

# OST WORLD: RESEARCH CONNECTIONS

AMERICAN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH ASSOCIATION OUT-OF-SCHOOL TIME SPECIAL INTEREST GROUP

## Q&A: GIL NOAM

The AERA 2015 theme was, *Toward Justice: Culture, Language, and Heritage in Education Research and Praxis*. How does your work address justice?

Educational justice is a foundation for social justice. If we want democracy to be successful and social justice to be foundational to wellbeing of individuals and families, then, communities, education, and health and mental health are all essential. We can't have an underclass that is uneducated and doesn't participate in opportunities. It is wonderful that so many people are coming together around schools, OST, and health clinics. We are all focusing on social justice, on creating equal opportunities that make it possible to develop pathways out of poverty, into future jobs, and participation in the political process.

In general, people have a good understanding that education needs reform and needs change, personalization and new integration of technologies in education. What people have less of an understanding is a real mental health crisis. Many young people have been traumatized and carry a burden and have a problem developing a resilient self. It is pervasive everywhere, regardless of demographics. [Program in Education, Afterschool & Resiliency](#) (PEAR) focuses on the intersection of educational achievement and psychological burdens children often carry that we believe need to be addressed simultaneously with academics. PEAR is saying that we have enough methodology and theory that we know what it takes to have a whole child develop 21<sup>st</sup> skills, and that with good teaching and learning in school and in OST settings can really opportunities for everyone.

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This year marks the 15th anniversary of PEAR. How has PEAR advanced OST research?

PEAR is a program located at Harvard University, so we have been able to draw on the University resources and intellectual power, and translate it to practical tools, tracking the development of tools such as assessment and strategies to work with students in social-emotional and STEM fields. The translational work is both what we know from research, what is evidence-based, what is working, and bringing them to OST. The translation goes the other way around too, from community back to university, what needs further investigation. We locate ourselves between theory and practice, and it is a wonderful space to inhabit. Research becomes practical and practice becomes more evidence-based.

One example are the tools we developed. One is a holistic student assessment and other is a common instrument for science and engagement. Both invite

students to tell us how they think about and feel about themselves in the process of learning. Both have a youth-voice orientation, asset-based orientation. We are a data center, so we report back to programs, to students and families, the results in a way that they can immediately use. Programs can see what students say and adjust practice accordingly. PEAR provides ideas and coaching to integrate curriculum to strengthen quality of programming so youth have stronger outcomes. We can change programming.

PEAR has two sides. It focuses on social-emotional learning (SEL) and on STEM. In SEL, the out-of-school time programs have a huge opportunity to contribute to what students need to be successful, including building relationship with adults, positive relationship with peers,

active engagement, etc. We help programs, schools, and educators become intentional and help students make it in new economy and the world.

We also have one leg in STEM, where we can say that what students are learning is impacting academic success, and is in fact, deep learning. STEM is especially strong due to job market in the U.S. We need to focus on STEM in an engaging way. We began to use our knowledge about OST to broaden the students' use of STEM. We started STEM work 12 years ago, and only in the last few years, we have just seen STEM as a revolution. We did foundational work. We created an observation tool (Dimensions of Success) that observes what is happening in programs to get a snapshot of success and vulnerabilities of programs and coach them on how to approve.

We are currently transforming PEAR into a data center for SEL, so schools and OST providers can early on in the school year get a sense of their population, can look at trends, report it back to communities, schools, and districts to improve practice on the ground.

[You were the editor-in-chief of the seminal journal, \*New Directions for Youth Development\*, which published 140 volumes. How has the Journal informed and shaped the out-of-school time field over time?](#)

When we started the Journal, with a very powerful Board of Editors, we wanted to provide some credibility, to build the field of youth development and OST, to say this is not a sidekick that happens, not glorified babysitting, but a movement and energy that is coming from researchers, policymakers, and practitioners nationally and internationally. The Journal created a forum, centered around a topic, where researchers, policymakers, and practitioners engaged in a dialogue and addressed an issue like youth mentoring or expanded learning time and opportunities, spiritual development,

university-community partnerships, etc.

Many people from the field participated, which creates a community. When we started in late 1990s, early 2000, there was no other place to publish in our field. We helped create a momentum, showed that many people were interested and willing to go across disciplines and take on topics that changed the way young people were treated and accepted.

In terms of success, there has been a lot of success in making the field really interesting. When you look at topics over the last 20 years, they are remarkable. When you start thinking about experiences, how many topics there were... STEM, arts, resiliency, mental health... endless... We have also created a bridge for scholars and practitioners to share their work in an accessible way.

[What excites you about the OST field today?](#)

Wherever I go, I see more children and adolescents spending time in settings that are caring, informal, and provide learning in the broadest sense, not only testable learning, but really see passion about pursuits. These spaces have always been there, but have increased over time. Out-of-school time programs are not places for low-paid people to hang out with kids, but a place where caring adults broaden who are educators of children and adolescents. This has implications for schools. Youth professionals free up teachers, so that they can focus on different things and have different relationships with children in OST. There is a factor that is building that is creating more quality and more leadership within it. Kids now get more external opportunities.

The OST field is also professionalizing. It is more evidence-based. They address the academic outcomes but also go beyond, which is important. There is a broadening consensus that outcomes can be bigger (wellbeing, sports, learning, learning skills, support homework and mentorship). I am very optimistic.

While the funding will not always be there, we hope that states will continue to invest in youth-serving organizations and to fund networks that connect sectors, health, college preparation, and school, so that we can see a broader view of what it takes to support the whole student. OST is a bridge.

**Dr. Helen Janc Malone**  
(OST SIG Chair)

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**Dr. Corey Bower**  
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Dear members,

We welcome you to the inaugural year of an exciting new series by the OST SIG, designed to connect you to each other and to the emerging and groundbreaking scholarship in the out-of-school time field. We hope the series will introduce you to new ideas, concepts, and spark a connection in your work.

With warm regards,  
The officers of the OST SIG

Gil Noam, Ed. D., Ph.D. (*Habil*), is the founder and director of the Program in Education, Afterschool & Resiliency (PEAR) at Harvard University. An Associate Professor at Harvard Medical School and McLean Hospital focusing on prevention and resilience, Dr. Noam trained as a clinical and developmental psychologist and psychoanalyst in both Europe and the United States. Dr. Noam has a strong interest in translating research and innovation to support resilience in youth in educational settings. Dr. Noam has published over 200 papers, articles, and books on topics related to child and adolescent development, and risk and resiliency. He was the editor-in-chief of the award-winning journal *New Directions in Youth Development: Theory, Practice and Research*. He consults nationally and internationally to youth development, education and child mental health organizations, foundations and agencies.

