodology

For this research, municipal public libraries are used to examine how philanthropy is currently supporting these institutions in Illinois. Public libraries in Illinois are governed by the Illinois Local Library Act (1965) and the Illinois Public Library District Act (1991). Municipalities establish local libraries under the Illinois Municipal Code (1961). The Local Library Act dictates how libraries are to be funded from public tax dollars, with special distinction between cities below or above 500,000 residents. All public libraries in Illinois and all libraries in the Chicago (Cook County) and collar counties (McHenry, Lake, Kane, DuPage and Will) are shown in detail in Figure 1.

To answer our research questions, we first created a database using survey data from the Public Libraries Survey which is conducted annually by the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS). The survey data were collected for fiscal year 2011 and released in June 2013. The survey frame consisted of all 9,291 public libraries. For this paper, we used only the responses for public libraries in Illinois (population 13 million). Out of a possible 626 libraries, 620 returned the survey resulting in a response rate of 99 percent.

We supplemented the survey data by first conducting a keyword search in Guidestar. We searched for nonprofit organizations with "library" in their name based in Illinois, which resulted in 353 results. Many of these results included private libraries and library associations. To narrow our research to public library nonprofit organizations, we then queried for "library" and "friends" (163 results) and "library" and "foundation" (68 results). We went through the combined results (231) and removed any organizations that were not affiliated with a public library (such as private and academic libraries), and this left 160 organizations affiliated with public libraries. We then matched the nonprofit organization to the public library and coded this list as 0 = no nonprofit organization, 1 = one friends or foundation nonprofit organization, or 2 = two or more friends or foundation nonprofit organization associated with a particular municipal public library. Next, pertinent financial details were added to the database for each of the nonprofit organizations

Figure 1. Public Libraries in Illinois



identified, including total assets, annual income, and annual expenses using their IRS 990 form information for the most recent year available (2011). A new variable was created to determine the total amount of philanthropic support raised for the public library via the associated nonprofit organization. That sum was then divided by total operating revenue for that public library. To better understand the role of philanthropy in supporting libraries throughout Illinois, we also added a variable for county location to determine whether philanthropic support to libraries differed by geographic location. All Illinois counties were coded where 1 = Cook County (Chicago);

2 = Collar counties (DuPage, Kane, Lake, McHenry, Will); and, 3 = All other counties in Illinois (see Figure 1). The philanthropic support variable was analyzed via an Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) in order to compare means of the three geographic comparison groups. Philanthropic support was also assessed in relation to a variety of other variables via bivariate correlations. The variables included in this analysis are included in the Appendix.

Finally, we conducted an online survey of municipal public library directors in Illinois asking them about their fundraising capabilities and responsibilities. Out of 626 public libraries in Illinois, we located 525 email addresses of library directors. An online survey link was sent to each of these email addresses, which generated 117 responses (22.3percent response rate).

Results

The ANOVA and bivariate correlations offer a preliminary, yet insightful, glimpse of the reliance on philanthropic support of public libraries.

Hypothesis #1: Public libraries are dependent on public funding to support operations.

Nearly all public libraries rely on other income besides local tax revenue. Table 1 summarizes the revenue sources for public libraries in Illinois. The median dollar value for federal revenue is $0 because only 28.1percent of all libraries receive federal support for their public library, whereas, 93percent of all libraries receive some kind of state support.

Furthermore, we also calculated the percentage of total revenue deriving from all sources of revenue. Results of this analysis appear in Table 2. “Other” revenue includes all non-tax revenue such as fines as well as philanthropy (i.e., donations and grants). The Public Libraries Survey does not break down this amount further which is why we also captured financial data from associated friends and foundation groups.

Hypothesis #2: Reliance on public funding for public libraries varies with the library’s location (rural, urban and suburban).

Next, we explored whether there was any variation in libraries situated in different geographic areas of the state, specifically comparing public libraries in Chicago (Cook County), the collar counties, and beyond. The closer libraries are to Chicago, the more reliant they are on local government (see Table 3). As the percentage of operating revenue from local government

Table 1. Summary of Revenue

	Mean	Median
Local Government Support	$1,088,061	$172,008
State Government Support	$47,687	$8,497
Federal Government Support	$5,440	0
Other Support	$61,470	$17,457

Table 2. Percentage of Total Revenues

	Mean	Median
% Local Government Support	83.16%	88.62%
% Other Support	12.03%	5.77%

decreases, reliance on philanthropic funding sources increases. This disproportionately occurs outside of Cook and the collar counties. Using bivariate correlation analysis, the relationship between local government funding and philanthropic funding is statistically significant ($p < .01$). Therefore, libraries in less populous areas (i.e., outside of Chicago and the collar counties) have fewer financial resources at the local level, and they must raise a larger percentage of their operating budget through philanthropy than their peers in Chicago and the nearby suburbs. There is also a positive and statistically significant relationship between reliance on "other income" and county code. This suggests that the level of a library's reliance on philanthropic revenue increases the farther away it is from Cook County.

Hypothesis #3: Public libraries rely on fundraising to diversify their revenue.

According to the correlation results in Table 4, when all cases are considered (N=170), there is a negative and statistically significant relationship ($p<0.01$) between the percentage of local government support and the percentage of operating income derived from library friends or foundation organizations. The relationship is positive when correlated with state government funding ($p<.05$). When Chicago is removed from the analysis (N=169), a positive significant relationship emerges between the percentage of operating income derived from philanthropy and federal government funding. The relationship between total paid full-time equivalent staff is almost positive and statistically significant ($p<0.01$) with total operating revenue, which was expected.

Library budgets overwhelmingly derive from local government funding (see Table 3). One implication of the findings outlined here is that library friends groups and foundations are stepping up to raise a greater percentage of the operating budget when local government funding is not adequate. Beyond that, however, is the finding that a positive relationship exists between the percentage of budgets derived from philanthropy and state government funding (for all cases and when Chicago is removed) and federal government funding (when Chicago is removed). Since most libraries do not rely heavily on state and federal government revenue, does this relationship

Table 3: Geographic Comparison of Local Government vs. Philanthropic Funding

	Percentage of Operating Revenue from Local Government	Percentage of Operating Revenue from Philanthropy
COOK COUNTY	93.2%	.99%
COLLAR COUNTIES	92.9%	.59%
ALL OTHER COUNTIES	81.7%	4.74%

Table 4. Correlation Analysis of Library Resources in Illinois

	Total staff	Total operating revenue	Percent from local government	Percent from state government	Percent from federal government	Percent from friends or foundations
Total staff						
All Chicago Removed		.996**	.105	.012	-.024	-.013
		.964**	.288**	-.118	-.099	-.075
Total operating revenue						
All Chicago Removed	.996**		.110	.006	-.025	-.010
	.964**		.314**	-.142	-.106	-.068
Percent from local government						
All Chicago Removed	.105	.110		-.580**	-.519**	-.220**
	.288**	.314**		-.582**	-.519**	-.220**
Percent from state government						
All Chicago Removed	.012	.006	-.580**		.297**	.166*
	-.118	-.142	-.582**		.297**	.166*
Percent from federal government						
All Chicago Removed	-.024	-.025	-.519**	.297**		.085
	-.099	-.106	-.519**	.297**		.166*
Percent from friends or foundations						
All Chicago Removed	-.013	-.010	-.220**	.166*	.085	
	-.075	-.068	-.220**	.166*	.085	

N = 170 when all libraries with friends groups or foundations are included; N = 169 when Chicago is removed. Pearson correlations are reported. *** $p < .001$; ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$.

suggest that those who seek other governmental funds are also more aggressive in their pursuit of philanthropic donations? Moreover, this may also imply that donors may be less inclined to give to their local library when they perceive they have already "done their part" via taxation. This may also explain the discrepancy among Cook and collar counties, which have a higher property tax

Table 5: Percentage of Libraries with Friends Groups or Foundations

	Percentage of Libraries with Friends Groups or Foundations
Cook County	38%
Collar Counties	64%
All Other Counties	18%

burden on average than any of the other counties in the state. It could be that at the local level, donations are crowded out by governmental support; yet, when citizens are not as close to the source of government funding (i.e., state and federal), there is a crowding in phenomenon.

Hypothesis #4: The majority of public libraries have nonprofit fundraising organizations associated with the public library.

The dataset then revealed how many public libraries have nonprofit fundraising organizations, which varies by geographic location (see Table 5). The highest percentage of libraries with associated nonprofit organizations are located in the collar counties (i.e., the suburbs). Most libraries outside of the urban and suburban areas do not have a nonprofit group attached to them.

Our results indicate that as the percentage of operating revenue from local government decreases, reliance on philanthropic funding sources increases ($p<.01$). Therefore, if libraries are not receiving adequate funding from government sources via taxation, then they must supplement that revenue from other revenue streams. Urban libraries are the most reliant on local government support for their funding (93.2 percent of their operating budget derives from local government support, on average), as shown in Table 3. Suburban libraries are almost exclusively supported by government revenue (92.9 percent), but they also have the largest percentage of libraries with nonprofit organizations attached (64 percent). This enviable position suggests that libraries in the collar counties have both solid government support and access to philanthropic dollars from their affiliated nonprofit organization. Yet, it is important to restate that libraries outside of Cook and the collar counties are most reliant upon philanthropic dollars as a percentage of their operating budget.

Hypothesis #5: The majority of public libraries are fundraising to diversify their revenue.

To test this hypothesis, we used the results of the Illinois Library Director Survey (N=117). Nearly 70 percent of library directors spent less than ten percent of their time on any fundraising responsibilities. Three-quarters (75.2 percent) of all libraries do not have anyone else on staff involved with fundraising responsibilities, either as their main job or part of their job functions. Of those libraries that do have other staff responsible for fundraising, 46 percent spend less than 10 percent of their time on fundraising functions.

With regard to library board members, they tend to get involved in large capital campaign fundraising for the library, but there is much less involvement with ongoing fundraising related to fulfilling operational needs. One director admitted that the library's board was not involved at

all "with the exception of a couple of trustees who are also involved with our Friends of the Library group."
In terms of types of support beyond local government taxes, libraries are most likely to pursue donations from individuals (85.7 percent) and state funding (82.1 percent). Some libraries do not pursue other funding sources because of capacity issues. One respondent replied, "I am the only full-time employee. We have one part-time employee who works 15 hours per week. There is not enough time to pursue most of the fundraising sources mentioned." Respondents like this are not alone in their focus on providing core library services. Other survey respondents indicated that libraries themselves are also not generally eligible for many grants because they are public entities, so they may use their nonprofit friends group as a way of applying for grants only available to nonprofit organizations. There is also the perception that since the library is already funded by taxes, they may be less competitive for grants. But this perception may also be due to "The fact that [libraries] are supported by property tax which is unpopular in general, and [their] limited donor pool which consists of only local residents who are heavily solicited by numerous local organizations." The local community is a competitive environment for philanthropic dollars, making it challenging for public entities to solicit donations in a context that puts them in direct competition with other community nonprofit organizations who may receive no direct government support.

Conclusions

This project resulted in the creation of a new dataset that was built by merging the Public Libraries Survey with financial data from Guidestar. While this dataset could be substantially bolstered by collecting historic financial data and combining it with previous Public Libraries Survey results, we believe it lays the foundation for future scholarly research. Additionally, this project has identified geography as a significant factor when studying philanthropic support of public entities such as libraries. We believe these benefits outweigh some of the major limitations of the study, such as lack of generalizability (i.e., focused solely on Illinois libraries) and inclusiveness of friends groups and foundations (i.e., those that have not filed IRS 990 returns are not included in the analysis).

There are ample opportunities for future research on this topic. At a basic level, this study could be replicated in other states or shifted from libraries to other governmental entities such as public schools or park districts. Carrying out this work would serve to enrich the arguments put forth here and enhance external validity. By collecting additional data such as tax rates and community demographics (e.g., education levels, percentage of households with children, etc.), it might be possible to better understand how charitable giving to the public sector varies depending on community characteristics. There is also an opportunity to explore whether community members place more trust in nonprofits than governmental entities, and whether or not this plays a role in their decision to donate to public sector organizations. Furthermore, future study could examine if nonprofit organizations perceive philanthropy to local government as either a threat or a new reality in the competition for charitable donations.

This research offers several insights for scholars, practitioners, and policy makers into the ever-changing relationship between local government and the nonprofit community. For practitioners, the evidence here may be useful for public library directors and library boards as they plan, organize, and implement fundraising campaigns on their own, or utilize nonprofit organizations affiliated with the library. Libraries outside of Cook and the collar counties may want to consider creating a friends or foundation group if they do not already have one, and place a strategic emphasis on raising philanthropic funds.

For local government officials, this research suggests that they may need to consider (or reconsider) the role of nonprofit affiliated organizations for public libraries, and determine the optimal balance between taxation and donations to maintain a public good. Should public libraries be saddled with all the tasks associated with library administration and service provision, as well as fundraising tasks (either in-house or in partnership with a nonprofit organization)? Will this emphasis on fundraising detract from their mission of education, literacy, and public programming? Is fundraising part of the new normal for public entities who can no longer afford to go it alone without the assistance of nonprofit organizations and philanthropic dollars? Only time will tell if the experiences outside of Chicago and the collar counties will become a larger consideration for those public libraries that are closer to the urban core of Illinois. Beyond libraries, the findings uncovered here may be applicable to other public sector organizations such as park districts and public schools. Future research is necessary to understand if this is the case, whether geographic location has a similar influence, and how other public agencies seek out and secure philanthropic donations.

For nonprofit organizations, government has traditionally served as a funding source. Very little has been written about nonprofits supporting government. But, as this research has shown, public sector organizations are competing with nonprofits for philanthropic support, deciding to attract donations over taxation.

Although this article explores the extent to which public libraries are dependent on government funding and philanthropy, we are left with a larger normative question which is: Should governments be financially supporting public services, like those offered by libraries, at 100 percent funding levels? This is a public policy issue and resolution of this query is heavily dependent on the public's support for taxes (typically quite low) and the value that public libraries can demonstrate in this digital age. In light of this pressure, public libraries have already turned to philanthropy to sustain or grow operations either internally or by creating a nonprofit fundraising arm. Although publicly created and publicly funded, public libraries are no longer entirely dependent on public funds, and therefore, in order to survive, they must turn to other revenue streams with philanthropy being the most obvious. This is supported by the resource-dependency theory which suggests as public funds for libraries decrease, other funds are needed to shore up resources. Further, the principal-agent theory suggests that libraries benefit from public funding, but the nonprofit fundraising arms used to obtain this funding simply act as agents of government, in this case, raising funds that are not allocated through taxation.

The tide is turning, but we do not know how prevalent the notion of donation over taxation has become. Will there be a day when public libraries are more dependent on private funds than public funds? This is a cautionary tale.

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Appendix: Description of Variables

LOCGVT	Operating revenue from local government
STGVT	Operating revenue from state government
FEDGVT	Operating revenue from federal government
OTHINCM	Other operating revenue (i.e. revenue not included in LOCGVT, STGVT, and FEDGVT)
TOTINCM	Total operating revenue (i.e. sum of LOCGVT, STGVT, FEDGVT, and OTHINCM)
TOTSTAFF	Total paid full time equivalent (FTE) employees
FRIENDSFOUND	Whether or not library has an associated friends group or foundation
PERFFINCOME	Percentage of operating income derived from friends group or foundation
CNTY_TYPE	Classification of Illinois counties (i.e. Cook County, Collar Counties, All other counties in Illinois)

Nailing Shut the Policy Window: The Policy Evolution of America's First Urban School Voucher Program

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This article describes the origins and evolution of the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program, arguing that voucher policy in Milwaukee continues to exist long after the policy window that enabled its creation closed. The author, using the framework of public policy windows, concludes that under certain conditions untested policy initiatives can lead to policy paralysis. The study is of interest to legislators considering new and untested policy initiatives, program evaluators, and scholars interested in the history of school voucher policy.

