

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Civilian

Engagement in After-School Program Activities: Quality of Experience from the Perspective of Participants

Shernoff, D. J., & Vandell, D. L. (2007). Engagement in after-school program activities: Quality of experience from the perspective of participants. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 36(7), 891-903. doi:10.1007/s10964-007-9183-5

SUMMARY: One hundred sixty four middle school students' experiences at after- school programs were compared as they participated in different types of activities and with different social partners. Self-report data from the students were analyzed using an Experience Sampling Method to better understand the quality of experience as perceived by the students.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Students reported high levels of engagement while participating in sports activities and in arts enrichment activities through after-school programming.
- Lower levels of engagement when completing solely homework at programs were reported.
- Self-report from the students showed a higher engagement level in activities that involved both adults and peers, rather than activities with peers only.

IMPLICATIONS FOR MILITARY PROFESSIONALS:

Military professionals could:

- Help develop modules or activities to better inform staff of best practices in educational learning activities to best serve students
- Collaborate with other professionals in the field about ways in which to facilitate program activities that provide the most engagement

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Maximize students' experiences by promoting and implementing structured, adult-supervised activities
- Explicitly add academic content into enrichment activities may allow for higher engagement and motivation with students, as it supports meaningful learning

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Develop a student-to-facilitator ratio that fits the after-school programming needs of both adults and students to promote quality time and learning
- Suggest professional development for community providers about how to support students during afterschool programming

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METHODS

- A total of 1,596 experiences were randomly sampled using an experience sampling method approach.
- Participants wore digital wristwatches, of which were pre-programmed to randomly beep. Students then recorded their experience in a logbook each time they were 'beeped'.
- Students were paid \$1.00 for each entry in the logbook, on average, responding to 33 of the 35 signal beeps (94% response rate).

PARTICIPANTS

- Eight elementary schools were chosen across three states in the Midwestern U.S.
- 165 students comprised the sample, of which 50% (n = 83) were male.
- Of the sample, 37% were Black, 11% Latino, 39% White, and 13% were multiple ethnicities.

LIMITATIONS

- Small sample size limits generalizability across the U.S.
- Self-report data may impact internal validity of study.
- Results are correlational, so unable to make inferences about casual relationships.
- The incentive of \$1.00 per logbook entry may have skewed responses or answers.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Future research could examine ways for educators to aid after-school programming instructors in building a supportive academic-enriched environment where students are able to feel intrinsically motivated and engaged.
- Moving forward, further research regarding specific characteristics and outcomes associated with various activities in after-school programs, and how those outcomes vary by program type will be beneficial for program implementation.
- Future longitudinal research may help in better understanding perceived experiences of the students and factors that may change over time in terms of engagement and program activities.

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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