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After-School Programs:

Connecting Daily Experiences and Global Ratings of Support

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BACKGROUND

Since the early 1990's, there has been a shift in the approach researchers, practitioners and policy-makers have taken when addressing youth issues. The field is moving from a focus on intervention and crisis to one that views adolescent development in terms of assets and supports (Larson, 2000; Scales & Leffert, 1999; Quinn, 1999; Catalano, et al., 1998). Few studies of after-school programs have identified specific program features that contribute to positive youth development. This study uses a developmental and process-oriented approach to examine students' experiences and perceptions of support at school-based after-school programs. Two approaches were used to measure student experiences: (1) Minute-by-minute ratings of experiences using Experience Sampling Methodology (ESM) and (2) Global perceptions of support. The ESM makes it possible to know what a student is doing at a given time, to assess how a student responds emotionally to each experience, to learn how important a particular activity is, and how much the student enjoys the activity. The Developmental Supports Rating Scale measures students' perceptions of the developmental supports they receive in their after-school programs, specifically examining supportive relationships with adults and peers, opportunities for autonomy and leadership, and interest in activities.

METHOD

This study is composed of a subsample of youth who were participants in a larger study of After-School Experiences (Vandell, 2001). Data were collected in three Midwestern U.S. communities. The communities are ethnically diverse, and differ in level of urbanization, workforce composition, and economic stability. Students attended eight middle schools: three schools each in two communities, two schools at one community. Students, their parents, and their teachers were participants in the larger study; the current study will only utilize data collected from students and parents. The total sample consists of 191 eighth grade students. The current study utilizes after-school experience data collected from 157 students in the fall of 8th grade (Time 1) and 135 students in the spring of 8th grade (Time 2).

Students first described their experiences using the Experience Sampling Methodology. ESM was used to measure students' experiences during the after-school hours, evenings and on weekends. Students wore a watch for seven consecutive days in the fall and again in the spring. Watches were programmed to randomly beep 5 times each weekday between the time school ended until 8:30 p.m. and 5 times each weekend between 10:00 a.m. and 8:30 p.m. Each time the student was signaled, he/she completed a two –page record in a daily logbook. The students recorded their location, activity, activity partner(s), others present, levels of engagement in the activity and affective state. Students also indicated whether or not they were at an after-school program. Only those signals that occurred while students were attending an after-school program were included in these analyses (897 beeps at Time1; 699 beeps at Time 2).

Individual items from the Experience Sampling logbook were combined to create composite measures of engagement and affect. Measures of engagement included: (1) Concerted Effort, the experience of heightened concentration when using a high degree of skills in a challenging activity, (2) Motivation, the perception of enjoyment, interest, and intrinsic desire

during activities involving high degrees of choice, and (3) Importance, the perception that the activity is valuable. Measures of affect relate to the participant's emotions when signaled and included: (1) Positive Affect, (2) Negative Affect, and (3) Idleness, feelings of being lonely or bored (See Table 1).

Students also described their experiences at programs more globally using the Developmental Supports Rating Scale Questionnaire (DSRS), once in the fall and again in the spring. The DSRS assesses students' experiences in programs on four broad areas of support posited to promote positive youth development:

- Supportive Relationships with Adults
- Supportive Relationships with Peers
- Opportunities for Autonomy and Leadership
- Interest in Activities

A confirmatory factor analysis examined the underlying structure of the items in the DSRS. A four-factor model was fitted using LISREL. The Chi-Square for the model was significant ($X^2= 171.31$; $p=.000$). The fit indices reached the .90 and above range: NNFI = .90; CFI = .92 (see Table 2).

KEY FINDINGS

Partial correlations which controlled for gender, race/ethnicity, family structure, and prior adjustment examined whether measures of engagement and affect were related to global ratings of support. In the fall (Time 1), daily reports of motivation were related to supportive relationships with adults ($r=.25^{**}$), supportive relationships with peers ($r=.32^{**}$), interest in activities ($r=.38^{***}$), and total ratings of support ($r=.30^{**}$). Daily reports of positive affect and importance were also significantly associated with supportive relationships with adults and total ratings of support. Daily ratings of importance were positively associated with supportive

relationships with adults ($r=.20^*$) and interest in activities ($r=.22^*$) (See Table 3). In the spring (Time 2), the associations between daily experiences and perceptions of support followed a relatively pattern. Daily reports of experiences were less associated with relationships with adults, and were more likely to be associated with leadership and autonomy opportunities as well as interest in activities. Motivation was positively associated with opportunities for leadership and autonomy ($r=.32^{**}$), interest in activities ($r=.33^{**}$), and supportive relationships with peers ($r=.20^*$). Students ratings of the importance of their after-school activities was positively associated with for leadership and autonomy ($r=.20^*$) and interest in activities ($r=.25^*$). Spring ratings of concerted effort were positively associated with interest in activities ($r=.25^*$) (See Table 4).

