The Effect of Extracurricular Activities on Youth Development

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Abstract

The focus of this literature review is on how youth development is affected by participation in extracurricular activities using specific assets established by the Search Institute. Following a look at the Search Institute’s history, the paper will focus on three specific assets (bonding to school, positive peer influence, and other adult relationships), and how they are developed through involvement in extracurricular activities. The paper will then look at how participation relates to various Adlerian concepts. Finally, the author will describe the implications for school counselors which include a proposal for a mentorship program for coaches.
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The Effect of Extracurricular Activities on Youth Development

There is a growing body of research examining the relationship between extracurricular participation and youth development. Fredricks and Eccles (2006) postulated the heightened interest in this area may be due to the “high levels of alienation and boredom reported by youths in school, developmental increases in underachievement and school disengagement, and evidence of increases in the amount of time youths spend unsupervised by adults” (p. 698). Larson (2000) agrees stating that “high rates of boredom, alienation, and disconnection are signs of deficiency in positive development” (p. 170).

Researchers hypothesize that the absence of engagement may be the cause of risky behaviors such as substance abuse, delinquency, premature sexual involvement, and dropping out of school (Fauth, Roth, & Brooks-Gunn, 2008; Fredricks & Eccles, 2006; Larson, 2000). Because of this, advocates for positive youth development, such as Larson, want to discover ways to engage youth and “get adolescents’ fires lit, how to have them develop the complex of dispositions and skills needed to take charge of their lives” (p. 170). Having structured out-of-school-time activities has been believed to develop key assets for positive youth development (Zarret, et al., 2009). This has led to an increased interest in the study of extracurricular activities among families, policymakers, and researchers (Gardner, Roth, & Brooks-Gunn, 2008).

Researchers have discussed various reasons for the positive association between structured activities and positive youth development. According to Gardner et al. (2008), the common after-school activities for youth, which may include watching television or hanging out with friends, do not encourage healthy development. Organized activities, on the other hand, do encourage healthy development “because they provide more developmental supports and
opportunities” (Gardner et al., 2008, p. 814). Fredricks and Eccles (2006) add that when youth spend their free time in a productive way, it can provide “distinct opportunities for growth and development” (p. 698). Larson (2000) performed a study and found that extracurricular activities have the unique quality of giving youth an experience that provides a high level of intrinsic motivation as well as increased concentration.

Due to the high student to school counselor ratio, particularly in Minnesota, many high school students are missing out on the more personalized relationship they should have with their counselors. The American School Counselor Association (2005) recommends a student to counselor ratio of 250 to 1. However, school counselors in Minnesota have case loads of close to 500 students. According to Fitzgerald (2009):

Minnesota school children’s mental health and academic counseling needs have dramatically increased in the last two years; however, funding and hiring of school counselors has not kept up with this growing demand. Compounding the problem for children is that Minnesota has traditionally lagged behind the rest of the nation in student-to-counselor rations, ranking 49th out of 50 since the beginning of this decade. As a result, student’s academic, social and mental health problems are going unaddressed.

Involvement in extracurricular activities can help these problems get addressed. This paper will give an in-depth look at the Search Institute and the list of developmental assets developed by them. Through a literature review, the author will illustrate how three specific assets can be developed by participation in school-based activities. Finally, the author will discuss what the implications for school counselors are.
The Search Institute

Background

The Search Institute is an organization based in Minneapolis, MN, that has been working for more than fifty years to discover what young people need to succeed. The vision is “to create a world where all young people are valued and thrive” (Search Institute). They hope to be able to accomplish this vision through their mission which is “to provide leadership, knowledge and resources to promote healthy children, youth, and communities” (Search Institute).

The Search Institute is a “private, not-for-profit organization that since 1958 has conducted practical research to benefit children and adolescents” (Scales, 2003, p. 5). It was originally named Lutheran Youth Research (LYR) and was initiated by Dr. Merton P. Strommen. Strommen had a desire to better understand young people. During his doctoral studies at the University of Minnesota, he submitted a proposal “for a study to identify the concerns and needs of Lutheran youth” and developed a “youth survey of 520 items” (Search Institute). The survey was administered to 2,000 youth and 2,000 adults through a random sample from 191 congregations. Data was analyzed and a book based on the findings was published. Smedsrud wrote *What Youth are Thinking (1961)* which was LYR’s first published book.