John W. Kingdon (1995) defined policy windows as "opportunities for actions on given initiatives" (166). Under Kingdon's framework, a set of circumstances and actors coalesce to turn a public policy idea into a reality. It was the opening of a policy window in Milwaukee that enabled the creation of the first urban private school voucher program in the United States (Percy & Maier, 1996). However, the circumstances that made a free-market based voucher policy a viable approach to solving Milwaukee's educational challenges, as will be demonstrated in this article, now cease to exist despite the ongoing struggles of Milwaukee's education system. In 1990, the city of Milwaukee was the epicenter of education reform in the United States, but today, even articles declaring that school vouchers are dead make only cursory mention of Milwaukee (Rapoport, 2013). Yet, the Milwaukee school voucher program still exists, and it is large. In 2013, total Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (MPCP) enrollment was over 25,000, meaning the Milwaukee voucher program enrolled more students than all Wisconsin school districts except the Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS) (Kava, 2013). In total, about 21% Milwaukee students receiving a publicly funded education in Milwaukee are doing so via the MPCP.

This article takes a case study approach using the case of the MPCP to argue that under certain circumstances, public policies can exist long after the policy windows that enabled their creation closed, which leads to a policy paralysis and inability to address an ongoing public policy concern. Specifically, the author answers the question, "What happens when a policy window closes. But the policy itself cannot be eliminated for pragmatic reasons?" by:

1) Providing background on the MPCP;
2) Presenting a historical account of the origins of the Milwaukee voucher program;
3) Explaining how and why the policy window for voucher reform as a viable approach to Milwaukee's educational struggles closed;
4) Explaining why voucher policy in Milwaukee outlived the existence of the policy window that first enabled its creation; and,
5) Analyzing the repercussions of the policy paralysis regarding the educational challenges facing Milwaukee.

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What is the MPCP?

In its most technical definition, the MPCP is a state program that allows Milwaukee students from families with household incomes at or below 300% of the federal poverty level to attend a qualifying private school at state expense (Kava, 2013). Qualifying schools are those that choose to participate, agree to accept students via random selection, receive accreditation from an entity approved in the Wisconsin state statutes, agree to accept the maximum voucher amount as full payment, and meet a variety of other fiscal and academic criteria (Kava, 2013). However, in reality, the MPCP is, and always has been, different things to different audiences. This is a key point, as the MPCP was always more complex than a policy response to poor academic performance.

MPCP as Education Reform

Before the program began, the MPCP was heralded as an education reform designed to improve academic outcomes. Then President George H.W. Bush spoke of the academic potential of the MPCP, stating: "When schools compete to attract students, that can't help but to improve education" (Ahlgren, 1990). A state mandated academic evaluation conducted over the first five years of the program's existence, as well as a more recent five-year study completed in 2011, support the claim that the MPCP is designed to be a program that improves academic outcomes (Witte et al, 2012). In fact, in 2013, the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI), which oversees the operation of the MPCP, advocated against expanding the program on the grounds that it does not improve academic achievement (DPI, 2013). This position spurred strong reaction among advocates of school choice in Milwaukee, who claimed that the program does in fact improve academic outcomes (School Choice Wisconsin (SCW), 2013). Whether or not the Milwaukee voucher program is improving outcomes at a level that justifies its existence is debatable.

Lubienski et al. (2009) concluded there is no consensus on the effects of voucher policy in Milwaukee or elsewhere. The argument of Powers & Cookson, Jr. (1999), that politics make untangling school voucher research uniquely difficult, have proved true. Despite studies finding slight reading gains and graduation rate advantages for voucher users (Cowen et al., 2013), it is clear that after over two decades of voucher policy, Milwaukee students are still struggling academically (Andersson & Ford, 2014). On aggregate, Milwaukee children trail most of their big city peers on the Trial Urban National Assessment of Educational Progress (National Center for Education Statistics, 2011). Despite the lack of consensus on the academic effects of the MPCP, the willingness of supporters and opponents alike to point to academic data when making their case illustrates that the MPCP is designed, in part, to be an education reform.

MPCP as Cost-Savings

The MPCP can also accurately be described as a cost saving reform. Robert Costrell (2011) concluded that the MPCP saves Wisconsin taxpayers over $50 million annually. Because the maximum voucher amount is considerably less than the combined state and local support for students in MPS, state taxpayers send less education dollars to Milwaukee when a student who otherwise would have attended MPS uses the MPCP. The positive statewide financial impact of the MPCP is a reason Republican legislators representing districts nowhere near Milwaukee have consistently supported the MPCP (Witte, 2000; Richards, 2014). Throughout the MPCP's history, the political debate over the MPCP was driven partly by fiscal issues unrelated to the academic effects of the voucher program (Costrell, 2011). The prominent role of cost savings in the policy debate suggests that Percy and Maier's (1996) argument that vouchers are a form of privatization less premised on public cost savings, did not play out in reality. As more evidence surfaces that the aggregate academic effects of the MPCP are modest at best, pro-voucher arguments

increasingly focus on the increased efficiency of the MPCP, (i.e., the same outcomes for a lower cost) (Carlson, Cowen, & Fleming, 2013; Cowen et al., 2013). Whether this is a bait and switch among program advocates, or a wise policy evaluation criterion, it is evidence that the success or failure of voucher policy is, in the political discourse, tied to the issue of cost savings.

MPCP as Entitlement

The MPCP has also been described as an entitlement program. Though the MPCP began as an experiment where parents directed funds to private schools, over its existence, it has evolved into an alternative form of public education for Milwaukee students. The high degree of switching between MPCP and MPS schools, in addition to the similar demographic and aggregate performance profiles of the two groups, suggest that Milwaukee school consumers view both sectors in much the same way (Witte et al., 2012; Howell, 2013). A 2013 letter from the United States Department of Justice to DPI formalized the viewpoint that MPCP schools are actually public institutions by advising that schools in the program be treated like public schools in regard to tracking the enrollment of, and services provided to, participating special needs pupils (Bhargava, Wohlenhaus & Fischbach, 2013).

Public, private, or somewhere in between, the MPCP is a significant provider of publicly funded education to a primarily minority low income slice of Milwaukee students. Parents whose children use vouchers report high levels of satisfaction with the MPCP, despite its documented performance shortcomings (Teske, Fitzpatrick, & Kaplan, 2007). The heated political battles over the MPCP, fueled in part by program parents, are further evidence that the MPCP is a large and important entitlement program to many Milwaukee families.

MPCP as Politics

The MPCP was borne of an awkward and short-lived alliance between African American Democrats and white Republicans (Witte, 2000; Dougherty, 2004). Today, the school choice lobby in Wisconsin boasts three former speakers of the state assembly, and is on par in influence with the state teachers union (Lueders, 2011). It follows that the program has, since its creation, been a political football (Staff, 1998). At the height of its functioning, the MPCP serves as a vehicle for dueling political groups to project their deepest suspicions of true intent upon one another.

Public policies are responses to problems, and while the development of voucher policy in Milwaukee indicated dissatisfaction with the city's current public school system, there was (and still is) a lack of consensus on what specific problem the MPCP was designed to solve (Lindblom, 1959; Cohen, March, & Olsen, 1972; Kingdon, 1995). If the MPCP is so many things to so many different people, how can the overall value of the program objectively be evaluated, and how can shortcomings of voucher policy be addressed by new or changed public policies? To answer this question, it is necessary first to look back in a historical account of the opening of the policy window for vouchers in Milwaukee.

Opening the Policy Window for the MPCP

As previously stated, policy windows open when a set of circumstances and actors come together to provide an opportunity to address a public concern with a new public policy (Kingdon, 1995). It was a set of changing circumstances in Wisconsin that led to the June 8, 1990 signing of Wisconsin Assembly Bill 25 by Wisconsin Governor Tommy Thompson (Witte, 2000). That bill, a budget adjustment bill, created a capped voucher program for nonsectarian schools. Its passage signified both a new era for public education in Milwaukee, and the end of a process that opened the policy window for Milwaukee's voucher policy.

Milton Friedman is credited with first proposing the use of school vouchers in a 1955 book chapter (Friedman, 1955). Friedman argued that private markets are better positioned to regulate the delivery of public education than government oversight. For years, Friedman's theory had not been put to any real-world test. In Milwaukee, however, a series of events in the decades prior to the implementation of any school voucher programs in the United States opened the policy window, allowing Friedman's theory to be turned into a reality. One of those events was the long-simmering legal battle over segregation in MPS. That battle, led by Milwaukee attorney Lloyd Barbee, resulted in the creation of Wisconsin's Chapter 220 voluntary racial busing plan, and laid the groundwork for African American support of the original MPCP (Dougherty, 2004). But the perfect storm enabling vouchers was more than the events enabling the interracial alliance supporting the program's creation.

Frustration over the ability of MPS to reform from within played a key role in making an outside reform like school vouchers a realistic possibility for Milwaukee. A 1975 account of an effort by a University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee education expert to work with MPS reveals the huge disconnect between the MPS board and outsiders at the time. The expert, Robert Ingle, proposed that each MPS board member list "the seven most pressing problems in the school system." The simple proposal degraded into "almost an hour of bickering and arguing among the board members" which prompted Ingle to leave the meeting (Editorial Board, 1975). Additional accounts from Milwaukee newspaper archives reveal that conflict between board members and between board members and the superintendent was commonplace in the early 1980s (Bednarek, 1980; Hurley, 1980). The editorial board of the Milwaukee Journal frequently chided the MPS board, using descriptions such as "schizophrenic" and "bitterly divided" (Editorial Board, 1984; Editorial Board, 1986).

Equally evident in the journalistic accounts of MPS in the 1980s was a growing frustration with the academic performance of Milwaukee students. The initial frustration with MPS came not just from the low levels of achievement in the district, but also from an attempt by the district administration to hide its struggles. A 1980 analysis of reading scores in the Milwaukee Sentinel found that, contrary to MPS claims, the district was performing well below national averages (Staff, 1980). Though then MPS superintendent Lee McMurrin slammed the paper's reporting, the episode spelled the end of the district's practice of placing its students' performance into the three vague categories of above average, average, and below average (Samuels, 1980).

In the following years, the Milwaukee Sentinel editorialized about MPS under headlines calling MPS' failures "appalling," and placing blame on individual schools for "refusing to challenge students" (Editorial Board, 1981; Editorial Board, 1982). The middle of the decade brought accounts of increased programming, bold plans, and efforts such as decreasing class sizes to improve achievement in Milwaukee (Stanford, 1985). By the late 1980s, a noticeable shift away from internal MPS reform plans, and towards non-MPS solutions to Milwaukee's education struggles occurred. In 1987, activist Howard Fuller, along with State Representatives Polly Williams and Spencer Coggs, led the charge to create a new school district on the north side of Milwaukee centered around the mostly African American North Division High School (Bendarek, 1987). Though that specific effort failed, it was a precursor to a defeated voucher proposal in 1988, and the eventual successful passage of the bill creating the MPCP (Witte, 2000). Also important to the development of the MPCP was the presence of the Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation in the City of Milwaukee. The foundation, a strong supporter of conservative causes like school choice, was well positioned to provide the infrastructure necessary to support a burgeoning school choice movement in its own backyard.

The frustration over low academic achievement, the public perception of a school district unable to reform itself, the long-simmering perceived alienation of Milwaukee's African American community from a non-responsive MPS bureaucracy, and a willing set of strong personalities like Governor Tommy Thompson, Howard Fuller, Polly Williams, and State Senator Gary George, combined to make Friedman's theoretical policy idea a palatable policy option (Dougherty, 2004; Kingdon, 1995). No less important to the enactment of the MPCP was the influence of program design. The limited scope of Milwaukee's initial voucher program, described as a pilot program, also contributed to its passage (Witte, 2000). The original MPCP was:

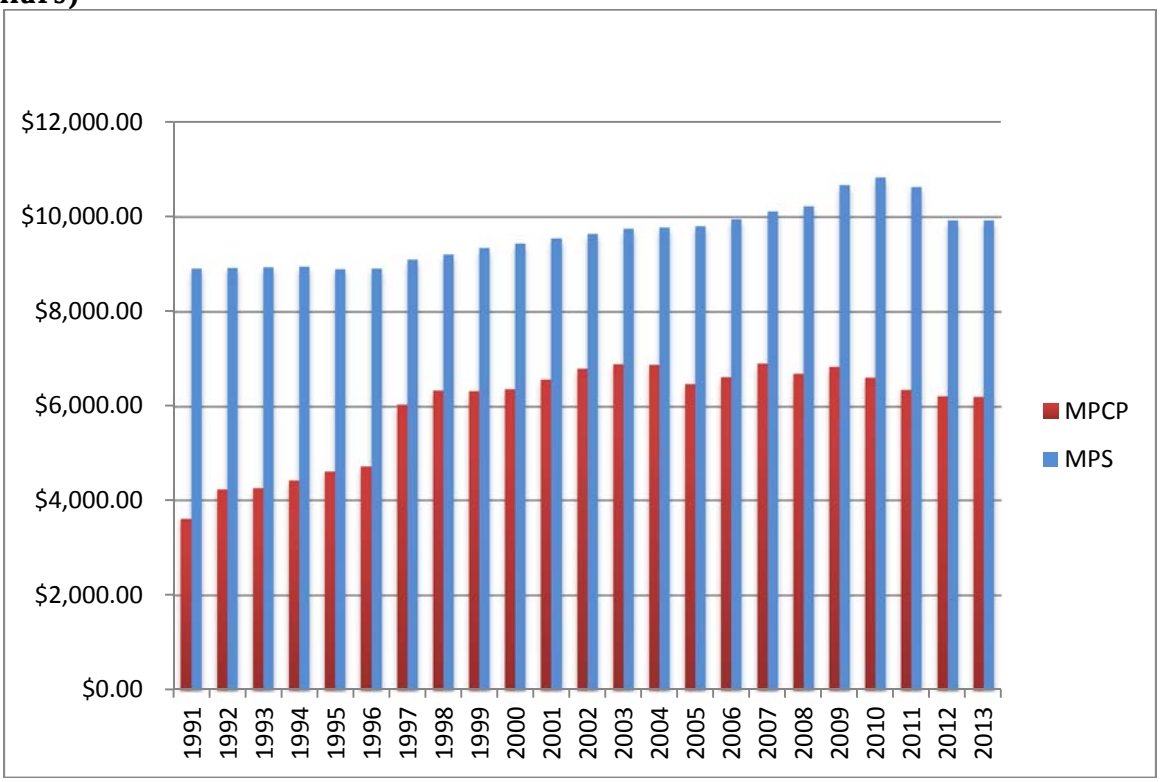
- Capped at 1% of MPS enrollment, which in 1990 meant no more than about 920 pupils could use the program;
- Restricted to families with household incomes at or below 175% of the federal poverty level;
- Restricted to schools enrolling at least 51% tuition-paying pupils;
- Limited to students currently in public schools or new to school; and,
- Limited to nonsectarian schools.

These limitations ensured that the MPCP would not be a significant threat to MPS' market share. Though the program was new, legislators could accurately describe the program as an experiment rather than a significant policy shift. The inclusion of a state-mandated program evaluation furthered the ability for tepid supporters to frame their initial support as a simple willingness to try to something new. But over the next twenty years, the reality on the ground shifted considerably. The size, scope, regulation, support, and critiques of the program grew to the point where today. The MPCP has become a part of the status quo of public education in the city of Milwaukee.

Closing the Policy Window

That the MPCP ever became law is somewhat remarkable. Twenty-five years later, only a handful of urban areas in the United States have a private school voucher program, and none approach the scope and size of the MPCP. Indeed, at its inception the MPCP was revolutionary. It was new, trendy among policy wonks and media, and held great promise as a "disruptive innovation," i.e., an education reform that can disrupt a long-entrenched education system decades before the term "disruptive education" was popularized (Christensen et al., 2008). Much of the initial excitement surrounding the introduction of voucher policy in Milwaukee was driven by the near universal promise of school vouchers. Any new public policy contains potential downsides such as high startup costs, implementation challenges, regulatory difficulties, etc. (Kingdon, 1995). But, the MPCP appeared to be all upside. At the time of passage, it was mostly taken for granted that the private schools in the MPCP would outperform public schools in Milwaukee (Chubb & Moe, 1990; Witte, 2000). Even skeptics arguing that private schools might cream the best students or not adequately represent civic values did not question the expected achievement advantage for private schools (Witte, 2000). Proponents argued that the new program would not only not harm public schools, but force them to improve through market competition. This point of view was reinforced by John Chubb and Terry Moe's influential book, Politics, Markets, and America's Schools, released near the time of the MPCP's enactment (Chubb & Moe, 1990). The basic idea was that districts could no longer afford to be complacent with low income parents. If parents were not satisfied with their current public schools, they could use a voucher to attend a private school at state expense. MPS would inevitably respond to the loss of market share by responding to parental needs and improving their quality of instruction. Thus, vouchers were not just a mechanism to give low income pupils more opportunity, they were a way to improve public schools without wading too deeply in the morass of classroom level reforms.