CONCLUSIONS

In general, the significant correlations between daily experiences and global ratings of support suggest that the more choice, enjoyment, interest and motivation students have about an activity, the more supportive they rate the activity in terms of relationships, autonomy, leadership and interest. These results also suggest that as students spend time in the program across the school year, the more they are likely to report positive daily experiences as being related leadership opportunities.

Examining daily experiences and perceptions of support longitudinally can inform research, policy, and practice communities about important information regarding program participation and help in the interpretation of longitudinal outcome data.

Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations of Composite Measures of Engagement and Affect

	Program Experiences at	Program Experiences at
	Time 1	Time 2
	<u>M</u> (SD)	<u>M</u> (SD)
	N = 157	N = 135
<u>Engagement</u>		
Concerted Effort	2.64 (.81)	2.62 (.81)
Motivation	3.06 (.61)	3.07 (.58)
Importance	3.08 (.69)	3.09 (.70)
<u>Affect</u>		
Positive Affect	2.53 (.71)	2.52 (.68)
Negative Affect	1.29 (.38)	1.29 (.39)
Idleness	1.32 (.41)	1.31 (.40)

Note. Concerted Effort = Challenge, Concentration, Skills. Motivation = Choice, Interest, Enjoyment, Wish. Importance = Importance. Positive Affect = Happy, Excited, Relaxed, Proud. Negative Affect = Angry, Stressed, Sad, Worried. Idleness = Bored, Lonely.

Table 2

Psychometrics of Each Subscale on the Developmental Supports Rating Scale

Scale	Alpha	Mean	Standard Deviation
Supportive Relationships with Adults	.81	3.74	.88
Supportive Relationships with Peers	.66	3.76	.84
Autonomy and Leadership	.75	3.01	.87
Interest in Activities	.75	3.47	.94
Total	.91	3.47	.75

Table 3
*Time 1 Correlations between Immediate Experiences and Global Ratings of Support
Controlling for Gender, Ethnicity, Family Structure and Prior Adjustment*

	<u>Global Ratings of Support</u>				
	Supportive Relationships with Adults	Supportive Relationships with Peers	Opportunities for Autonomy and Leadership	Interest in Activities	Total Support Scale
Concerted					
Effort	.06	.09	-.05	.11	.05
Motivation	.25**	.32**	.15	.38***	.30**
Importance	.20*	.17 ⁺	.09	.22*	.20*
Positive					
Affect	.34***	.20*	.16	.41***	.32**
Negative					
Affect	-.13	-.11	-.09	-.03	-.11
Idleness	-.16	-.17	-.11	-.14	-.17

Note. N=128. ⁺p<.07, *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

Concerted Effort = Challenging, Concentrating, Skills. Motivation = Choice, Interest, Enjoyment, Wish. Importance = Importance. Positive Affect = Happy, Excited, Relaxed, Proud. Negative Affect = Angry, Stressed, Sad, Worried. Idleness = Bored, Lonely.

Table 4
*Time 2 Correlations between Immediate Experiences and Global Ratings of Support
 Controlling for Gender, Ethnicity, Family Structure and Prior Adjustment*

	<u>Global Ratings of Support</u>				
	Supportive Relationships with Adults	Supportive Relationships with Peers	Opportunities for Autonomy and Leadership	Interest in Activities	Total Support Scale
Concerted					
Effort	.10	.04	.10	.25**	.15
Motivation	.09	.20*	.32**	.33**	.30**
Importance	.18 ⁺	.12	.20*	.25*	.24*
Positive					
Affect	.13	.09	.21*	.19 ⁺	.19
Negative					
Affect	.01	-.17	.04	-.04	-.02
Idleness	.06	-.15	-.03	-.06	-.05

Note. N=108. ⁺p<.07, *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

Concerted Effort = Challenging, Concentrating, Skills. Motivation = Choice, Interest, Enjoyment, Wish. Importance = Importance. Positive Affect = Happy, Excited, Relaxed, Proud. Negative Affect = Angry, Stressed, Sad, Worried. Idleness = Bored, Lonely.

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