Realizing the potential of this study and the implications of the findings, Lutheran Brotherhood provided “unprecedented use of computer equipment, paper, and cards” (Search Institute). As the organization continued to grow, LYR wanted to expand their research to include other denominations. In 1967, after receiving outside funding which allowed them to become independent of the denominational youth department, Lutheran Youth Research changed its name to Church Youth Research (Jones, 2007). During this time, the focus was still in researching youth in a religious setting. However, the potential to be able to reach even more
youth with this study could not be ignored. In 1977, Strommen suggested changing the name once again to Search Institute in order to “reflect its broadening mission” (Jones, 2007).

**The Developmental Assets**

In 1990, the Search Institute began surveying youth from more than 1,000 U.S. communities and identified “40 developmental assets or building blocks of success that young people need to be healthy, caring, responsible, and productive” (Scales, 2003, p. 21). This framework was grounded in the vision of building on the positive attributes young people have rather than focusing on the negative ones (Scales, 2003).

There are external and internal assets with four categories in each. Each category contains some of the developmental assets. For the external assets the categories are support, empowerment, boundaries and expectations, and constructive use of time. Support consists of family support, positive family communication, other adult relationships, caring neighborhood, caring school climate, and parent involvement in schooling. Empowerment includes community values youth, youth as resources, service to others, and safety. Boundaries and expectations include family boundaries, school boundaries, neighborhood boundaries, adult role models, positive peer influence, and high expectations. Constructive use of time is made up of creative activities, youth programs, religious community, and time at home.

The categories for the internal assets are commitment to learning, positive values, social competencies, and positive identity. Commitment to learning consists of achievement motivation, school engagement, homework, bonding to school, and reading for pleasure. Positive values includes caring, equality and social justice, integrity, honesty, responsibility, and restraint. Social competencies is made up of planning and decision making, interpersonal competence,
cultural competence, resistance skills, and peaceful conflict resolution. Positive identity includes personal power, self-esteem, sense of purpose, and a positive view of personal future.

According to Morgan, Spears, and Kaplan, the developmental asset framework is “grounded in the scientific literature on prevention, resilience, youth development, and protective factors” and is “conceptually aligned with a number of recent syntheses of research on adolescent development, including the Child Welfare League of America's framework of the five universal needs of children” (as cited in Mannes, Roehlkepartain, & Benson, 2005, p. 235).

Over the years, Search Institute has surveyed more than 3 million children to develop their framework. By surveying at this high volume, they are able to reach students of different races, socioeconomic backgrounds, and familial systems. The Search Institute has shown that building these assets can benefit all children which is why this has become the “most widely recognized and most frequently cited approach to positive youth development in North America” (Search Institute).

Under this framework, the focus moves to the strengths the young person possesses instead of just the challenges they are facing. In other words it is “an asset-based approach instead of a deficit-based approach with children and youth” (Rose, 2006, p. 236). According to Scales (2003), “research has shown that the more of these assets youth report in their lives, the less they engage in various kinds of high risk behaviors” (p. 21). As shown in Table 1, the high risk behaviors that decrease include problem alcohol use, violence, illicit drug use, and sexual activity. Scales (2003) adds that “the greater the number of assets, the more young people show evidence of developmental thriving, such as doing well in school, valuing racial diversity, helping others, and overcoming adversity” (p. 21). As shown in Table 2, they are also more likely to exhibit leadership and maintain good health.
This paper will focus on three particular assets: bonding to school, positive peer influence, and other adult relationships. The author will use current research to define each asset, show how the development of each one benefits students, and demonstrate how participation in extracurricular activities develops the asset.

**Extracurricular Activities Defined**

My College Calendar developed a list of the various extracurricular activities that are available to today’s students. There are academic focused activities such as student government, debate team, science club, national honor society; interest focused clubs such as chess, photography; performing arts such as drama, band, dance, choir; campus-related activities such as homecoming or prom committee, yearbook staff, school newspaper; as well as athletics which include a variety of sports such as basketball, tennis, cheer squad, track, etc.

These activities need to possess certain characteristics in order to foster a positive developmental setting (Eccles & Gootman, 2002). This includes direction by one or more adults, supportive relationships from the adult(s) and other participants, appropriate structure with rules of behavior and a regular schedule, opportunities for skill building and opportunities to belong regardless of one’s gender, ethnicity, etc. (Darling, Caldwell, & Smith, 2005; Eccles & Gootman, 2002). One of the most basic and most important elements is to provide an environment in which students feel physical and psychological safety (Eccles & Gootman, 2002). According to Eccles and Gootman (2002) this is crucial because “in addition to the direct effects of harm on physical well-being and development, violence or the threat of violence interferes with the allocation of attention to intellectual, psychological, emotional, and social development” (p. 91). Another characteristic is that the activity is voluntary which means it is not required for school (Larson, 2000).
Analysis of Developing Assets through Extracurricular Activities