Figure 1. MPCP Per-Pupil Payment and MPS Per-Pupil State and Local Cost (2013 Dollars)



And cost? The MPCP in 1991 cost Wisconsin taxpayers $2,446 per pupil, far less than the $5,748 per pupil cost of a MPS pupil (Greene, Peterson, & Du, 1999; Kava, 2013). Meaning, each time a student attended a private school via a voucher instead of MPS, advocates could claim a $3,302 savings to state of Wisconsin taxpayers. As can be seen in Figure One, the comparative state and local cost of the MPCP has consistently been well below that of the MPCP (Costrell, 2009). The task of regulating the new program also promised to be far less complicated than the high level of oversight of Wisconsin public schools. Though the original MPCP did require schools to meet one of four chosen accountability objectives in the areas of parental involvement, attendance, academic progress and grade level advancement, the program promised a new market-based approach to school regulation (Witte, 2000; Kava, 2013). It was assumed parents would not send their children to low-performing schools, so little need was seen for expansive input regulations. In all, the MPCP was thought to be a true panacea for urban education.

It did not take long for the reality of the challenges of urban education to collide head on with the expectations of the most fervent free market education advocates. The first official evaluation of the MPCP, released in November 1991, found that students using vouchers did not outperform MPS pupils. The evaluation's author, John Witte, wrote: "This program is not now, nor probably will it ever be, the answer for the extensive and complex problems associated with providing a quality education for Milwaukee children" (Ahlgren, 1991B; Witte, 1991). Further, DPI released statistics showing that 155 of the 259 pupils who used the MPCP for the entirety of its first year of operation were no longer using it in its second (Ahlgren, 1991A). But despite the high program attrition, overall enrollment in the program increased to 521. The high rate of program turnover, and underwhelming effects on academic achievement identified in the first year of the MPCP, poked holes in some of the initial premises of the program, and also foreshadowed much of the

program's future. First, Witte's finding revealed that a higher rate of performance in Milwaukee private schools was no sure thing. Like public schools, private schools could offer a range of quality, and were not insulated from the factors contributing to low achievement in MPS. Second, the high rate of attrition combined with increasing enrollment undermined the pure market principles on which the MPCP was based. It could not be assumed that the free market could adequately regulate private schools if schools had a steady pool of new customers to replace the majority of dissatisfied customers. This situation suggested that some parents were making decisions based on frustrations with their current environment rather than enthusiasm for their chosen private school.

Under this backdrop, the MPCP experienced its first school closure when the Juanita Virgil Academy declared bankruptcy and folded in the middle of the 1990-1991 school year (Witte, 2000). This occurrence, too, foreshadowed the many MPCP school closures that would occur over the next two decades (Ford, 2011). Though the failure of some businesses is to be expected in a functioning marketplace, the disruption caused by the failure of a publicly funded school in the middle of the year was not seriously considered before it actually happened in 1991.

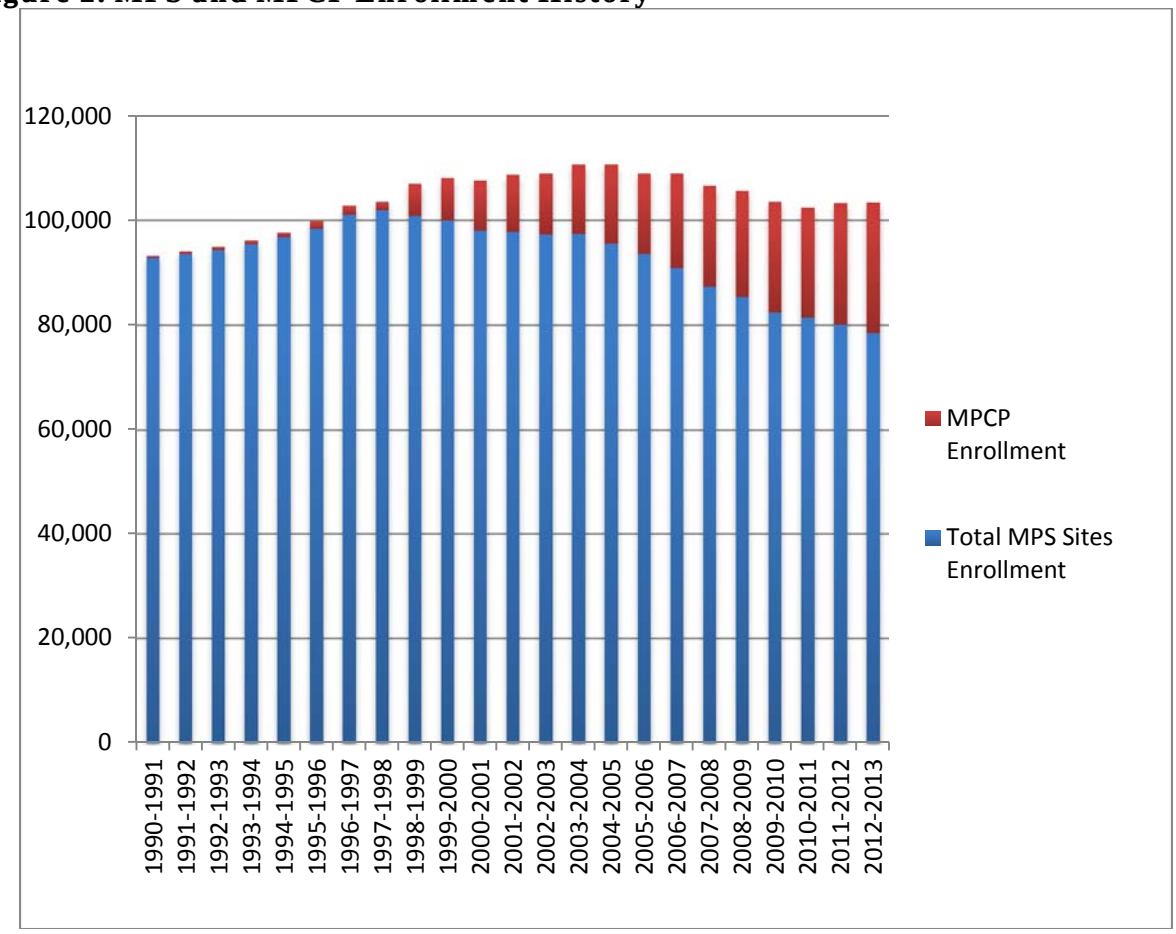
Lower than hoped for achievement, a closed school, high student attrition, low overall enrollment, a lawsuit, and constant political battling, made the first two years of the MPCP a less than ideal policy experiment. Though there were bright spots, including high levels of parental satisfaction, the initial implementation of the MPCP was a messy affair that killed off any illusions of it being a silver bullet for urban education. The alliance between white Republicans and African American Democrats eroded quickly, with key supporters such as Representative Annette Williams withdrawing their support for the program (Witte, 2000; Dougherty, 2004). By 1995, the conditions that led to the creation of the MPCP, including the hope that it could serve as a panacea for Milwaukee's education struggles, had disappeared.

However, voucher policy continued to exist, and evolve, after the policy window first enabling its enactment had closed. The closing of the policy window for the MPCP was, and still is, problematic. Despite the diversity of hopes and expectations for the MPCP, various interest groups and audiences at the time of its inception were, at the very least, united in their belief that the program should exist, and could be a vehicle to solve various policy woes. The collapse of the alliances leading to the original MPCP splintered its original supporters into camps with differing views on program regulation, size, structure, and even existence. To put it another way, rather than working collectively to make the MPCP work in a fashion that addresses an unsatisfactory education status quo, its original supporters began to work at odds with one another in ways that, as will be described in the following section, ensured the continuation of the unsatisfactory education status quo.

Why the MPCP Outlived its Policy Window

The elimination of the conditions that first opened the policy window for vouchers in Milwaukee was not enough to open the new policy window necessary for legislative action ending the MPCP. That window was nailed shut by several factors. The first was growing enrollment. The Wisconsin State Supreme Court ruled in 1998 that religious schools could participate in the MPCP (Witte, 2000). As can be seen in Figure Two, MPCP enrollment greatly increased after religious schools were first allowed to participate. The number of schools accepting vouchers more than doubled, from 23 to 83. This large increase in enrollment created a facts-on-the-ground argument against eliminating the MPCP; it was difficult for legislators to support outright eliminating the MPCP because doing so would disrupt the lives of thousands of their constituents.

Figure 2. MPS and MPCP Enrollment History



The second factor that allowed the program to grow and evolve after the closing of the initial policy window was politics. The MPCP is heavily supported by Republican legislators who, aside from the years 2009 to 2011, controlled at least one branch of Wisconsin government, and were thus able to block any proposal to eliminate the MPCP (LRB, 2014). The MPCP's place as the first urban voucher program also created a strong local and national advocacy movement that made the Wisconsin school choice lobby one of the most powerful actors in Wisconsin politics (Lueders, 2011; Associated Press, 2014). Today, the school choice lobby is influential in supporting conservative politicians in elections all across Wisconsin, and engages in issue advertising unrelated to education (Lueders, 2011). The importance of the Wisconsin school choice lobby to Wisconsin's Republican political infrastructure continues to help protect the MPCP from possible elimination.

The third factor was the voucher program's popularity with parents. Enrollment in the MPCP has grown steadily over time, and surveys of participating parents shows a high level of satisfaction with the voucher program (Teske, Fitzpatrick & Kaplan, 2007; Witte et al., 2008; Kava, 2013). Focus groups of Milwaukee parents in both voucher schools and MPS revealed that Milwaukee parents in general see both the MPCP and MPS as viable schooling options for their children (Carlson, Cowen, & Fleming, 2013; Howell, 2013). The MPCP's popularity with parents ensured that efforts to eliminate the MPCP would be met with significant backlash.

Only once in MPCP's history did a policy window for eliminating vouchers appear to open. In 2009, Democrats generally opposed to the MPCP, took control of all three branches of Wisconsin government (LRB, 2014). Both school choice advocates and opponents in Wisconsin predicted the MPCP would be targeted for elimination in the 2009-2011 biennial Wisconsin budget (Miner, 2009). A coalition led by activist Howard Fuller and several school leaders, however, worked with Milwaukee State Senator Lena Taylor and others to develop a set of proposals they hoped would protect the program from elimination (Miner, 2009). The efforts were successful. The 2009-2011 Wisconsin state budget increased the regulatory and accountability requirements for participating schools, but did not eliminate the MPCP.

As of 2014, Republicans supportive of school choice control all three branches of Wisconsin government which, combined with the factors discussed in the previous paragraphs, makes it unlikely that a policy window enabling the elimination of vouchers will open again in the foreseeable future (LRB, 2014). Instead, as will be demonstrated in the following section, Milwaukee's education policy finds itself in a state of paralysis because the policy window enabling decisive legislative action on the MPCP closed, despite the program's failure to solve the various issues that spurred its creation. Today, the MPCP and MPS face similar challenges, and similarly few prospects for addressing them.

Policy Evolution, and Paralysis

It has been demonstrated that the policy window enabling the MPCP closed shortly after the program's inception, and that a new policy window for eliminating the MPCP has not yet, and is unlikely in the near future, to open. Because of this situation, Milwaukee's voucher program has evolved incrementally from a dramatic free-market-based reform, to a system that mirrors Milwaukee's traditional public school sector (Lindblom, 1959). The policy evolution began in 2003 in response to the stories of two troubled schools: Mandella Academy and Alex's Academics of Excellence. Both schools had well-documented deficiencies (including one with a convicted rapist as the principal); however, DPI lacked statutory authority to close either school. The crisis resulted in 2003 Act 155, which mandated that schools undergo an annual independent financial audit certified by an independent accountant, submit on occupancy permit to the state prior to opening, show financial viability, show evidence that the school's administrator underwent state financial training, and empowered the DPI Superintendent to cut off funding to a school "if he or she determines that conditions at the private school present an imminent threat to the health or safety of pupils" (Act 155, 2003).

The new law had a significant impact. DPI quickly closed both Alex's Academics of Excellence and Mandella Academy. Since its passage in 2003 and the year 2013, Act 155 was used to cut off public funding to 31 schools (DPI, 2013). Most important, with the enactment of Act 155, the idea that a market-based regulatory approach to the MPCP could be sufficient was permanently undermined.

The MPCP further evolved with the previously mentioned accountability and regulatory provisions enacted in the 2009-2011 biennial budget. Those provisions required that MPCP schools provide an array of written policies and transparency information to parents and DPI, namely, that all teachers in MPCP schools have college degrees, that all MPCP pupils take the Wisconsin Knowledge and Concepts Exam in the same grades and subjects as public school pupils, that test score results be released publicly by school, and this created a new pre-accreditation entity empowered to approve new schools. Aside from the notable exceptions of adherence to open records law and the possibility of sanctions under the federal No Child Left Behind Law, private schools in the MPCP are now regulated in a manner very similar to public

schools. The new pre-accreditation requirement in particular provided a barrier to program entry that killed any last illusions that the MPCP was still a market-based education policy.

In 1990 the MPCP was revolutionary. It held limitless potential to greatly improve academic outcomes in the city of Milwaukee. The potential envisioned in 1990 failed to materialize. Today's MPCP is not a free market experiment, but a well entrenched part of Milwaukee's K-12 status quo. The MPCP enrolls about 21% of Milwaukee's publicly funded students, is open to most Milwaukee children, and parents and policy makers can access the policies and test scores of both MPS and MPCP schools. MPCP schools, like those of MPS, are serving a primarily low income minority population. Most important, achievement levels for students in the voucher program are almost identical to MPS (Cowen et al., 2013). Both the results of a five-year longitudinal study of the program and the release of school level results of the Wisconsin Knowledge and Concepts Exams indicate a program producing academic outcomes very similar to MPS (Witte et al., 2012). Like MPS, there are several outlier MPCP schools with extremely high levels of achievement, but also like MPS, most schools educate students with achievement levels well below state averages.

The modern MPCP is a decentralized parallel system of public education with aggregate challenges, needs, and outcomes similar to the traditional public school system it was created to reform. Policy makers in Milwaukee and Wisconsin face a policy paralysis--neither eliminating nor expanding the voucher program is likely to have an impact on the overall academic performance of Milwaukee pupils. Instead, policy makers are faced with the difficult task of improving both MPS, as well as the parallel system of the MPCP.

Conclusion

John Kingdon (1995) concluded that policy windows close when advocates feel an idea does not solve their problem, supporters run out of steam, turnover in political leadership occurs, or a crisis ceases to exist. The presented case of the MPCP demonstrates how public policies can exist and evolve long after the policy window that enabled their creation has closed. Simply, the MPCP did not dramatically change the unacceptable status quo defined by various audiences at the time of its creation, but its creation nonetheless nailed shut the policy window that might lead to its elimination. Thus, there are several lessons from the Milwaukee voucher experience. First, public policy concepts can have life cycles independent of actual public policy programs. Vouchers still may exist in Milwaukee, but the voucher policy enacted in 1990 does not. Second, policy initiatives without clearly articulated goals and accepted methods of measuring those goals are likely to evolve at the whim of legislators and public opinion. The changes to voucher policy in Milwaukee have all been incremental and driven by the political realities of the moment. Third, under certain conditions, the survival of a policy after the closing of a policy window can lead to policy paralysis. But what are those conditions?

