The Impact of Extracurricular Leadership Activities on Adolescent Life Satisfaction

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ABSTRACT

Previous studies have shown that certain extracurricular school-based activities such as sports can help satisfy basic psychological needs and increase feelings of vitality and life satisfaction (Eccles & Barber, 1999; Hanrahan, 2005).

School sports and other in-school leadership activities can allow for adolescents to develop positive and meaningful relationships with adults (who can serve as mentors) and peers and give opportunities for their psychological needs to be met. However, it has not yet been deeply explored whether the type of activity or the environment which it takes place affects overall youth life satisfaction.

The present study utilizes SDT and ALT in hierarchically examining the relationships between 4 constructs of interest (inside and outside of school leadership activities, basic psychological needs satisfaction [BPNs], vitality) and youth life satisfaction.

The purpose is to better understand how the nature/context of leadership activities can help explain the variance in life satisfaction amongst youth from underserved populations. Through assessing inside of school versus outside of school leadership activities (ISLA and OSLA respectively) this study hopes to display the impact community involvement has on the overall life satisfaction of adolescents.

METHODS

• This study focuses on understanding reported adolescent life satisfaction prior to a youth leadership conference.
• Participants (n=109) from 12 different high schools (mean from each school = 7, SD=3.7) were chosen by their respective districts to attend a free youth leadership conference.
• Demographics showed most participants identifying as female (63.3%) and white/Caucasian (88.1%). Student ages ranged from 14-18 (M=15.53, SD=1.07).
• The current study utilizes 4 pre-conference surveys with data regarding basic psychological needs satisfaction, vitality, life satisfaction, and leadership development in and outside of school.
• All assessments utilized a 7-point Likert scale, except for the leadership development questionnaire which had a 5-point scale. The number of questions ranged from 4 (leadership development) to 21 (BPNs).
• The predictor variables examined in this current study are basic psychological needs satisfaction and vitality. These variables were chosen due to the hypothesized positive relationship with the outcome variable of life satisfaction. Additional factors analyzed in this study are leadership involvement inside and outside of school.

RESULTS

Prior to performing the regression analyses, correlations among all of the control, predictor variables, and the outcome variable, life satisfaction, were calculated, alpha levels of < .05 were incorporated into the hierarchical regression models.

Table 2. Reliability estimates.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Number of items</th>
<th>Cronbach’s alpha</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vitality</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life Satisfaction</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic Psychological Needs Satisfaction</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>.90</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All of the correlations between study variables are illustrated in Table 2. All bivariate correlations performed in school leadership involvement were statistically significant (p < .01) ranging from moderately weak (r = .311) to strong moderate (r = .622) associations with life satisfaction.

Table 3. Results of hierarchical regression analyses for life satisfaction.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Life Satisfaction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>3.452</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard Error of the Estimate</td>
<td>285</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F-Test</td>
<td>11.14** 29.60** 28.38**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

DISCUSSION

The main findings suggest that leadership involvement, specifically those held outside of school, play a significant role in positively increasing youth life satisfaction.

This data showed strong correlations for outside of school leadership activities and feelings of autonomy, relatedness, competence, vitality, and life satisfaction, while in school leadership activities did not.

The predictive modeling demonstrates practical and theoretical insights for creating the optimal conditions for adolescents development and well-being.

Self-Determination Theory: Outside of school leadership activities may provide more opportunities for the three basic psychological needs to be satisfied: Autonomy. OSLA allow for youth to act in a way that is more positive to increasing youth life satisfaction.

Relatedness. OSLA creates opportunities from student from different educational (e.g., different schools or school districts), develop friendships (e.g., middle class v. lower middle class), and social strata (e.g., within school cliques) to feel meaningful connected with other over a shared interest.

Competence. OSLA affords opportunities for the engagement in activities that create a deeper level of mastery.

Authentic Leadership Theory: Authentic leadership in OSLA programs may create open and supportive relationships with adolescents. If the three basic psychological needs are not being thwarted in any way and positive role models are actively trying to develop positive relationships, then feelings of vitality may increase which all together can improve reported life satisfaction (Kernis & Goldman, 2005).

Implications: OSLA may impact to the satisfaction of basic psychological needs, vitality, and life satisfaction. The results of this study suggest that expanding and developing community level activities for all youth may lead to higher levels of life satisfaction among that population. With this knowledge, community leadership programs should be invested in and made readily available to adolescents.

REFERENCES


Hanrahan, K. P. (2005). Authentic Leadership Theory: Outside of school leadership activities may provide more opportunities for the three basic psychological needs to be satisfied: Autonomy, Relatedness, and Competence. Athletic Insight: Online Journal of Community Leadership Programs. 1, 2


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