Bonding to School

Bonding to one’s school, which can also be termed as school connectedness or school attachment, describes a student’s positive feeling towards or relationship to his/her school (Blum, 2005; Catalano, Haggerty, Oesterle, Fleming, & Hawkins, 2004; Libbey, 2004). In an article focusing on school connectedness, Centers for Diseases Control and Prevention (2009) defined it as the belief by students that the adults in the school care about their learning as well as about them as individuals. The Search Institute includes in their definition that school attachment is a student’s belief that the adults in the school care about their success (Search Institute). In addition, it is characterized by an investment in school and feeling a sense of belonging while there (Catalano et al., 2004; Libbey, 2004). Finally, school connectedness is being proud of one’s school (Libbey, 2004).

School connectedness is a “critical element in the developmental experience of children” which reduces problem behaviors that interfere with being successful in school (Catalano et al., p. 252, 2004). There is evidence in existing research supporting this notion. In the reviewed research, we see that school connectedness is a major factor in predicting a student’s success. Students who develop school connectedness are less likely to demonstrate risky behaviors such as fighting, bullying, experimenting with illegal substances, smoking cigarettes, drinking alcohol, exhibiting disruptive and violent behavior, gang involvement, and dropping out of school (Blum, 2005; Catalano et al., 2004).

School connectedness not only decreases risky behaviors, it increases healthy behaviors as well. Strengthening school connectedness has been proven to increase a student’s educational motivation (Monahan, Oesterle, & Hawkins, 2010). Feeling bonded to ones school also increases...
students’ academic performance, classroom engagement, and social achievement (Blum, 2005; Catalano et al. 2004). The more students feel bonded to their school, the more likely they are to come to school every day. Increased school connectedness improves school attendance, student retention, and completion rates (Blum, 2005; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2009).

The research is compelling as it spans across a wide variety of students. “Various techniques were used to examine the relationship between school bonding and positive and problem behavior, and these relationships were found during childhood and adolescence” (Catalano, 2004, p. 257). These relationships are also found across all racial, ethnic and income groups (Blum, 2005).

Existing research has confirmed that participating in school-sponsored extracurricular activities is an excellent way to increase a student’s school connectedness. Through a study focusing on the relationship between youth participation in extracurricular activities and their sense of school connection, Brown and Evans (2002) found that students who participated in school-sponsored extracurricular activities, regardless of ethnicity, had greater levels of school connection. When students make a commitment to a school-based activity, they feel a sense of pride in their school and have a more positive attitude towards their school (Darling et al., 2005).

Through a longitudinal study using data from the Childhood and Beyond Study (Marsh, 1992), Fredricks and Eccles (2006) found a strong, positive correlation between the number and duration of extracurricular activities students are involved in and their sense of school connectedness. They found that the more extracurricular activities a student is involved in and the longer a student is involved in those activities, the higher his/her feeling of school bonding is.

Not only can getting students to participate in extracurricular activities benefit them, it can positively effect the school climate as well. Schools who have higher rates of participation in
extracurricular activities during or after school, tend to have a higher overall level of school connectedness (Blum, McNeely, & Rinehart, 2002).

**Positive Peers**

According to the Search Institute (2011), the asset of positive peer influence means that a young person’s friends model responsible behavior. In other words, it is important for students to build positive peer relationships. A positive peer is someone that provides social support, reinforces acceptable behavior, has a positive attitude towards school, encourages school involvement, and demonstrates commitment towards their academic goals (Darling et al., 2005; Fredricks & Eccles, 2005).

Why are peer relationships important? Peer relationships have a major impact on adolescents’ current and future well-being and contributes to their psychological adjustment (Erdley, Nangle, Newman, & Carpenter, 2001; Oberle, Schonert-Reichl, & Thomson, 2010). Peer relationships can be important sources of affection, intimacy, social support, feelings of inclusion, nurturance, companionship, and enhancement of self-worth (Erdley et al. 2001; Loder & Hirsch, 2003).

Research has shown that peers can have either a positive or negative influence on a student, depending on the characteristics of the group they are associated with (Fredricks & Eccles, 2005). According to Fredricks and Eccles (2005), there is “research linking peer characteristics to risk behavior, academic adjustment, and emotional well-being” (p. 509). Building relationships with peers partaking in risky behaviors will increase the likelihood that they too will partake in those same risky behaviors such as alcohol and drug use (Fredricks & Eccles, 2005; Oberle et al., 2010). Other possible consequences of these negative peer
relationships include developing an apathetic attitude towards school and homework, mental illness such as depression, and delinquency (Fredricks & Eccles, 2005; Oberle et al., 2010).