First, the MPCP was ambitious. Early voucher policy entrepreneurs saw the MPCP as a panacea for the struggles of urban education. Second, the goals of voucher policy in Milwaukee varied, depending on the audience. Third, voucher policy was new and untested, making it impossible to learn from previous experiments. Fourth, the MPCP was, and still is, a highly politicized public policy. Lastly, the MPCP directly impacts the lives of thousands of families, making it a policy that is likely to elicit strong emotions. The author cautions that the experience of the MPCP is just a single case. However, the conditions surrounding the enactment and evolution of voucher policy in Milwaukee are nonetheless instructive for identifying potential characteristics of public policies at risk for paralysis. Ambitious public policies that elicit emotions among citizens, that are experimental, highly politicized, and that are borne of diverse fleeting coalitions may become,

as the MPCP demonstrates, entrenched and polarizing, even if they are ineffective or underwhelming in obtaining their original goals.

Today, Milwaukee's education system struggles much like it did in 1990, yet, the possibility of constructive reform to address the struggles of both MPS and the MPCP is all but impossible. The policy window for bold collective education reform in Milwaukee has been effectively nailed shut. Hence, there are no easy answers for fixing Milwaukee's struggling and complex publicly funded education system. The parallel education systems are likely to continue in their current form, with limited aggregate academic improvement for Milwaukee pupils. However, the Milwaukee experience does provide lessons for policy makers considering policies under conditions similar to the policy window that enabled the MPCP. First, the goals of new untested policies should be clearly articulated at the time of their passage. Second, policy sunset provisions attached to clearly articulated goals should be included in untested policy initiatives. Third, and most important, policy makers must consider the role that facts on the ground realities (such as large program enrollment and politics) play in complicating actionable program evaluations. The MPCP demonstrates how rational, evidence-based policy making becomes more difficult when certain conditions are met. Further research on the experience of other similar education policies can strengthen the conclusions of this study by exploring in other similar settings what happens when public policy initiatives outlast the complex and unique set of conditions that first led to their creation.

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Understanding Nonprofit Collaborations: A Case Study of Communities in Schools of North Texas and its Partner Organizations

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The purpose of this study is to understand and categorize the diverse forms of collaborations, and explore the challenges of cross sector collaborations. To achieve these purposes, we analyze documentation of 132 collaborative partnerships of Communities in School of North Texas (CISNT), and conduct interviews with select partners of CISNT. Our results suggest that the nature of collaborations vary. Partnerships tend to be informal and resource sharing. The findings further indicate that nonprofits face challenges in the collaborative process including management of accountability and interorganizational communication.

Introduction

Collaboration in the nonprofit world is vital but very complex. In today's networked world, collaboration is encouraged and often required for nonprofit organizations to achieve social change (Jang, Feiock, & Satgalina, 2014; Provan & Milward, 2001; Selden, Sowa, & Sandfort, 2006; Sowa, 2009). As part of the nature of the nonprofit sector, collaboration is often motivated by organizational benefits and the pursuit of more innovative ways to serve clients and the community. Potential benefits of nonprofit collaboration include the reduction in service provision costs through economies of scale or scope of services, and the improved service capacity as well as high status gained from working with more established actors (Podolny, 1993; Feiock & Jang, 2009; Jang, Feiock, & Saitgalina, 2014; Guo & Acar, 2005; Gazley, 2008, 2010).

Despite the substantive and symbolic benefits of collaboration, the extant research presents an abstract depiction of nonprofit collaboration by only examining why nonprofits collaborate, and provides a limited understanding of the collaborative processes. Formal contract based collaboration, for example, is mainly discussed in the nonprofit literature, yet not all collaborative arrangements take this form. In some instances, collaboration is organized on an ad-hoc basis to respond to the immediate needs of actors and then dissolved once the purpose of collaboration is achieved or goes dormant until the need of collaboration occurs again. In this case the collaboration remains informal in nature to minimize potential drawback of formal collaborations (Jang, Feiock, & Satgalina, 2014; Guo & Acar, 2005; Gazley, 2008, 2010).

The presumption that collaboration is always good and without its challenges has been questioned, and a growing body of research calls attention to the dark side of collaboration (Smith & Lipsky, 1993; Michell 2013; Fosler, 2002; Erman & Uhlin, 2010; Shaw, 2003; Batley, 2011; Guo, 2007; Bennett & Savani, 2011). The challenges of collaboration ranges from loss of autonomy, high uncertainty in service delivery and cash flow, and lack of accountability that may eventually result in a tainted reputation and mission drift. To make real the advantages of collaboration, it is important to understand diverse forms of collaborations and potential challenges that may occur in various dimensions of collaborative processes because the benefits of collaboration do not appear without effective management of collaborations (Agranoff & McGuire, 2003; Milward &

Jang, H. S., Valero, J., Kim, J. W., and Cramb, C. (2015). Understanding the Diverse Forms of Nonprofit Collaborations: A Case Study of Communities in Schools of North Texas and its Partner Organizations. *Journal of Public and Nonprofit Affairs* 1(2):100-117.

Provan, 2006; Linden 2010; Forrer, Kee, & Boyer, 2014). The purpose of this research then is to analyze and categorize the diverse forms of nonprofit collaborations, and explore the challenges that nonprofit organizations face in the collaboration process. To fulfill this research purpose, we conduct a case study of Communities in Schools of North Texas (CISNT)—a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization in the Dallas-Fort Worth area, Texas—and its partner organizations from the public, private, and nonprofit sectors. This paper proceeds as follows. First the nonprofit collaboration literature is presented and a theoretical understanding of challenges of collaboration is provided. Then the CISNT, the data case of this study is introduced. The review of 132 collaboration of CISNT is conducted and the findings from 10 interviews with partner agencies of CISNT is presented. Following a presentation of the findings, the theoretical and practical implications of the results are discussed.

Literature Review

Collaboration Process

Collaboration is a dynamic process by which two or more organizations work towards mutual goals that they would otherwise be unable to accomplish alone (McGuire, 2006; Gazley, 2010). Collaboration research has been traditionally focused on three areas: 1) antecedents of collaboration, 2) collaboration process, and 3) collaboration outcomes (Wood & Gray, 1991; Thomson & Perry, 2006). The collaborative process, however, remains largely understudied in the public management literature. Exploring the collaboration processes or the "doing" part of collaboration is important because it sheds light on *how* organizations work together to accomplish mutual goals and objectives as well as the challenges that they encounter in this collective effort. Thomson and Perry (2006) identify five dimensions of collaboration, which "together signify collective action" (24). These dimensions include: governance, administration, autonomy, mutuality, and social capital dimensions.

The governance dimension of collaboration process emphasizes communication or shared decision-making because organizations in a collaboration share responsibility for common goals. Interorganizational communication is important because it facilitates the building of trust among organizations in collaboration, which further results in mutual commitment to the collaboration process (Ostrom, 1998; Ansell & Gash, 2007). Milward and Provan (2006) similarly suggest that public managers functioning as network leaders must engage in the design of the network or governance structure by determining the governance structure that best fits the network, implementing the structure, and identifying when it's necessary to make modifications to the network's governance design (19). By identifying a governance structure, parties to collaboration have a way by which to reach decisions and govern their behavior. Generally, written agreements such as memoranda of understanding allow organizations in collaboration to enhance accountability because the document clarifies performance and roles in collaboration (Bardach & Lesser, 1996).

The administration dimension is closely linked to the governance dimensions because it emphasizes the implementation or management of the network (Thomson & Perry 2006). Even when functioning beyond organizational boundaries and into networked governance, there is a still a need to identify a way by which to administer the functions of the collaboration. Without proper administration of the collaborative, organizations may lack clear direction as well as clear roles and responsibilities. The administration of a network involves management of accountability to ensure partner organizations are held accountable for outputs, management of conflict to ensure all parties are on the same page, and the management of commitment so that partners are consistently engaged and active in the collaborative process (Milward & Provan,

2006). This is similar to what Ansell and Gash (2007) describe as "facilitative leadership," or collaborative leadership that stands ready to identify a network vision and maintain organizations engaged in collective action.

The autonomy dimension describes the process by which organizations reconcile individual self-interests and collective interests or the goals and objectives of the collaboration (Thomson & Perry, 2006). Here, organizations weigh the transaction costs and the risks associated with becoming part of a collaborative partnership, or what some scholars refer to as the "dark side" of collaboration (Gazley & Brudney, 2007). Jang and Feiock (2007), for example, find that the ability and inclinations of nonprofit organizations to collaborate with others is often dependent on their financial stakeholders. In other words, nonprofit organizations that are dependent on private income sources are less likely to collaborate because of the autonomy that such funding sources afford when compared to government funding, which often carries strings attached such as stringent reporting requirements (Smith & Lipsky, 1993).

The mutuality dimension, on the other hand, refers to the process by which organizations form mutually beneficial collaborative arrangements or relationships (Thomson & Perry 2006). Without organizations having a clear understanding of the benefits that they will derive from the collaboration process and their interdependence in being able to achieve a common vision, effective collaboration may not be possible because of the lack of commitment and motivation that may ensue (Ansell & Gash, 2007). In order words, there must be a realization among organizations in collaboration that a common vision cannot be accomplished by any one organization alone. Gazely and Brudney (2007), for instance, find that government and nonprofit organizations collaborate to obtain resources that they do not have for achieving shared goals. Graddy and Chen (2009) similarly find that organizations sustain good relationships with other organizations in order to gain and exchange resources for common goals.

Lastly, the collaboration process involves building social capital norms such as reciprocity and trust (Thomson & Perry, 2006). The presence of trust among organizations in collaboration matters because it helps reduce uncertainty and transaction costs, and has an influence on the prospects of future collaborations. Ostrom (1998) and Gazely (2008) argue that a reputation for being trustworthy helps organizations to collaborate with other organizations within a community because organizations are willing to partner with those organizations that they perceive will follow through with collaborative arrangements and not take excessive advantage of partner organizations. This is when face to face dialogue and a prehistory of cooperation has an impact on the collaboration decisions of organizations (Ostrom, 1998; Ansell & Gash, 2007; Sowa, 2009).

Collaboration Benefits & Challenges

A nonprofit organization's motivation to enter a collaborative arrangement of any kind is shaped by three main motivations (Guo & Acar, 2005). First, nonprofit organizations are motivated to collaborate with other organizations because there may be an expectation or requirement that they comply with rules, regulations, and other governmental mandates (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Guo & Acar, 2005). One major benefit of a nonprofit being in compliance with these institutional pressures includes the eligibility for government funding (Shaw, 2003). Second, nonprofit organizations are also motivated to collaborate because of a need to access resources from their external environment (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978; Jang & Feiock, 2007; Gazley, 2010). Increasing the pool of resources such as access to information and technical assistance benefits the nonprofit in several ways, including an increased capacity to deliver services and reduction in service costs (Gazley & Brudney, 2007). Lastly, a nonprofit's motivation to collaborate can also be shaped by its embeddedness in social networks (Granovetter, 1985; Guo & Acar, 2005; Bunger, 2013). That

is, an organization may collaborate because of the established experience and trust of working with other organizations. The benefit of partnering with organizations within the network is a reduction in the transaction costs when there is less of a need to gather information, monitor and/or enforce an arrangement (Bunger, 2013; MacIndoe, 2013). Thus, a nonprofit's motivation to collaborate can be due to institutional pressure, the need to access resources, and its embeddedness in social networks. These motivations are shaped by a series of benefits including an increased capacity to provide services, access to governmental support, and reduction in transaction costs—among other benefits.

Not all collaborative arrangements, however, are effective in producing the intended outputs and outcomes (Ansell & Gash, 2007; Gazley, 2010). This then results in a need to understand the challenges facing nonprofits in achieving effective collaboration (Provan & Milward, 2006; Babiak & Thibault, 2009; Chen & Graddy, 2010). The literature on the dark side of collaboration, however, is still limited (Gazley and Brudney 2007). Milward and Provan (2006), for example, highlight the importance of managing the accountability and overall communication between collaborating organizations. For example, because of the multiple players involved in achieving a mutual goal and objective, it becomes challenging to determine who is responsible for what. Thus, it is important to identify the individual(s) responsible for agreed-upon outcomes (managing accountability); otherwise, it will be unclear who is to be held accountable when parties to the collaboration fail to achieve their mutual goals. Gray (1989) argues that in effective collaborations, organizations as collective take responsibility of the future of the collaboration. In their study of a nonprofit and its partner organizations, Babiak and Thibault (2009) found that a majority of interviewees were concerned with issues relating to the roles and responsibilities of partner organizations.

Another challenge cited by the literature facing nonprofit collaboration involves the ability of partners to engage in positive interaction and the ability to address differences in constructive ways (Gray 1989; Ansell & Gash, 2007; Gazley & Brudney, 2007). Open and constant communication was suggested as a key to prevent and address misunderstandings and potential conflicts. Failure to engage in meaningful dialogue can lead a collaboration to lose common goals and norms (Babiak & Thibault, 2009). Through effective communication, the organizations participating in a collaboration can jointly make decisions about how to manage the network, including areas such as the governance structure and build commitment (Milward & Provan, 2006). Ansell and Gash's (2007) model of the collaborative governance process specifically highlights the importance of face-to-face dialogue, which is "at the heart of a process of building trust, mutual respect, shared understanding, and commitment to the process" (558).

In sum, the literature provides a good understanding of the nonprofit collaboration process, the various motivations to collaborate, and the challenges facing nonprofits entering collaborative arrangements. What remains largely unexplored by the literature, however, is a deeper understanding on the diverse forms of nonprofit collaboration and the collaboration process, specifically challenges that nonprofits face in the process of working with other organizations to accomplish mutual goals and objectives. In the next section, we introduce our research case, which we use as the laboratory to explore nonprofit collaborations and the challenges that arise from multi-sector organizations working together to achieve mutual goals and objectives.

Communities in Schools of North Texas

CISNT is a locally governed 501(C)(3) nonprofit organization that provides dropout prevention programs in public schools in Denton and Wise counties in the North Texas region. Students drop

out of school for many reasons. Asthe cause of a student dropping out of school is multidimensional in nature, this problem's complexity implies a "wicked problem (Weber and Khademian 2008)", which a single actor may be ill equipped to resolve alone. Thus, a wicked problem is best addressed through collaborative arrangements of many concerned actors (O'Toole, 1997; Kettl, 2006; Weber & Khademian, 2008).

At-risk students, for instance, miss valuable educational opportunities because of family problems, lack of permanent shelter, safety concerns, inadequate nutrition, lack of appropriate clothing or uniforms, and/or lack of transportation (CISNT, 2014). Thus, there is a need for diverse community organizations to collaborate to share resources and information in order to better serve disadvantaged youth. CISNT collaborates with hunger relief charities, community back-to-school programs, local governments, local businesses, community health clinics, and drug rehabilitation programs because CISNT lacks the capacity and resources to effectively address the diverse needs of at-risk youth. CISNT, in their 2014-2018 Strategic Plan, has identified as a primary goal the need of developing and expanding current partnerships (CISNT Strategic Goals and Strategies, 2014-2018, p. 2).

According to a CISNT estimate, in Denton and Wise County alone, over 20,000 public school students are at risk of dropping out of school (CISNT, 2015). Through school-based coordination, CISNT prevention programs focus on six different areas, including: supportive guidance and counseling, health and human services, parental and family involvement, career awareness and employment, enrichment activities, and educational enhancement. These programs are aimed at connecting students and their families to community resources tailored to their specific needs, and are performed in accordance with guidelines established by the Texas Education Agency.

In the 2014-15 academic year, CISNT served about 5,000 at-risk youth by operating three distinct programs: case management, dropout intervention programs, and after-school programs. With limited supports, CISNT actively pursues opportunities to collaborate with community organizations from the public, private and nonprofit sectors in order to better serve youth at risk of dropping out of school. Currently, for example, CISNT collaborates with a variety of organizations such as United Way of Denton (nonprofit), the City of Denton (local government), and the Village Church (faith-based).

