The Relevance of Self at Work:
Emotional Intelligence and Staff Training in After-School Environments

by Michelle Seligson and Marybeth MacPhee

Executive Summary

- Key finding is that after-school staff can learn to increase their capacity for self-awareness, create stronger connections with co-workers and children, and increase their understanding about how after-school programs function as a group; change is magical, not magic.

- After-school programs provide important opportunity for social and emotional growth in children.

- Growing body of literature and research points to the social and emotional climate of an after-school or youth program as a key factor in determining how interested, safe and respected the children and youth feel.

- Quality of adult-child relationships and degree to which the child feels a sense of connection is key indicator of success.

- Visits to after-school programs reveal that those programs emphasizing the personal development of adult educators have a more positive social-emotional climate than those that do not address adult development issues.

- After-school programs are well-suited for the work of social and emotional development because relationships between adults and children are less formal and task-oriented that they are during the school day.

- Advocates for emotional intelligence in schools (and, in turn, after-school programs) propose that staff should have time and space at work for self-reflection.

- Successful after-school programs build into program design opportunities for staff to reflect on what leads them to work with children and how these motivations affect their relationships with children.

- The capacity to honestly listen to self and empathetically listen to others helps after-school staff hear the essence of what children, co-workers and parents need to improve the emotional climate of a program.

- Adding elements of emotional intelligence and relational practices to after-school staff training offers essential coping tools to what is an undervalued profession.