When a student builds relationships with positive peers he/she will demonstrate more favorable behavior (Fredricks & Eccles, 2005). Positive peer relationships can result in benefits such as improved self-worth, enhanced self-esteem, and higher social functioning (Oberle et al., 2010; Schaefer, Simpkins, Vest, & Price, 2011). Students who have positive peer relationships also tend to have a more positive attitude towards school, put effort into their homework, and demonstrate more motivation in school which leads to higher academic performance (Darling et al., 2005; Oberle et al., 2010).

With this knowledge, we need to explore ways to help students develop these positive peer relationships. Research has shown that involvement in extracurricular activities is an excellent way to accomplish this. According to Gilman, Meyers, and Perez (2004) extracurricular activities can introduce adolescents into productive social networks in which its participants demonstrate positive values. A study done by Fredricks and Eccles (2005) supported this notion. The authors obtained a sample of 498 adolescents using data from the Childhood and Beyond Study and found that participation in school-based extracurricular activities predicted characteristics of one’s friendship network. They found that adolescents who participated in extracurricular activities have more positive peer relationships than nonparticipants.

According to Hansen, Larson, and Dworkin (2003) participating in these activities helps to develop pro-social skills because the activities are more likely to involve collaborative group interactions. The pro-social skills include learning how to work with others, building relationships with and better understanding of peers from diverse ethnic and social class groups, and the development of leadership skills (Larson et al., 2003). The participants are more likely to
develop stronger bonds because the “activities link adolescents to a set of similar peers, provides shared experiences and goals, and can reinforce relationships between peers” (Eccles, Barber, Stone, & Hunt, 2003, p. 874). Through these group interactions students build teamwork skills and emotion regulation (Hansen et al., 2003; Schaefer et al., 2011).

Using data from a longitudinal study, Darling et al. (2005) found that those who participated in extracurricular activities had peer relationships with students who had a more positive attitude towards school and were doing well academically. Eccles et al. (2003) had similar findings in their longitudinal study involving 1800 students. They found that those involved in extracurricular activities had a higher quantity of friends who planned to attend college and were doing well in school and less friends who used and drugs and who skipped school. According to the study, participation was directly correlated with having a more academically-oriented group of friends.

**Non-parental Adults**

The third asset discussed in this paper is adult relationships outside of parents. According to the Search Institute (2011), a young person should receive support from three or more non-parental adults. According to Bush and Dong (2003) a non-parental adult is an adult in an adolescent’s life, other than a mother or father, that have had a significant influence on his/her life and is someone he/she can rely on for support. Some examples of non-parental adults are extended family members, teachers, or coaches.

Non-parental adults serve as mentors, role models, advocates, motivators, and provide emotional support (Chang, Greenberger, Chuansheng, Heckhausen, & Farrago, 2010; Gilman, Meyers, & Perez, 2004; Sanchez, Reyes, & Singh, 2006). Relationships with non-parental adults involve mutual respect, commitment and loyalty (Sanchez et al., 2006). These adults become
important sources for comfort, support, guidance, and inspiration (Bush & Dong, 2003; Mahoney, Schweder, & Stottin, 2002). Adolescents describe non-parental adults as people who can help guide their decision making and adults with whom they can have meaningful conversations with (Scales, Benson, & Mannes, 2006).

Peers and parents influence the development during the adolescent years, but research has shown that non-parental adults play a crucial role - somewhere between that of parent and peer (Chang et al., 2010). Non-parental adults “may be able to provide information and connections that parents cannot offer” and “are less likely than parents to threaten youth’s autonomy” (Chang et al., 2010, p. 1067). Bush and Dong (2003) evaluated data collected data from their study and found that students rated non-parental adults higher than parents and peers in perceived warmth and acceptance. They also rated non-parental adults as more likely to help them avoid problem behaviors than their parents and peers.

Research has shown that relationships built with non-parental adults result in various benefits for adolescents. Having support from a non-parental adult has been shown to be positively related to adolescents’ social, psychosocial, and psychological development (Sanchez et al., 2006; Spencer, 2007). Other benefits include increased academic success, enhanced resiliency, and less misconduct (Gilman et al., 2004; Sanchez et al., 2006; Chang et al., 2010). Several researchers have found that support from non-parental adults is significantly important when working with high-risk youth and those experiencing stressful life circumstances (Chang et al., 2010; Mahoney et al., 2002; Sanchez et al., 2006;). However benefits are not exclusive to this population (Chang et al., 2010).

Chang et al. (2010) performed a study surveying 754 students from four schools in the Los Angeles Unities School District and found that students who had a relationship with a non-
parental adult reported higher grades and less misconduct. This study included Latin American, European American, Asian American, African American, and multiethnic students and the results were consistent among all students.