Data and Methodology

The data used for this study were derived from a case study that involved two data collection methods; 1) review of 132 collaboration documentations and 2) semistructured interview with 10 CISNT collaborative partner organizations. Multiple sources of data are expected to create a full and deep understanding of case (Berg & Lune, 2012). The case study method is an appropriate research strategy when the purpose of a research is explanatory, controlling over behavioral events is not required, and the focus is on contemporary events (Luton, 2010; Yin, 2014). [1]

First, we conducted an analysis of all partnership documentation provided by CISNT to the researchers of this study in Spring 2014. Documents were carefully reviewed, and information were analyzed for several areas including: name of partner organization, contact person, whether collaboration agreement paperwork existed, date of the agreement, service provided by the partner organization to CISNT, and whether funding was provided to CISNT. Out of our review of the partnership documentation, a total of 132 partner organizations were identified.

[1] University of North Texas IRB approved in April 8 2014 (application No. 14-136).

Second, we conducted open ended, semistructured interviews with 10 partner organizations of CISNT in the spring of 2014 to achieve adequate coverage for the purpose of the research and the best strategy when the research has specific areas to examine (Noor, 2008; Berg & Lune, 2012). Interview questions are designed to elicit information about collaboration related issues (see Appendix); however, the interviewers were allowed to digress to beyond scope of predetermined questions (Berg & Lune, 2012). In selecting partner agencies, a review of the current 132 partnership was undertaken to gain a picture of the different partnerships that existed. Researchers also consulted with CISNT to select the sample of organizations CISNT, and the sample was identified based on two objective criteria. First, partner organizations would be identified from a stratified pool from the public, private and nonprofit sectors. Second, the choice of sample represents the diverse services provided by partnerships. To contextualize our interviews, we reviewed each partner organization including their 990 form (if it is nonprofit) and other types of organizational reports. As reported in Table 2, the 10 organizations consist of 4 human service nonprofit organizations, a church, a government supported hybrid nonprofit organization, a city government, a nonprofit credit union, and two private organizations.

A questionnaire was created from the review of literature and comprised of questions relating to the nature of the relationship, formality of the partnership, interorganizational communication, governance, motivation for partnering with CISNT, and the perceived effectiveness of the partnership. This set of questions was used by the researchers to ask questions concerning the partner organization's views toward their relationship with CISNT. These questions were used as a guide for discussion to achieve the purpose of research. On occasion, however, the interviewer asked follow-up questions or a full question to probe for additional information. Interview notes were taken and used for analysis of the perceived relationships.

Findings

Diverse Forms of CISNT Collaborations: Review of 132 collaborations

A common understanding of collaboration is hard to achieve owing to a number of terminologies and concepts used today in discussion of collaboration. Collaboration can vary in terms of formality, sector orientation, and resource sharing (Jang, Feiock, and Saitgalina; Milward & Provan, 2006; Linden, 2010; Forrer, Kee, & Boyer, 2014). Our focus in this analysis is to understand the diverse forms of collaborations in terms of formality, partner sectors and nature of resource shared by conducting a review of partnership documentation, which CISNT has managed (Grønbjerg, 1993).[2] Table 1 presents the results of document analysis of the 132 CISNT partner organizations.

Formality

Our review of CISNT collaborations suggest that only 20% of 132 partnerships have maintained signed contracts, which may be legally binding on both parties. In the case of 40% of CISNT collaborations, we find that organizations engage in partnering activities bysigning Memorandum of Understanding. This engagement is not legally binding but still identifies the person in charge for those activities specified in a short document. For the remaining 40% of partnerships, we found them to be very informal in nature, without any specific documentation, or in the form of a one-time based arrangement.

[2] To demonstrate consistency among observational ratings we assess inter-rater reliability by comparing evaluations of four independent coders (Tinsley & Weiss, 2000).

Table 1: Document Analysis of CISNT 132 Partnerships

More formally designed ↕ **More informally emerged**	Contracts	20%
	Formal collaborations: mutually agreed conditions specified	40%
	Informal arrangements: no written document	12%
	One time based arrangement- with potentials of extension	28%
Partnership with private ↕ **Partnership with public**	Partner with private organizations	25%
	Partner with hybrid (private-nonprofit) organizations[3]	3%
	Partner with other nonprofits	38%
	Partner with hybrid (public-nonprofit) organizations[4]	2%
	Partner with governments	32%
Funding based partnerships ↕ **Service partnerships**	Funding based partnerships	32%
	Service giving (or exchange) partnerships with funding attached	16%
	Service giving (or exchange) partnerships	52%

Cross-Sector Partnerships

Results also indicate that the largest proportion of partnerships (38%) was made with other nonprofit organizations, and one out of four partnerships was made with private organizations. CISNT partnerships with public organizations, including school districts and local governments, account for about 32% of all partnerships. We categorize partnerships with corporate community responsibility programs under private and nonprofit hybrid organizations (for example, Wells Fargo Community Development), and we found 4 partnerships with private organizations operating nonprofit nature activities. Public school social clubs are categorized as public-nonprofit hybrid category (such as a High School Spanish Club).

Resource Sharing

When considering the basis of the relationship (i.e., service vs. funding), more than half of the partnerships were classified as service exchange or support collaboration when compared to about 48% being funding based relationships. Service based collaboration refers to instances where the partners provide one service or more to each other (i.e., referral of a client or provide counseling to a client). Funding-based relationships are those where the exchange between both organizations is mainly monetary, without additional specification about service commitments in any of partnership documentation.

[3] We categorize partnerships with corporate community reach out programs under private and nonprofit hybrid organizations. ex) Wells Fargo Community Development.

[4] Public school social clubs are categorized as public-nonprofit category. ex) Flower Mound High School Spanish Club.

Challenges of Collaboration: Interview with 10 CISNT Partner Organizations

For exploring challenges of collaboration, we conducted open ended, semistructured interviews with 10 partner organizations of CISNT, including 4 human service nonprofit organizations, a church, a government supported hybrid nonprofit organization, a city government, a nonprofit credit union, and two private organizations. Ten cases were cross-compared to refine inferences and identify emerging themes across organizations (Eisenhardt, 1989).[5] We found all of the partnerships selected for interviews have been maintained more than 5 years. As shown in table 2, the general nature of partnerships is resource sharing and supporting CISNT programs and the main goal of collaboration is helping CISNT achieve its mission in the community. From this interview and review of organizational reports and other relevant archival documents, we identified four main themes: nature of collaborations, resource sharing, need for improved communication, and issues regarding accountability.

Partnership Documentation

The predominant form of collaboration between CISNT and its partners is informal in nature. We found 8 of the 10 partnerships have maintained relationships on an informal basis without a legally binding contract with CISNT. Even though two of the partner organizations (Denton County Friends of Family and Retired Senior Volunteer Program) have maintained signed Memorandum of Understandings with CISNT, we found that the MOUs were quite general and vague, with only providing general FERPA and HIPPA legal stipulations. The collaborative relationship between CISNT and DATCU Credit Union, on the other hand, is more informal in that there is no contract or MOU in place to describe their relationships with CISNT. When asked about formality of partnership, the interviewee answered that "among the nonprofits, it is often an informal process when organizations contact one another to help solidify a project," and indicated that this lack of formality may prove to be problematic in the future if a change in contact person between the two organizations were to occur. Another interviewee who discussed the duration of partnership indicated that the expected duration of partnership is "Permanent, as long our organization keeps the Vision and Values we have, and CISNT holds up to their side of their job of doing the wonderful things, and then someone is with Wells Fargo to uphold the relationship."

We found that the City of Denton currently maintains a legally binding contract with CISNT. The federal funding the city granted to the CISNT carries a more formalized relationship due to strict oversight and reporting requirements from the funding agency. The City's Director of the Human Service Department described the relationship as more compliance-based rather than a collaborative one. From the City of Denton's perspective, the partner organization is in the best position to adequately determine what it can or cannot be done. As a result, the City provides CISNT with little direction on how to implement its programs. The United Way of Denton County also had a formal collaborative arrangement with CISNT, with a document signed by the CEOs of both organizations and specifying the roles for joint program operations.

Resource Sharing

Three of the partner organizations (i.e., City of Denton, Wells Fargo, and DATCU) have maintained funding based relationships with CISNT. These organizations support CISNT financially without a specific choice of supporting programs or functions they prefer. Especially we found a local bank branch of Wells Fargo collaborates with CISNT in more than just a donor -

[5] The analysis of interviews was conducted by three researchers to ensure patterns and themes we identified were reliable.

Table 2: Analysis of 10 Partnerships of CISNT

Partner Organizations	Nature of partnership	Goals of collaboration	Formality	Length of partnership	Communication	Ways to improve
United Way of Denton County (Nonprofit)	- Resource sharing (financial and programs) - Running joint programs	Support families and students for building Community Capacity	Formal (Signed formal documents to specify expectations of UNDW and CISNT)	5 years	Formal meetings	- Identify more potential resource to be shared
Denton County Friends of the Family (Nonprofit)	- Resource sharing (Programs)	Help needy families	Informal (Signed MOU but very general in nature)	About 7 years	Informal (occasional email exchange)	- Redefine MOU - Define regular communication channel
Robson Ranch Senior Living (Private/Nonprofit Hybrid)	- Resource sharing (volunteers) - Support of volunteer mentors	building Community Capacity by getting seniors involved	Informal (No MOU)	More than 5 years	Informal (no specific communication channel established)	- Redefine MOU - Define regular communication channel
Retired Senior Volunteer Program (Nonprofit)	- Resource sharing (volunteers and programs)	Help needy children' s educational capacity	Informal (Signed MOU but very general in nature)	13 years	Informal (occasional email exchange and phone call conversation)	- Define regular or formal communication channel
Interfaith Ministry (Nonprofit)	- Resource sharing (In-kind donations) - Running joint programs	Support vulnerable families and students	Informal (No signed formal document)	More than 7 years	Informal (occasional email exchange and phone call conversation)	- Ensure communication channel - Involve decision making process
Keep Denton Beautiful (Hybrid: Public/Nonprofit)	- Running joint programs (Community Beautification Projects)	Educate students and families to engage in community	Informal (No signed formal document)	8 years	Informal (occasional email exchange and phone call conversation)	- MOU needed - Develop performance management system - Ensure communication channel

Table 2: Analysis of 10 Partnerships of CISNT (continued)

Partner Organizations	Nature of partnership	Goals of collaboration	Formality	Length of partnership	Communication	Ways to improve
Village Church of Flower Mound (Congregation)	- Resource sharing - Support of volunteer mentors	Serving community by mobilizing volunteers	Informal (No signed formal document)	5 years	Informal (email & phone) and ad-hoc meeting	- Develop performance management system
DATCU (Nonprofit Credit Union)	- Financial support - Support of volunteer mentors	Involvement in community	Informal (No signed formal document)	More than 9 years	Informal (email & phone) and ad-hoc meeting	- Define MOU
Wells Fargo (Private)	- Financial support - Resource sharing	Help to stay in school by educating finance	Informal (No signed formal document)	About 5 years	Informal (email & phone) and ad-hoc meeting	- Develop performance management system
City of Denton (Government)	- Financial support - Build community capacity	Broad community development	Formal contract for funding allocation	More than 5 years	Formal and regular meeting	- Regular communication - Develop performance management system

recipient relationship, since Wells Fargo regularly offer money management workshops for CISNT clients. The interviewee described its mutual resource sharing nature, "CISNT is a resource to us which helps us do what we want to do for the community and we are very happy to participate in on-going partnership to achieve social missions together." In addition, DATCU and Wells Fargo operate volunteer programs that afford their employees volunteer opportunities at CISNT services and activities.

Interfaith Ministry, a local human service nonprofit organization to support children in CISNT programs, has provided in-kind donations for many years. For example, Interfaith has supported CISNT by distributing back-to-school supplies for CISNT client families. The partnership between Interfaith and CISNT has evolved voluntarily over time, and their relationship is often need based rather than contract based. The interviewee describes their partnership is service exchange nature: "We have built a referral partnership which allows us to know what kind of services are available from each other. One of benefit from this collaboration is being able to get the word out to right population we try to serve. It is more of way to advertise our resources to people who most need them, and to make sure that we have verification of the eligible service clients. CISNT provides us with statistics and we can grant right to get the services, vice versa."

Denton County Friends of the Family (DCFOF) serves as a program resource to the CISNT's mission because some of the issues that CISNT students face often involve situations of sexual abuse and domestic violence, which are the main service areas of DCFOF. DCFOF partners with CISNT to provide anti-violence presentations to CISNT campus programs and provides services to clients who have been affected by domestic violence and sexual assault. Keep Denton Beautiful, a government supported nonprofit organization, and CISNT have an eight years of partnership where both entities benefit by working together by offering programs for CISNT students to take responsibility in the beautification of their city. CISNT recruits volunteers for cleanup events from each of the schools they serve and coordinates the on-site cleanups for each school. CISNT is a partner agency of United Way of Denton County, with United Way providing funding assistance to realize the education mission of CISNT. United Way also runs a joint program of free tax return consultation for disadvantaged families, which CISNT is able to refer to assistance. Four of the interviewed organizations provide direct-services to clients of CISNT by volunteering to mentor students in afterschool programs that CISNT runs.

Communication

While examining partnership communication between CISNT and partnering organizations, results appear to be mixed. An example of regular and well maintained communication was be found in the relationship between CISNT and DATCU. During the interview, the DATCU representative acknowledged that they receive weekly emails from CISNT and the regular communication build the partnership solid. Yet, this interviewee also serves on the board for CISNT and his/her role at the CISNT may allow him or her to maintain communication when compared to other partner organizations that do not have organizational representatives also serving on the board of CISNT. Open communication channels were found to be lacking for some of the partnerships with CISNT. Some partner organizations such as Robson Ranch and Retired Senior Volunteers indicated that they engage in communication based on emergent needs, with occasional emails and infrequent phone conversations. The City's head of Human Services mentioned that "communication tends to be limited to e-mail and telephone conversations, predominantly focused on reporting requirements of funding granted to the CISNT." In two cases, interviewees indicated they only learn about CISNT events or program changes by visiting websites and expressed lack of structured communication channel.

Accountability

A last key theme identified from our analysis of the 10 semistructured interviews was the accountability between CISNT and partnering organizations. For example, Robson Ranch, a local retirement community, has provided volunteer mentors to one elementary school but those volunteers are not aware that they are participating in CISNT programs. The point of contact at Robson Ranch does not have any information on whom to contact at CISNT. On the other hand, an interviewee of a community church expresses a different experience. In response to an open-ended question on partnership experience on CINST, the representative of Village Church said: "The collaboration effort has always been clear in my opinion. CISNT provides opportunities for our church body to engage, support and empower the children in our local community.... Although in almost all cases we cannot speak about the Gospel of Christ, we can show the children and CISNT the love of Christ through our actions in serving our brothers and sisters in the community."

In addition, several organizations indicated that they expect CISNT to implement a performance management system that would help partner agencies evaluate performance of their services and activities as well as monitor progress on mutually established goals and objectives. The City of Denton was the only organization appears to invest in accountability measures when working with CISNT. Because the City of Denton disperses federal grant monies to CISNT, a strict set of guidelines must be adhered to. The city representative noted that formal documentation between the City of Denton and CISNT was on file (in this case, a Memorandum of Understanding) because the City is responsible for keeping CISNT accountable to the federal guidelines associated with the awarded grant. Thus, formal accountability measures are used in the relationship between the City of Denton and CISNT because the City serves as an intermediary between federal rules and regulations and the local agencies that receive grant allocations.

Conclusion

This study has aimed to better understand nonprofit collaboration by conducting a case study of a community nonprofit organization's collaborations. Specifically, we seek to gain a greater understanding of the diverse forms of nonprofit collaborations and the challenges that organizations face in the collaborative processes. Although a small sample case study does not support a firm causal relationship, the results from the two levels of analyses open doors for further discoveries and serve ground work for insights for scholarly inquiries and provide lessons for collaborative managers (Berg & Lune, 2012; Eisenhardt, 1989).