Haddad, Chen, and Greenberger (2011) performed a similar study which involved 355 adolescents. They compared the importance of non-parental adults across three ethnic groups: Hispanic, Asian, and European American. They found that despite their ethnic differences, building relationships with non-parental adults contributed to the adolescents’ self-esteem and decreased their problem behaviors.

Participating in extracurricular activities is an excellent way for students to build relationships with non-parental adults. Fredricks and Eccles (2006) state that extracurricular activities provide an ideal context for students to connect with supportive adults. These activities involve direct interaction with adults and they provide an environment in which the adult can get to know the student more personally (Eccles et al., 2003). By getting to know the students on a more personal level, the adult can recognize the areas the student needs extra support in. With this knowledge, the adult can provide the support or give the student outside resources that he/she may need.

Students who are involved in school-based activities report having more access to teachers or coaches for discussing personal problems (Eccles et al., 2003). “Both sport and school involvement participants had a broader range of adults to talk with than their non-involved peers” (Eccles et al., 2003, p. 882). According to a survey completed by 539 adolescents, students who participated in extracurricular activities and perceived a highly supportive relationship with their activity leader were less depressed than nonparticipants and
those who did not perceive a supportive relationship with their activity leader (Mahoney et al.,
2002).

Eccles et al. (2003) make the point that adults who dedicate their time to lead activities
invest a great deal of time and attention into the young people who participate. They act as
“teachers, mentors, friends, gate keepers, and problem solvers” (p. 881). According to Gilman et
al. (2004), when students participate in extracurricular activities they are given “opportunities to
work with competent adult figures to achieve goals, develop and improve skills, and/or enhance
social opportunities” (p. 33). This relationship is meaningful because it is more personalized and
often involves a shared interest which can reinforce the bond (Eccles et al., 2003; Mahoney et al.,
2002).

**Future Considerations**

Although there is consistent evidence to suggest that extracurricular involvement leads to
positive youth development, there is more empirical work needed. Gilman et al. (2004) point out
that not just any activity will lead to success if we do not consider “perceived social status of the
activity, intrinsic interest in the activity, the quality of the adolescent’s social network, and the
non-parent adult who is part of the activity” (p. 37). It would be beneficial to look further into
these areas in the future.

Social status may affect a student’s desire to join a specific activity. For example, athletes
who have a true love for drama may not pursue that activity because they perceive that joining
the school play will give them a label they do not desire such as “drama geek.” Kraeger (2005)
found that athletic participation increased students’ social status. Ideally, students would join
activities based on their own interest rather than what they believe others would think of them. It
would be interesting to research how often students decide not to join certain activities based on the perceived social status.

The intrinsic interest or motivation for an activity is also important. If a student joins an activity just to please the school counselor or perhaps a parent, he/she may not be motivated to truly become involved in the activity. Vandell et al. (2005) found that increased intrinsic motivation leads to increased effort and decreased apathy. The lack of intrinsic motivation could hinder the development of assets. Further research may help in discovering if intrinsic motivation is necessary for the benefits of participation to take place.

Research has shown that adolescents who participate in extracurricular activities are more likely to develop relationships with positive peers. However, there is also research which shows that participation in sports can be linked to high risk behaviors such as alcohol consumption. Overall, participation in sports is associated with “psychological well-being, positive social development, and higher academic and occupational achievement through young adulthood” (Zarret, Fay, Li, Carrano, Phelps, & Lerner, 2009, p. 368). How can sports increase high risk behaviors for some and have such great benefits for others? Perhaps the quality of the adolescent’s social network should be taken under consideration.

Finally, it is crucial for the non-parent adult who leads the activity to be not only a positive influence but someone who is also appealing to students. Gilman et al. (2004) state that if students perceive the leader to be uninteresting or someone they cannot relate to there is a chance there will be negative outcomes. Most important, the leader of the activity needs to be a good example and should have the students’ best interest at heart. They do not dismiss students who are struggling academically, but instead collaborate with students and their teachers. At the same time, a good leader will hold students accountable for their academic performance rather
than trying to convince teachers to pass them regardless of their grades just so they can continue to participate. To be appealing to students means that the leader is someone students can relate to (Gilman, 2004). Research looking more in depth at the importance of the leader’s abilities and qualities would be beneficial.

**Conclusion of Analysis**

The reviewed research confirmed the importance of the development of these specific assets. This combined with the research showing how participation in extracurricular activities develops students’ bonding to school, positive peer influence, and other adult relationships shows how joining these activities can increase students’ thriving behaviors. The author cites many reasons why participation in extracurricular activities is beneficial for students. Participation in extracurricular activities is positively associated with youth development. Through longitudinal studies researchers have found that these benefits lead to success into young adulthood as well (Fredricks & Eccles, 2006; Gardner et al., 2008). In the next section the author will explore these benefits through an Adlerian perspective.