With regards to the forms of nonprofit collaborations, our findings from the first analysis of the 132 partnership document indicates that there is diversity in organizations from the private (28%), public (32%), and nonprofit (40%) sectors that collaborate with CISNT. We find, for example, that some organizations collaborate for pure resource exchange, while others for the funding support for CISNT services. While a majority of collaborative arrangements were formalized, results indicate that about 40% of CISNT's partnerships are informal in nature. This is consistent with the literature, which finds that not all collaboration takes the form of a contract or formal arrangement (Gazley 2008). Collaborations tend to emerge among nonprofit organizations from their need to overcome lack of resources and desire to build reputation (Thomson & Perry, 2006; Gazley, 2008; Sowa, 2009; Jang, Feiock, & Saitgalina 2014).

With regards to the challenges of collaboration, the 10 interviews revealed some interesting findings. First, we found a challenge in maintaining expectations of partner agencies due to the lack of formal or written documents that delineate responsibilities of parties in collaboration.

Studies note that there can be conflicts and misunderstanding regarding division of responsibilities between collaborators, and that ambiguity is the most important to resolve by identifying mutually agreed conditions of collaboration (Milward & Provan, 2006; Linden, 2010; Mankin & Cohen, 2004; Forrer, Kee, & Boyer, 2014). The partnership agreed upon in writing, which sets out the common purposes and potential outputs and outcomes of partnership, will lead effective contributions of all members of partnership. Formal agreements often include congruent and time sensitive goals to be achieved by the partnership, which helps the partner organizations understand their respective role in the collaborative process (Graddy & Chen, 2009). Organizations should be clear about their individual roles and responsibilities within the partnership, and avoid potential disagreements or conflicts between the organizations. According to Milward and Provan (2006), accountability has to be managed by institutionalizing roles and expectation of parties so that participants are well informed about other parties' activities and build commitment culture within collaboration. They also note that one of the most important management tasks is to set up mechanism to resolve potential conflict.

Second, our findings revealed a challenge of interorganizational communication when partner organizations exchange e-mails or phone calls in an ad-hoc manner. Regular communication between partner organizations can be a way to enhance partnerships because interorganizational communication helps partner organizations to clarify mutual goals, to reduce ambiguity, and to understand norms, rules, and even culture (Shaw, 2003). Frequent communication with partner agencies also helps with the management of accountability by monitoring and ensuring that dedicated resources are actually used for collaboration activities (Milward & Provan, 2006). In addition, effective collaboration requires that there be positive interaction and that partner organizations be able to engage in constructive dialogue (Gray, 1989). If there is a lack of proper communication, other aspects of effective collaboration are also compromised such as the ability to engage in mutual decision-making. Our interviews indicated that even if CISNT maintains the same purpose and members for many years of partnership, it is still necessary to develop regular communication with partner agencies to update values and norms of collaborations and conditions and expectations of activities.

This study makes several contributions to theory and practice. From a theoretical standpoint, the results of this research confirm theoretical arguments about the importance of interorganizational communication and holding parties accountable. From a practical perspective, the findings suggest that nonprofit organizations should make a more conscious effort to invest resources in managing their partnerships in order to achieve positive outcomes. Organizations, however, may be limited in investing such resources because of capacity limitations. Another practical implication from our findings is that regular communication channels may enhance collaboration effectiveness by ensuring shared-vision and by sharing resources and support for emerging needs through periodical communication. The last implication to practice by this research is that formal accountability mechanisms, such as performance management or deliberation processes for sharing goals and identifying resources, contributes to strengthening nonprofit collaboration by clarifying common missions to be achieved and reducing ambiguity. This then results in the need to recruit or train nonprofit managers with collaborative management skills.

Despite the meaningful contributions of this research, the study is not without its limitations. A case study approach limits the generalizability of the results to other contexts. Future research, therefore, should consider a larger sample of organizations and its partners. In addition, future research conduct hypothesis testing to investigate the causes of collaboration challenges such as a lack of accountability or appropriate communication channels. Because this research considers

the context of organizations working in the area of dropout prevention, future research should explore collaboration processes and challenges in other contexts for comparative analysis.

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Appendix: Semistructured interview questions

Collaboration goal (or mission to pursue from this partnership)

Are you clear about goals of partnership? And what do you want to achieve from this partnership?

Do you have any specific goal documented to achieve from this partnership?

Nature of the relationships

- How long it has been? (age of relationship): short term or long term (semi-permanent?)
- Is this relationship more like "encouraged (prescribed) by law" or "voluntary."
- Resource sharing? What kind? Financial (Donative/ Service grant?) exchange?
- Degree of competition: Do you perceive CISNT as your competitor?

Formality of partnership

- What is the nature of partnership in terms of formality?
- Do you have any paperwork drafted to define relationship with CISNT?: Written documentation? MOU in writing?

Board involvement in partnership building

- How did you make decision to partner with CISNT? – Who were involved in initial decision to partner with CISNT?
- Do you have a person in charge of collaboration? If yes, who is taking the role of in person in charge?
- Leadership: Do you identify any catalytic actor in partnership?
- Any other actors have role in building partnership?
- Number of actors involved in initial decision to partner with CISNT

Communication practice

- What is the method of communication?
- Contact frequency (How often do you contact CISNT?)

Governance of your organization (or part of social responsibility of private corporate)

- Self governing
- Led by center organization- funding organization (more hierarchical)
- Led by facilitating organization- identifiable leader

Why do collaborate (or partner) with CISNT? : Motivation and purpose

Do you experience any challenge from partnering with CISNT? : Please identify obstacles (in collaboration) that to be overcome to make partnership more successful

Network structure Who do you partner with other than CISNT? Please identify organizations and their nature of partnerships

- Informal

- Financial donation:
- Sharing resource:
- Participation in on-going discussion to achieve social missions:

Accountability of partnership

Do you feel the collaboration is sufficiently held accountable? Whom do you feel accountable of? And potential responses are:

- To the collaboration manager,
- To your staff and CISNT staff,
- To consumers,
- To legal requirements,
- Or other

Measures of Collaboration Effectiveness

- Do you think partnership with CISNT is effective to realize goals of partnership?
- Please advise how to improve management of collaboration

Evaluating Community Inclusion: A Novel Treatment Program for Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders

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A state-funded, non-profit organization developed an innovative inclusion program for children with Autism spectrum disorders and developmental delays, Including Special Kids, which offers activities for children with developmental delays alongside typically developing children in collaboration with well-established local youth programs. This case study examines the ISK intervention program at the original community host sites to determine if the evidence supports a measurable and demonstrable change in behaviors in a real-world setting that may lead to increased quality of life and greater inclusion in the community. Using evidence-based data, we measured the progress of 30 children over 6-24 months. Children participating in the program showed average improvement in all but two function areas and improvement in all composite scores. While these results do not prove program success, they offer an indication that the program helps children learn skills and behaviors to successfully navigate and become part of community-based, after-school recreational programs.

Key Words: Autism Spectrum Disorders; Children with Developmental Delays; Inclusion Program; Youth Programs; Social Skills in Community Settings

Introduction

One in 88 American-born children have been diagnosed with autism spectrum disorders (ASDs) (Department of Health and Human Services, 2012), and worldwide estimates indicate 4.3 million people had a diagnosis of ASD in 2009, which is predicted to increase to seven million by 2017. (Global Data, 2010). According to the Mayo Clinic, "Autism spectrum disorder is a serious neurodevelopmental disorder that impairs a child's ability to communicate and interact with others. It also includes restricted repetitive behaviors, interests and activities. These issues cause significant impairment in social, occupational and other areas of functioning." (Mayo Clinic, 2014) Children with ASD face social difficulties due to their behavior including their difficulties in communication and social interactions, the fact that they may display repetitive behaviors, and that they often exhibit restricted interest in or participation in activities with other children. Their social skills development trails that of typically developing children, often leading to exclusion from mainstream education and social activities. Rao, Beidel, and Murray (2008, p. 353) found that "children who are deficient in social skills lack the behavioral repertoire necessary to interact with others according to social convention, a deficit that affects both academic and social development." The prognosis of a child with ASD depends on many aspects of the child's disorder, including joint attention skills and functional play skills, and more favorable outcomes may result

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from appropriate behavioral intervention and successful inclusion with typically developing peers in community and educational settings (Johnson & Myers, 2007).

While much ongoing scientific research addresses autism spectrum disorders, there are no conclusive solutions available to parents on how to provide the best support for their child's well-being. To a large degree, parents address their children's social interactions through non-profit groups that sponsor a wide variety of programs using recommendations that span the spectrum of possible interventions. While the scientific community is clear that these are not "science-based" interventions, the interventions are widely implemented throughout the general populace. This state of affairs should not be surprising as parents, in the absence of concrete scientific input, try multiple alternatives to help their child. However, it should be of concern to the public; some of these interventions may prove to be better (or worse) than others, but there is no forum for assessing their relative worth. More importantly, some of these interventions may be worth a full-blown medical study to scientifically prove their benefits, but how are they to make the transition from community-based intervention grown out of a geographic community's response to a clinical trial?

One possible solution to this dilemma is to share the findings from non-profit organizations' interventions. This provides a means of allowing the intervention to be judged by other non-profits, the medical establishment, and the general population. It creates a growing body of assessment of community-based interventions. And it allows other non-profit leaders to determine whether or not the intervention is a model they wish to emulate in their communities. Since medical journals resolutely do not publish interventions that do not meet the exact criteria of scientific study (most notably, they object to the lack of a control group – which is almost impossible to have in a community-based intervention), these findings must be published in non-profit journals, which is even more fitting because the implementing institutions are typically non-profits.

This paper presents a case study of a state-funded, non-profit organization that developed an innovative inclusion program for autistic children. Special Kids Crusade (SKC), a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, tax-exempt, charitable organization, was formed to make a positive impact on the lives of children with disabilities and their families, specifically addressing the isolation and discrimination these children face (Special Kids Crusade, 2012). *Including Special Kids* (ISK) is an after-school, community-based intervention, which provides children with developmental delays from ages five through high school the opportunity to interact with a typical mix of peers in small and large group recreational activities. The initial ISK program partnered with well-established local youth programs at two Boys & Girls Clubs (BGCs) and the First Tee golf program. The program now operates at four sites, soon to be five, and program leaders[6] designed the intervention to work with any available after-school host location. The ISK intervention addresses inclusion in leisure-time, community-based activities and aims to help children with ASD function in real-world situations[7].

[6] In this research, we refer to the ISK program director, the SKC clinical director, and members of SKC leadership as "ISK program leaders."

[7] The impetus for ISK came from an unusual grant opportunity offered by the California Department of Developmental Services (DDS) through the San Andreas Regional Center (SARC). SARC, is one of 21 regional, community-based, private nonprofit corporations funded by the State of California to serve people with developmental delays, supports individuals and their families who reside within Monterey, San Benito, Santa Clara, and Santa Cruz counties. In 2007, DDS, through SARC, offered to provide start-up funds to stimulate new ideas and new types of program models for individuals with developmental delay; however, DDS stipulated no funding for traditional program models. ISK began with DDS funding

This case study examines the ISK intervention program at the original three community host sites to determine if the evidence supports a measurable and demonstrable change in behaviors in a real-world setting that may lead to increased quality of life and greater inclusion in the community.

Foundation of the Intervention

Behavioral intervention programs concentrate on social skills development and behavior modification. Vismara and Rogers (2010, p. 447) state that, to date, behavioral interventions at young ages present the only treatments shown to effectively improve core autism symptoms. Researchers have suggested that if children learn social skills in childhood, they may have a greater likelihood of positive developmental outcomes including peer acceptance [or inclusion], mental health and wellbeing, and academic achievement (Hartup, 1989; Rao, Beidel, & Murray 2008).

Applied behavior analysis (ABA) provides the foundation for most of these intervention programs and addresses social difficulties by helping individuals change their behavior, emphasizing smaller changes in desired behaviors and avoiding reinforcement of unwanted behaviors. In practice, the interventions teach social skills such as referencing (a person's ability to monitor another person's behavior and adapt his or her own behavior according to its effect on others), communicating back and forth with another, and talking at an appropriate volume; behaviors that result in positive social interactions. These skills include not only verbal but non-verbal behaviors needed for individuals to have positive interpersonal communication (Gresham & Elliott 1987). (For more on social skills development see also Rao, Beidel, & Murray (2008, p. 353) and Hartup (1989).) To be included with their peers and in society at large, these children must not just modify existing behaviors, but also learn behaviors that foster group inclusion (Jones and Frederickson, 2010). Of particular interest to this research is the ABA-based model of positive behavior support (PBS). An empirically validated, function-based approach, PBS replaces challenging behaviors with prosocial skills. In a recent study, Leach and Duffy (2009) surveyed best practices in reducing problem behavior and promoting inclusion for students with ASD and found that in most cases, a PBS model is recommended for students with ASD.

These programs typically occur in formal settings administered by mental health professionals. As Lopata et al (2006) and others have shown, often, children can demonstrate specific social skills in the setting in which they were learned but cannot use the skills functionally in their real worlds of school, after school activities, and family interactions. Targeted social skills training groups may have little impact on the overall quality of life for the child or the child's family and community. Other researchers have also suggested that participating in inclusive programs with typically developing peers may improve outcomes for ASD children including greater social acceptance. (See, for example, Fryxell & Kennedy (1995); Guralnick, Gottman, & Hammond (1996); and Halvorson & Sailor (1990)). Further, Carr et al. (2002) suggested that to improve outcomes, activities for people with diagnosed delays must move beyond education and into other community activities that provide opportunities for participation and social interaction with a range of typically developing peers.

and included children who were SARC clients. As such, each child's family signed a release allowing evaluation data to be collected and used for assessment and evaluation purposes without identifying information.

Material and Methods

Intervention Goals and Sites

The ISK intervention operates in conjunction with established host site after-school programs. The sites are independent of the school grounds, accept children aged six through high school, and are composed of a representative community of peers. ISK and host program staff work to integrate children with ASD into typical out-of-school activities alongside their peers. The goal of the program is to have the children be comfortable attending the afterschool programs on a daily basis (five days a week) for approximately three hours requiring only the same amount of support as a typically functioning peer. ISK leaders were driven by a particular DDS stipulation that ISK could not use a traditional program model. In particular, the ISK leaders had to avoid staffing the program with shadow aides who interacted with ASD participants solely on a reactive basis – only stepping in once issues have arisen. Instead, ISK leaders designed the program to take a proactive approach, embedding an Inclusion Assistant in the activities and groups to create learning opportunities for the child with developmental delays. These learning opportunities are aimed at developing the child's skills so that they can attend community settings like other same age and gender peers. This approached involved training ISK staff as well as host site staff to teach both typically developing children and those with ASD the skills needed to participate together in the community program.

In the next sections we discuss program staffing and training, the skills on which the ISK intervention chose to focus, the measurement and assessment of these skills, and the participant assessment and skill development process.

Program Staffing

ISK leaders hired adults for each program site to teach inclusion techniques to host program activity leaders, adaptive skills to children with ASD, and adaptive skills to peers. They employed inclusion specialists (ISs) and inclusion assistants (IAs) who operated the programs. IAs provided direct support to program participants, helping them develop the requisite skills shown in Table 1 to integrate into the group. They also taught skills and tools to all members of the community. ISs were assigned to a specific site and acted as on-site managers, assisting with training, interacting with IAs and host staff, and talking with parents.

Both IAs and ISs came into the ISK program with experience working with children with ASD, passed strict background testing and underwent 15 hours of continued training, including in-service training and training on developmental disabilities, tools of inclusion, privacy regulations, measurements and assessments and other competencies needed to work in the inclusion program. Training materials are available on request. After the initial training, the IS observed and coached each IA weekly, and the clinical director provided similar support and guidance on a quarterly basis or more frequently, as needed.

IAs and ISs taught host site staff procedures to facilitate social interactions among all children, to include children with developmental delays in host site activities, and to reduce challenging behaviors. Host staff learned to use positive behavioral supports such as moving close by when giving directions, commenting on what the children do correctly rather than spotlighting missteps and simplifying games so all children can participate. In addition, those involved in the program received information from research on typical social and emotional development. Staff implemented strategies appropriate to the goals of each child on an ongoing basis throughout the time period the child attended the program.