**Adlerian Analysis**

**Social Interest/Community Feeling**

According to Mosak and Maniaci (1999), social interest or “community feeling is the empathic, emotional bond we have with each other and our world” (p. 113). Oberst and Stewart (2003) add that “having social interest means feeling like part of a family, a group, a couple, and the human community” (p. 17). According to Dreikurs (1989), being a part of a community and developing one’s social interest will create an attitude towards life in which one will have a desire to work with others to help each other become successful.
Dreikurs (1989) also stated that the desire to feel a part of a community is engrained within us. “But this innate social characteristic, which is common to all, must be developed if the individual is to be qualified to fulfill the complicated demands of the community in which the civilized adult lives” (Dreikurs, 1989, p. 4). Oberst and Stewart (2003) state that social interest “means to participate, contribute, to share; to feel accepted, appreciated, and loved, as well as to accept, appreciate and love other people” (p. 17). In other words, although social interest is something we are born with, we need help from others to learn how to properly develop it.

Extracurricular activities are naturally geared towards the development of social interest. The lessons students learn when they find out what it takes to work as a cohesive unit while developing the school’s yearbook or the school newspaper will stick with them when they become adults and need to collaborate with others.

**Holistic Approach**

The Adlerian holistic principle means that “the whole is more than the sum of its parts” (Oberst & Stewart, 2003, p. 10). The majority of extracurricular activities depend on group and/or team collaboration in order to be successful. A choir, band, or orchestra needs each participant to know the music, be in sync, and on the right key in order to sound great. A football, hockey, or basketball team needs each member to know the offensive plays, understand the defensive strategies and work together in order to perform well. Even activities that are in the end an individual performance such as track and field or the chess club only succeed when the participants work and practice together as well as support and encourage one another. This coincides with Adler’s notion that “the whole individual must be understood within their larger whole which is formed by the groups to which he belongs, ranging from the face-to-face to the whole of mankind ultimately (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956, p. 126).
For those students who have not learned how to work with others or understand what it feels like to be a part of something bigger than themselves, joining an extracurricular activity is an excellent opportunity to experience these things. According to Adler, gaining a holistic perspective is important in finding fulfillment and in understanding the self (Oberst & Stewart, 2003). Dreikurs (1989) stated it well when he said, “none but those who can seek their happiness as a part of a whole, that is to say, in the contribution they themselves can make to the common-wealth, can feel satisfied with themselves and their lives” (p. 6). Adler emphasized the idea of this holistic approach to life when he developed the term social interest which can also be referred to as community feeling.

**Belonging and Contributing**

At the core of social interest and community feeling are the concepts of belonging and contributing. “Social interest is a feeling of belonging to others and not being on the outside” (Oberst & Stewart, 2003. p. 19). The most common goal that people have is to belong (Mosak and Maniacci, 1999). Extracurricular activities provide students the opportunity to find a place where they belong. As was previously stated, extracurricular activities provide an environment in which students feel physical and psychological safety and belong regardless of their gender, ethnicity, etc. Another benefit that was discussed earlier is that these activities provide students an opportunity to find peers who have similar interests as them. An important aspect to the feeling of belonging is having something in common with other people and of being one of them (Dreikurs, 1989).

According to Oberst and Stewart (2003), Adler’s theory on what motivates people changed as his principles developed over time. The final development on the list about what fundamentally motivates behavior is “Striving for Completion and Belonging” (p. 21).
According to Oberst and Stewart (2003), “here the goal is contribute and to belong” (p. 22). Adler stated that “every human being strives for significance, but people always make mistakes if they do not see that their whole significance must consist in their contributions to the lives of others.” Feeling a sense of accomplishment from making a contribution to the lives of others can start at a young age. Extracurricular activities give students a unique opportunity to contribute in ways they may not otherwise experience. The adult in charge has a responsibility to find ways for each member to contribute. All of the participants should know that their contributions are important in the success of the whole group. According to Dreikurs (1964), one “cannot grow and develop and gain a sense of belonging without encouragement” (p. 36).

**Encouragement**

Encouragement is one of the essential concepts of Adlerian psychology. It is a crucial aspect of human growth and development as it can lessen feelings of inferiority as well as inspire confidence (Ganz, 1953). According to Mosak and Maniaci (1999), “the encouraged person demonstrates faith in self and life” (p. 149). Extracurricular activities can foster encouragement in meaningful ways. However, it is important for the adult who is in charge of the activity to set the tone that participants do not only receive encouragement based on the final result. According to Oberst and Stewart (2003), encouragement acknowledges the effort.

An aspect of extracurricular activities is that a participant not only receives encouragement from the adult who leads the activity and their fellow participants, he/she is also able to experience what it feels like to encourage others. “The more we encourage others, the more we encourage ourselves” (Mosak & Maniaci, 1999, p. 149). Mosak and Maniaci (1999) believe that when people help others succeed, they will feel successful themselves. Students feel successful because they played a part in helping others succeed.
Adlerian Analysis Summary

Relating these Adlerian concepts with extracurricular activities further demonstrates the impact that participation can have on students. With the evidence supporting the benefits of joining extracurricular activities, students should be encouraged to get involved in these activities. The following section discusses what this means for school counselors.

Implications for School Counselors

The Search Institute has proven that developing assets in youth will decrease high-risk behaviors and increase thriving behaviors. It is the author’s recommendation that school counselors encourage students to participate in extracurricular activities.

According to Moyer (2011) the nation average is 457 students per school counselor, which makes it difficult to get to know each student personally. According to Coogan and DeLucia-Waack (2007) “most high school students may meet with their school counselors for scheduling and college applications” (p. 5). As a result, “person/social issues is still a weaker area for the profession at the moment” (Coogan & DeLucia-Waack, 2007, p. 20). There is a limited amount of time that counselors have to meet with each student and it can be challenging to reach those who need additional interventions (Coogan and DeLucia-Waak). One way to get students additional support is to encourage them to join an extracurricular activity (Fredricks & Eccles, 2006).

It is recommended that one of the standard questions counselors ask incoming students be: “Are you interested in joining any extracurricular activities?” If a student responds with a quick “no” the school counselor should take a few minutes to discuss this. Students may not consider joining activities for various reasons. They may not know what kind of activity to join because no one has talked about the various options with them, they may feel nervous about
trying something new, or they might feel a lack of competence or motivation (Persson, Kerr, & Stattin, 2007). These are all things that the counselor can talk through with students. The school counselor will know the various activities that are available and should be able to find something that sparks students’ interest. He/she can talk through the fear of trying something new and share the benefits of taking a risk.

Another reason students may say “no” is because they are already participating in activities that are not affiliated with the school (Persson, Kerr, & Stattin, 2007). The author recommends that school counselors encourage students to join at least one school-sponsored extracurricular activity. School-related extracurricular activities are beneficial for several reasons. These activities are more likely to hold students academically accountable as they are usually required to maintain a certain grade point average in order to participate. The adult in charge of the activity has easier access to students’ teachers and vice versa when the activity is affiliated with the school (Scales, Benson, & Mannes, 2006). The activity must be school-based in order for students to feel more bonded to their school (Brown & Evans, 2002; Darling et al., 2005). Peer relationships built during these activities can have a greater impact when students have these friendships day-to-day while at school (Eccles, Barber, Stone, & Hunt, 2003).

It is also recommended that the school counselor does not decide the activity for students. He/she should discuss the options and allow students to choose the extracurricular activity on their own. Having students decide what activity they want to join benefits them by “facilitating intrinsic motivation, empowerment and life satisfaction through voluntary choice” (Gillian et al., 2004, p. 38).

School counselors have an advantage of becoming an advocate for extracurricular activities and the students through their close affiliation with the school system and
administration (Gilman et al., 2004). Therefore it is recommended that school counselors fight to keep programs in the school through raising awareness for these programs. It is also important to advocate for students who may be removed from programs based on eligibility or behavior. Rather than preventing participation for these high risk students who need the activities most, school counselors should work with them, their teachers, and their activity leader (Gilman et al., 2004).

Finally, the author recommends for the school counselor to provide a mentorship program for the adult in charge of the activity. As was stated earlier in the paper, students having a solid relationship with non-parental adults is an important asset to build. However, the students will not benefit from these relationships if the adult is not aware of the importance of his/her role. The next section will describe what a program like this would entail. The focus will be on athletics and the role of a coach.

**Mentorship Program**

**Overview**

Adults who make the decision to coach a sport may not realize what kind of influence they can have in the lives of the students who participate. Often times, the interview process for a coaching position includes only questions about playing experience, the win-loss record of previous teams coached, and knowledge of the sport. Likewise, the workshops provided for coaches focus on offensive or defensive strategies, effective drills to run in practice, review and updates of the rules of the game, and perhaps a refresher on sportsmanship.