Skills Development

One of the program goals is to help children build skills so that they can become fully independent members at their host sites. To this end, the ISK program director and clinical director had a series of discussions with host site leadership and determined that three behaviors most upset typically developing peers and the staff of their programs: inability to use the restroom independently[8], running and yelling. Although these three behaviors were most distressing to the staff and members of the club, age appropriate use of these skills did not necessarily mean that the children would be included in activities or make friends. ISK conducted a simple stakeholder survey, asking host site children and staff, "What makes it hard to be friends with _____?" ISK leaders incorporated these observations and the peer-feedback with the existing literature, (specifically: Wolfberg (2003) relating to development of peer engagement; Hart and Risley (1975) who targeted the development of language through incidental teaching; and Stokes and Baer (1977) who developed the paradigm for generalization of skills), and chose nine adaptive skills that pose the greatest challenge to having children accepted in a social group (Table 1: Adaptive Skills).

Once the leaders examined the nine skills in detail, they broke each of them down into a series of sub-skills whose full mastery would lead to achievement of the master skill. For example, "Moving Safely" included mastering the ability to move in a coordinated way first with ISK staff, then with host staff, and finally with typically developing children of the same age and sex. Sub-skills also included moving for the same amount of time as same age/sex peers and being aware of and avoiding other people and objects while moving.

Following Bellini and Hopf's (2007) Autism Social Skills Profile (ASSP), and incorporating aspects of how to teach essential skills from Banda and Grimmett (2008) and Hanzlick, Peterson, and Rogers (2011) as well as other well established PBS methods, ISK leaders developed toolkits to teach these essential skills. The toolkits, which specifically addressed these adaptive skills at 10 levels of skill mastery, were modified and extended to take advantage of group interactions provided by the host setting. For example, ISK staff taught each sub-skill using a set of associated techniques based on the child's level of mastery. For example, children new to the program with little ability to move in a coordinated way would first walk with an ISK staff member around areas of the host site that had very little "traffic." The ISK participant may have held the staff members' hand, while the staff member narrated safety actions (e.g., staying along the perimeter in the gym while others are playing basketball or looking before dashing through an activity). Staff used verbal and visual cues to help the child determine "safe" areas and movement in the host facility. As children progressed, staff used practice situations. These situations mirrored activities like playing "red light" and "green light" to help the child learn when to stop or go. As children began to participate independently, their peers assumed greater roles in interacting, reinforcing positive behavioral changes or addressing staff when an ISK child experienced difficulty. Thus, in teaching these skills, ISK combined ABA methods including peer-mediated strategies, adult-facilitated strategies, and strategies designed to increase initiating and autonomy in a child with autism. (See, for example, Haring & Breen (1992); Kamps, Kravits, Lopez, & Kemmerer (1998); Shukla, Kennedy, & Cushing (1998); Weiss & Harris (2001).)

ISK compiled the teaching techniques for the nine adaptive skills in a series of binders available to all program staff, including the host site. ISK staffing varied depending on needs of the children.

[8] Neither SKC nor BGCMC hold daycare licenses, requiring all program participants to use the restroom without assistance. If a child brought his or her own assistant, he or she was allowed to participate.

Table 1: Adaptive Skills

Attending Skills	*Using the Restroom*	IAs focused on teaching participants how to behave appropriately when in a public restroom. Participants learned how to open and close the locks of the stalls, to use the appropriate number of paper towels, to check for an empty stall and so on.
	Modulating Volume	Participants learned to judge the appropriate volume, depending upon the setting and to use that volume. IAs guided participants to gradually reduce and eventually eliminate loud, unpredictable noises.
	Moving Safely	The IAs spent a great deal of time walking with individual participants around the setting, especially at the beginning of each participant's inclusion. While doing so, each participant learned to move in a coordinated fashion with another person and to avoid objects/people in the path. After mastering walking with an IA, each participant worked on moving at the same speed and frequency as other children of the same age and gender.
Participating Skills	*Referencing*	Referencing refers to the skill of looking to adults or other competent children for nonverbal cues that help participants know how to behave at a given moment in a given setting. Initially the participants learned to socially reference by turning towards someone calling his or her name. Then they learned to use social referencing to seek out guidance in uncertain situations, and to seek affirmation from significant adults and children[9].
	Engaging in Activities	Participants frequently entered the program with a small number of preferred, often repetitive activities. IAs carefully scaffolded activities and skills so the participants developed the competencies to engage in a range of host site activities. Participants learned to sample new activities and to be flexible in their choices of activities. In addition, they learned to follow the rules of the activities, both stated and implied.
	Communicating	IAs worked with the participants to increase their ability to communicate clearly their needs and wants with both familiar and unfamiliar people. This communication occurred in the form of gestures, icons, signs or spoken language, depending upon the participant's preference. For participants comfortable using words and discussing ideas, IAs guided them to talk with and to listen to other people. Participants were gradually guided to expand their choice of conversational topics.

[9] "Significant" individuals include parents, teachers and other adults who have an emotional connection with the child. These are the adults that children learn to reference first; later the children learn to discern who is "in the know" in different environments and to reference them.

Table 1: Adaptive Skills (Continued)

Collaborating Skills	*Cooperating*	At the very beginning stages of cooperation, the IAs engaged in very simple play patterns with each participant. These beginning patterns require the IA and participant to do something like roll a ball back and forth or place cards on a stack, where the pattern is a very simple version of turn taking. These patterns helped the participant learn to cooperate with adults and other children; they also formed the basis for all types of group play. As a participant progressed, the IAs expected the child to cooperate, even on non-preferred tasks. The "habit" of cooperation was developed by initially inviting the child to do things that he or she had a high likelihood of doing, and incrementally adding activities that the child had avoided or did not like.
	Regulating Emotions	Most young children have temper tantrums; as they mature, they learn to manage their emotions so as to have few, if any, such outbursts. Children with developmental delays often have intense emotional outbursts long after their peers have learned to express their frustration and anger in socially acceptable ways. ISK participants learned to reduce the frequency, duration and intensity of such emotional outbursts so as to more closely resemble the outbursts of other children of the same age and gender. At the same time they learned to express their emotions in ways so that others could understand and respond.
	Making Friends	This is the most complex skill that the participants developed. Initially the IAs worked with a participant to enter a group of children who were engaged in an activity; simultaneously the IA worked with the group to welcome the participant into the group. The overall goal was to develop a stable and inclusive group (meaning more than one person) that welcomed the participant and with whom the participant learned to enjoy spending time.

For example, children with low skills had an ISK staff member assigned to them while participating in the program while children with more advanced skills had a ratio of two or more children to one staff member. A separate manual for parents details the program itself and all of the policies and procedures for the program. These handbooks are made available to anyone wishing to replicate this program[10].

ISK program staff members saw these nine skills as being hierarchical, arranged in order from simplest to most complex. In general, participants mastered basic skills before more complex skills were emphasized. However, as with typical development, children and staff worked a little on all skills all the time. From lowest competency to highest, ISK designated three categories of skills based on the nine individual skills. Attending skills came from the first three individual skills (Using the Restroom, Modulating Volume, and Moving Safely), and must have been high enough that a child could show up to the program and handle the group setting. Participating skills, the middle three, (Referencing, Engaging in Activities, and Communicating) allowed children to more fully engage and participate with the activities and routines in the setting. Collaborating skills

[10] Contact Deirdre Hickey Sturm, ISK Program Director, Special Kids Crusade, deirdre@specialkidscrusade.org

(Cooperating, Regulating Emotions, and Making Friends) described the skills required for working with or collaborating with other people independently within the setting.

Individual Measurement and Assessment

While positive parent feedback on the progress of their children, progress as observed by the IAs, and professional clinical assessments were critical measures of success, ISK leaders felt it was necessary to develop a uniform means of measuring and quantifying progress in an individual. Using data and measurement scales to quantify observed behavioral changes would provide objective, corroborative measures of progress that would permit a triangulation of observations between the parents, staff, and clinical director. The leaders felt that the development, testing, and application of these measures would provide strong evidence-based data about the impact of the program.

An assessment system was needed to serve many purposes including allowing: ISK to report quarterly to SARC on progress of the children; ISK program leaders to understand what skills interventions work; IAs and ISs to also understand and work to improve their skills and interventions; and families to track meaningful progress in their children and to ask intelligent questions about progress. ISK leaders reviewed many types of instruments that provide information on social skills and adaptive behavior for children and adults who have, or are suspected of having an ASD. They found no instrument or combination of instruments that was suitable for their purposes, so they decided to create their own assessment system to measure intervention effectiveness of their critical skills training program. In doing so, they found their ideas most aligned to Bellini's (2006) Autism Social Skills Profile, Partington's (1998) Assessment of Basic Language and Learning Skills - Revised (ABLLS®-R), and Hanzlick et al's work on functional social competence (Hanzlick, Peterson, & Rogers 2011).

ISK leaders constructed an easy-to-understand measurement system allowing individuals to work on the nine skills, describing each skill using 10% improvement increments. Table 2: Evaluation Criteria for Each Skill, shows the levels, where Level 10 means low or very weak skills and Level 1 signifies high or strong skills. While the levels remained constant, program materials provided detailed descriptions of what was meant by the level within the specific skill. This created a scoring matrix as shown in Figure 1 for each child at a given point in time. The matrix rows reflect each of the nine adaptive skills. The matrix columns reflect the level of mastery of each skill (running from 10 [lowest] to 1 [highest]). Every square within this matrix (90 in total) has a detailed explanation of exactly what is meant by that level of mastery for a particular skill. . For example, a score of "5" for moving safely (the dark highlight box in Figure 1) was described as follows:

> The ISKer walks and moves safely half the time. The ISKer is able to do this as long as the IA is within 3-8 feet. The ISKer is able to walk in a coordinated fashion with the IA half the time. The ISKer can successfully move with a group half of all opportunities. His/her speed resembles his/her peers half the time. He/she both bumps into people and objects and avoids people and objects. Half of the time, the ISKer moves the same amount as other same age/gender peers. Half of the time, the ISKer moves more often or less often than his/her same age/gender peers. Half the time, he/she moves with intention. Half of the time (51-60% of opportunities), the ISKer moves in the setting like other children of the same age/gender.

Using this measurement technique, ISK leaders and staff created Individual Profiles (IPs) for each child. Every child was scored on each of the nine adaptive skills (the shaded boxes in Figure 1)

Table 2. Evaluation Criteria for Each Skill

Level	Adverb	% observed	Skills Focus
1	Typically	91-100	Attendance, Participation & Collaboration
2	Usually	81-90	Attendance, Participation & Collaboration
3	Frequently	71-80	Attendance, Participation & Collaboration
4	Often	61-70	Attendance & Participation
5	Half of the Time	51-60	Attendance & Participation
6	Sometimes	41-50	Attendance & Participation
7	Occasionally	31-40	Attendance
8	Sporadically	21-30	Attendance
9	Seldom	11-20	Attendance w/accommodation
10	Rarely	1-10	Attendance w/accommodation

and these scores were to be tracked over time to determine improvements or possible worsening. One of the most important aspects of creating this measurement tool was describing what "typical" behavior meant for each age and gender represented in the ISK program. ISK staff members used their own observations and those generated from published studies to describe typical skill mastery at different age/gender combinations. Individual Profiles reflected comparison of skills against typical skill and sub-skill mastery. These "typical" skill mastery descriptions and activities used to teach them are available from the ISK program director.

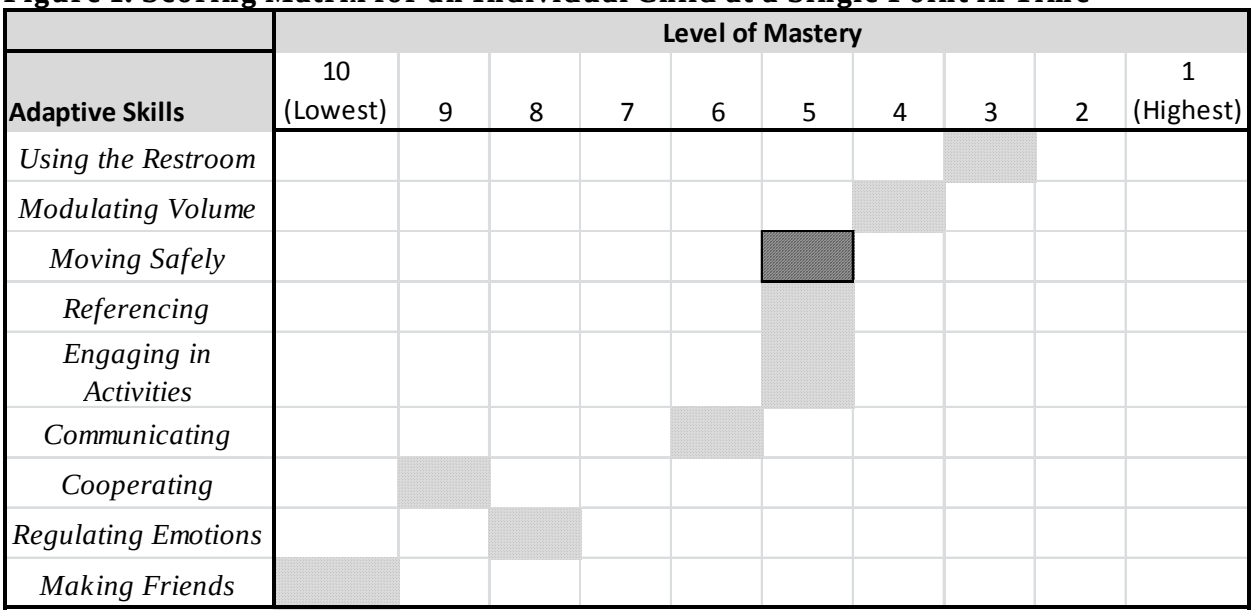
Gerhardt (2010, p. 202) notes "Direct observation of individuals with ASD in social environments can be one of the best means of conducting detailed assessment of particular social behavior of interest, as well as interpreting how responsive an individual is to contextual variables regarding exhibiting particular social skills." ISK leaders ensured that raters closely followed Jones' "three desirable conditions: "(a) observation and recording of behaviors at the time of occurrence in their natural settings; (b) the use of trained, objective observers; and (c) a behavioral description system involving a minimal level of inference by the observers" (Jones, 1979). As found by other researchers, the use of multi-informant (IAs, ISs, clinical director, host staff, parents) behavior ratings gave ISK better information on social inclusion. (Verhulst & Van der Ende, 2008). Each rater was trained to conduct individual assessments using a detailed rating scale, and the clinical and program directors made frequent comparisons among raters. Inter-rater reliability was high (generally above 90% agreement within one level). For those ratings varying more than 20% between raters, the program director and/or clinical director resolved disagreements by conducting the observation and assessment themselves and working with the original raters to come to agreement.

Participant Assessment and Skills Development

This study focuses on 30 students enrolled in three different centers. The average age was 11.7 years (minimum 6 years, maximum 16 years) and 77% were male. The average time in the program was almost a year (minimum 3 months, maximum 27 months). Student initial skills assessments are reported in Table 3 and discussed in the Results section.

When children entered the ISK program, the program director conducted an intake interview with a parent, including the parents' assessment of the child's skills and a record review of educational and regional center documents (medical records, SARC information, etc.) to set the baseline on the child's functional and social skills. ISK staff then used a "naturalistic" (Gerhardt 2010, p. 202)

Figure 1. Scoring Matrix for an Individual Child at a Single Point in Time



setting, and direct observation of the children to create individual descriptions and plans for each child. Throughout the program, IAs completed a daily report form on each child. When a child received assessments indicating a level change in a skill, the program director evaluated these "tipping points" to determine whether to record a change in the child's level for a particular skill. In addition to these daily ratings, the ISK program director evaluated each child every three months, comparing her assessments to those of the IAs and ISs.

Staff worked to build the skills needed for ISK children to become fully independent members at their host sites. This involved advancing children by changing support and desired skill mastery as they mastered lower-level skills. At the time of the quarterly assessment, each child who met the criteria (improved skills enough) to "graduate" to the next level of independence (from 1:1 support to 2:1 support, for example), moved to the next level. ISK staff collaborated with parents and SARC to create a graduation plan, which included a transition timeline, peer matching, implementation guidelines and evaluation criteria. On the selected start date, the IAs modified their roles. A lead IA guided the child and completed daily report forms while a support IA helped the child learn to navigate the next level successfully. All ISK staff monitored progress or decline in skill levels, providing additional support and information for parents over the transition period. After four successful weeks at the new level, ISK staff set up an official graduation where the child, members of the child's family and the SARC coordinator attended an appropriate ceremony and/or celebration.

Analyses

In this study, we used three-month assessments to capture true changes in skill level and avoid the noise of daily variations in behaviors that were not considered real changes. We constructed descriptive statistics and regression models from the panel data to study the skill level changes for each child over time. In addition to the nine individual skills, we developed five composite scores: a composite of all nine skills, a composite of all skills excluding Using the Restroom, a composite of attending skills (Using the Restroom, Modulating Volume and Moving Safely), a composite of participating skills (Referencing, Engaging in Activities, Communicating), and a

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics, n=30

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Basic statistics:				
Average age	11.70	2.67	6	16
% Male	0.77	0.43	0	1
No. With Attender classification	11			
No. With Participator classification	9			
No. With Collaborator classification	10			
Average months in program	11.80	8.07	3	27
Functional/behavioral skills scores:				
Using the Restroom	2.57	1.80	1	8
Modulating Volume	4.84	2.57	1	10
Moving Safely	5.41	2.52	1	9.25
Referencing	5.40	2.66	1	10
Engaging	6.25	2.38	1.5	10
Communicating	6.05	2.50	1	9.75
Cooperating	5.97	2.29	1.33	9.75
Regulating	6.33	2.37	1.2	10
Making Friends	8.36	2.01	1.33	10
Composite scores:				
Composite score:	5.69	1.88	1.29	9.13
Composite score not including restroom	6.05	2.06	1.32	9.52
Composite - attending skills	4.15	1.92	1.17	8.17
Composite - participating skills	5.89	2.22	1.4	9.8
Composite - collaborating skills	6.87	1.98	1.29	9.42

composite of collaborative skills (Cooperating, Regulating Emotions, Making Friends). We refined our global analysis by categorizing participants based on their skill levels on entry to the ISK program. The three categories were the Attenders (those who had sufficient skills in Using the Restroom, Modulating Volume and Moving Safely to enter the program, but no higher), the Participators (those who had sufficient attending skills plus some mastery of Referencing, Engaging in Activities and Communicating), and the Collaborators (those who had sufficient attending and participating skills plus some mastery of Cooperating, Regulating Emotions and Making Friends).

Fixed effects models were appropriate because we assumed that something within individual children, the unique characteristics of the individual, might impact or bias the predictor or outcome variables that measure program effects. We needed to control for this to evaluate the program, thus we held constant (or "fixed") characteristics of each child that did not change over the time period of the study. These were level of intelligence or other individual characteristics. We developed these models including all children with ASD in the program, in total and by entry skill group.

Results

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics shows basic information about the ISK participants and the average skill levels of all children at the time they entered the program. For example, children averaged

2.57 for using the restroom and 8.36 for making friends, where 1 is the best possible score and 10, the worst. Overall, average skill scores increased (reflecting poorer skills) as skills became more complex. Table 4: Descriptive Statistics by entering skill classification, shows baseline skill scores for children by their entering classification (attenders, participators and collaborators). Children who enter with attending scores average approximately "8" on most skills; participators average about closer to "6," while collaborators average under "4."

In Table 5: Fixed effects models estimating effects of program participation on skills for all participants, we present analyses of changes in each of the skills over time. The coefficients shown are average changes in skill level for a 12-month increase in program attendance, with corresponding p-values (*** $p<0.01$, ** $p<0.05$). The third column shows the standard errors for the regression coefficient. The fourth and fifth columns show the constant terms and standard errors for the constants.

We found that overall, children participating in the program showed average improvement in scores in all areas except using the restroom and cooperating ($p<0.05$). We also saw improvement in all composite scores. For example, the 12-month effect on skill improvement for moving safely was 1.0 ($p<0.01$)[11], meaning that on average, children in the program improved by one point over a 12-month period. In fact, these children improved their scores, on average, of one point or greater for modulating volume, moving safely, and making friends. They improved their scores, on average, more than half a point for referencing, engaging, communicating, regulating emotions, and for all the composite scores. These children came into the program with high average scores for using the restroom, so perhaps they had less need or ability to improve in that

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics, by Entering Skill Classification

	Mean skill scores		
Variable/Observations	**Attenders**	**Participators**	**Collaborators**
Observations	11	10	9
Using the Restroom	3.64	1.78	2.14
Modulating volume	6.84	4.41	2.86
Moving Safely	7.63	4.83	3.35
Referencing	7.27	5.48	3.01
Engaging	8.29	6.64	3.32
Communicating	8.57	5.17	3.94
Cooperating	7.82	6.01	3.64
Regulating Emotions	8.13	6.62	3.82
Making Friends	9.67	8.39	6.74
Composite Score	7.55	5.48	3.65
Composite without Using the Restroom	8.03	5.97	3.73
Composite - Attending	6.03	3.67	2.39
Composite - Participating	8.04	5.76	3.39
Composite - Collaborating	8.54	7.01	4.66

[11] Note that improvements in scores are measured by a decrease in the score because 1 is the highest score and 10, the lowest. However, to keep the results understandable, we report all improvements in positive terms.

Table 5: Fixed Effects Models Estimating Effects of Program Participation on Skills, All Participants

Adaptive Skill	Ave. 12-mo change in score		s.e.	Constant	s.e.
Using the Restroom	0.36		-0.021	2.315***	-0.213
Modulating Volume	-1.13	***	-0.019	5.227***	-0.193
Moving Safely	-1.00	***	-0.022	5.815***	-0.220
Referencing	-0.65	**	-0.021	6.083***	-0.212
Engaging	-0.61	***	-0.016	6.349***	-0.166
Communicating	-0.48	***	-0.015	6.258***	-0.151
Cooperating	-0.18		-0.020	6.335***	-0.205
Regulating Emotions	-0.84	***	-0.017	6.909***	-0.177
Making Friends	-1.17	***	-0.019	8.359***	-0.195
Composite Score	-0.63	***	-0.012	5.962***	-0.122
Composite without Using the Restroom	-0.73	***	-0.013	6.385***	-0.128
Composite - Attending	-0.53	***	-0.015	4.394***	-0.152
Composite - Participating	-0.58	***	-0.013	6.219***	-0.133
Composite - Collaborating	-0.73	***	-0.014	7.213***	-0.144

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05

area. There is no ready explanation as to why children did not show an improvement in cooperation skills.

For the next set of analyses, we calculated the average effect on skill score for children in the program by categorizing them in terms of their initial skills. Table 6: Fixed effects models estimating effects of program participation on skills by entering skill category, shows the effects on skill score using the attenders (lower), participators (middle) and collaborators (higher) categories (representing the spectrum of skills from simplest to most complex).

The estimations for children who entered the program with low skill levels, the attenders, show improvements in average skill scores for two of the three simplest skills; the effects on modulating volume (1.26 points over 12 months; $p<0.01$) and moving safely (0.84 points; $p<0.05$). Interestingly, children in this group showed a statistically significant improvement in making friends score (0.80; $p<0.01$) despite that being the most complex skill to master. They also showed a significant improvement in the composite score not including restroom use (0.47; $p<0.05$).

For children who entered the program with mid-range skills, the participators, we found strong average effects on the more complex skills of regulating emotion and making friends (1.36, 1.52; $p<0.01$) as well as on all composite scores (0.55, 0.68; $p<0.05$ for attending and participating composites and for all other composites (0.78 on overall composite, 0.91 on composite without restroom use and 1.15 on the collaborating composite; $p<0.01$). These children also showed strong average improvements in scores for modulating volume, moving safely and engaging (0.94, 0.97, 0.83; $p<0.05$). Given this group's mid-level skills, it seems appropriate that the children made their greatest improvements in collaborating skills (the highest level) and overall composite scores.

Table 6: Fixed Effects Models Estimating Effects of Program Participation on Skills, All Participants by Entering Skill Category

	Attenders (Lower skills)					
Adaptive Skill	**12-mo effect**			**s.e.**	**Constant**	**s.e.**
Using the Restroom	-0.97			0.043	3.163***	-0.466
Modulating Volume	1.26	***		0.031	7.276***	-0.334
Moving Safely	0.84	**		0.034	7.512***	-0.374
Referencing	0.38			0.030	7.770***	-0.331
Engaging	0.53			0.024	7.856***	-0.258
Communicating	0.33			0.016	8.548***	-0.172
Cooperating	-0.37			0.033	7.506***	-0.358
Regulating Emotions	0.17			0.026	8.294***	-0.279
Making Friends	0.80	***		0.021	9.482***	-0.232
Composite Score	0.32			0.019	7.497***	-0.208
Composite without Using the	0.47	**		0.019	8.022***	-0.204
Composite - Attending	0.37			0.028	6.005***	-0.305
Composite - Participating	0.41			0.018	8.058***	-0.198
Composite - Collaborating	0.20			0.020	8.427***	-0.214
Obs	55					
Individuals	11					
	Participators (Middle skills)					
	12-mo effect			**s.e.**	**Constant**	**s.e**
Using the Restroom	-0.21			-0.016	1.401***	-0.158
Modulating Volume	0.94	**		-0.036	4.032***	-0.365
Moving Safely	0.97	**		-0.039	4.821***	-0.399
Referencing	0.82			-0.038	5.690***	-0.382
Engaging	0.83	**		-0.032	6.061***	-0.323
Communicating	0.35			-0.029	4.917***	-0.298
Cooperating	0.46			-0.036	6.390***	-0.367
Regulating Emotions	1.36	***		-0.030	6.964***	-0.308
Making Friends	1.52	***		-0.035	8.023***	-0.354
Composite Score	0.78	***		-0.021	5.353***	-0.215
Composite without Using the	0.91	***		-0.023	5.838***	-0.229
Composite - Attending	0.55	**		-0.021	3.446***	-0.216
Composite - Participating	0.68	**		-0.024	5.540***	-0.247
Composite - Collaborating	1.15	***		-0.026	7.181***	-0.262
Obs	44					
Individuals	10					
	Collaborators (Higher skills)					
	12-mo effect			**s.e.**	**Constant**	**s.e.**
Using the Restroom	0.72			-0.031	2.114***	-0.271
Modulating Volume	1.18	***		-0.024	3.313***	-0.208
Moving Safely	1.42	***		-0.036	4.221***	-0.316
Referencing	0.97			-0.045	3.626***	-0.399
Engaging	0.37			-0.03	4.054***	-0.263
Communicating	1.05	**		-0.039	4.116***	-0.348
Cooperating	0.89	***		-0.024	4.144***	-0.212
Regulating Emotions	1.42	***		-0.031	4.312***	-0.274
Making Friends	1.34			-0.056	6.798***	-0.493
Composite Score	1.03	***		-0.018	4.083***	-0.158
Composite without Using the	0.97	***		-0.025	4.234***	-0.222
Composite - Attending	0.86	***		-0.019	2.880***	-0.172
Composite - Participating	0.78	**		-0.029	3.906***	-0.260
Composite - Collaborating	1.15	***		-0.026	5.050***	-0.245
Obs	31					
Individuals	9					
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05						

We observed that children who entered with the highest skill levels showed improvements in their average scores, but at both ends of the spectrum. Interestingly, they made significant improvements in scores for modulating volume and moving safely (1.18, 1.42; $p<0.01$). In mid-level scores, they also showed average improvement in communicating (1.05, $p<0.05$). At the upper end, they improved significantly in two of the three scores (0.89 for cooperating; 1.42 for regulating emotion; $p<0.01$). As might be expected, this group showed significant improvements in all composite scores: overall, 1.03, $p<0.01$; composite without restroom use, 0.97, $p<0.01$; attending skills, 0.86, $p<0.01$; participating skills, 0.78, $p<0.05$ and collaborating skills, 1.15, $p<0.01$).

Discussion

Across groups, we noticed that cooperating and communication were significant only for children who entered with higher-level skills (the collaborators). We might speculate that the program needs modifying so that it helps children who do not already have high skills improve in these areas. In addition, referencing improvements were weak or nonexistent across groups, so program leaders plan to evaluate more closely the processes and assessments used to teach and capture referencing skills. In general, these children came into the program with high average scores for using the restroom; thus we do not find our lack of improvement in using the restroom over time problematic.

In general, our results seem to support the finding by Rao et al (2008) that social skills training programs should differ in their approaches to learning and adaptation of skills relative to cognitive and verbal skills of children with ASD. Certainly our analyses show different patterns when we grouped children by their initial skill levels. And while these early results do not prove program success, they offer an indication that the program helps children with ASD learn skills and behaviors that allow them to successfully navigate and become part of community-based, after-school recreational programs.

Limitations

There are a number of limitations in this work that should be acknowledged. First, observed improvements in friendships, social skills and other skill measures do not prove that children actually are more included or have higher quality of life. We have every reason to believe this is true, but this study does not provide empirical evidence making that connection. Secondly, the program is not a clinical trial, and the "control group" consists only of "typical" behavior based on research and development literature and the behavior of "typical" children at the community-based facilities. In addition, many children in the program had secondary diagnoses that likely affected their ability to learn and adapt behavior. Finally, even though this dataset is a time series of data on each participant (and thereby ensures that the individual level changes are controlled) and ISK leaders made every effort to maximize inter-rater reliability of learning and adaptive behaviors, the possibility of rater bias cannot be ruled out (i.e. the rating changes amongst the population). Nonetheless, the study provides insight into the potential participant level benefits on children who participated in this community-based, inclusion program, illustrating program effects not readily found in the literature.

Conclusions

In this study, we examined the Including Special Kids (ISK) Program, a novel treatment program developing better social skills and inclusion among children ages five through high school with autism spectrum disorders (ASD). This study reports the initial results of program effectiveness.

Using evidence-based indicators, we measured the progress of a population of 30 children over 3-24 months. We captured the effectiveness of multiple aspects of the ISK program across different types of participants. Although attenders, participators and collaborators showed some improvement relative to their entry-level skills, those children who began the program with at least mid-range skill levels tended to show the most improvement. These initial findings support the idea that the methods, measures and evaluation techniques created for the ISK program result in positive outcomes in terms of being included in mainstream, out-of-school activities.

Our study of this community-based inclusion program suggests that ISK had a meaningful effect on the skills ASD children need to be accepted in and to participate with groups of typical children in out-of-school activities. This initial assessment yielded encouraging results for community-based inclusion programs, which merits further, in-depth study. An ideal result from this initial work would be that this program is selected for further rigorous scientific study to empirically prove and document the benefits that this initial study highlights. This would require two main pieces of research. First, the measurement tool that is proposed in this study would need to be fully vetted as a valid measurement tool by documenting its reliability and validity as well as its sensitivity, its interpretability, and its ability to minimize responder (rater) bias. The next step would be to run a clinical trial including a control group in which the participants receive standard care. Since this is a community-based intervention and does not have pharmaceutical backing, the considerable expense of a clinical study would need to be borne by a public agency. In order for a funding source to be found, initial findings and excitement about the possibilities needs to be generated. We hope this study can help lay these foundations.

In a larger sense, we hope that this study encourages other community-based interventions (in ASD or other interest groups) to develop measures to show where and how their interventions provide benefit. Those who operate non-profit community based interventions likely have little or no time to concern themselves with additional measures that would another layer of data and reporting (and probably training, documentation, and analysis) to their already busy schedules. These same program managers witness individual cases of success but often do not have time or know how to set up evidence-based, objective data, which is necessary to convince others of their success. Other community organizations and other funders need to see the potential power of an intervention; the best way to encourage wide adoption is to provide proof of the potential for success.

Finally, although medical journals will not publish the results seen in a community-based intervention, those working in other non-profits and community-based organizations will be an eager and appreciative audience. These individuals merit the ability to assess and judge how well an intervention may work in their community. With sufficient grass-roots experimentation and implementation, the scientific community and potential clinical trial funders can be encouraged and enticed to run the clinical trials to provide conclusive proof of efficacy.

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