Because of this, a mentorship program for coaches led by the school counselor can be very beneficial. The counselor can meet with coaches several times during their season. It would be great for the school counselor to connect with the different coaches for each sport. One idea to
do this would be to build a relationship with the athletic director and see if it would be possible to make a brief appearance during the pre-season meeting with the coaches. In that initial meet, the counselor can briefly talk about how the impact that coaches can have on their players’ lives is often overlooked.

**Power of the Role**

In the non-parental adults section of this paper, the author cites numerous studies which confirmed the importance of this relationship. In the beginning of the mentorship program, coaches should be made aware of that their role is more than teaching their players about the game. The school counselor can give a brief overview of why the non-parental relationship is important for youth to develop. Next, the counselor should give examples of the various roles and the importance of each. A few of these roles include mentor, role model, and advocate.

Coaches serve as mentors. A mentor is a trusted guide who helps his/her protégées reach their full potential (Denmark, 2000). During a sports season players spend more time with their coach than any other non-parental adult and perhaps their parents as well. When a coach puts in the effort to get to know his/her players, he/she will become someone that players want to talk to about what is going on their lives. These will most likely start out as surface conversations. The more time that is spent together, the more trust can be built, and the conversations will begin to get deeper. If players view their coach as someone who cares about them, they will begin to go to him/her for advice, comfort, and support.

Coaches serve as role models. Role models have the ability to inspire others and leads by being a positive example (Price-Mitchell, 2011). Students join sports for different reasons. However many of them, particular in their upperclassman years, join because of their love for the sport. These players will look up to their coaches because of their experience and knowledge of
the sport that they love. As a result, players may try to emulate their coach. Coaches should realize this responsibility and be a positive example for each of their players.

Coaches are advocates. As an advocate coaches can help players express themselves more effectively. If players are having a difficult time talking to a parent or a teacher about an issue, their coach can be a support system for them. If players are hesitant to speak up on their own behalf, coaches can be there for guidance.

These are a few examples of the roles that coaches play. One thing to note is that this type of mentorship program would not just be for the head varsity coach. The lower level coaches are key as well. The freshman and sophomore coaches are more likely to have players on their team who are new to organized athletics. These students may try a new sport to meet people or to have something to do after school. It would be wonderful for these students to have a positive experience, build friendships, and have a positive relationship with the coach. When coaches understand the power of their role, they may feel inspired to learn more about what they can do. A great way to start would be to discuss the goals of misbehavior.

**Goals of Misbehavior**

According to Adlerian psychology all behavior has purpose and is movement towards a goal. Because of this, Dreikurs (1964) suggests that instead of looking at the behavior itself, adults should look at the goal of the behavior. According to Dreikurs there are four mistaken goals: attention, power, revenge, and inadequacy. It is essential to understand these mistaken goals in order to redirect students into a “constructive approach to social integration” (Dreikurs, 1964, p. 58). In order to find the goal, adults need to look at their response or reaction to the behavior. We will now look at each mistaken goal, the adult response, and ideas on ways to change the behavior.
The first mistaken goal is the desire for undue attention. According to Dreikurs (1964) this behavior is used by discouraged students who are looking for a feeling of belongingness. The adult response to students looking for attention is irritation. Once coaches realize that they feel annoyed by a player’s behavior, they can assume that their player is looking for attention. An example of this may when players are lackadaisical during practice. An annoyed coach’s response may be to call these players out in front of the rest of the team. When this happens, the player achieves their goal of receiving attention. Instead, coaches may want to consider calling out a player who is working hard and putting effort into the drills. This does not necessarily mean to always praise the player who finishes first or performs the best. It could mean giving recognition to the player who finished somewhere in the middle of the pack but was clearly working his/her hardest. After a drill, rather than coaches reprimanding players who annoyed them with their effort, coaches can recognize a couple of players who gave 100 percent.

The second mistaken goal is the struggle for power. According to Dreikurs (1964) this behavior usually occurs after the adult has tried for some time to stop the students’ demands for attention. Dreikurs talked about the problem of the power contest becoming more common because of society’s concept of equality changing. Today, it has become even more prevalent. During a power struggle, the adult reaction is anger. When adults engage in the power struggle they are trying to show the student that they are the boss and the student is trying to do the same. It is important to remember that power struggles take cooperation because it takes two to fight. Rather than giving into a player that wants to engage in a power struggle, coaches should withdraw and negotiate. Coaches can tell the player that they will discuss this at a later time, so the other players’ practice time is not wasted. During that conversation, the player and coach can come up with natural and logical consequences together. They can also talk about ways to
prevent this type of behavior from happening again. When students are apart of this conversation they feel like their opinion matters. As a result they are less likely to repeat that type of behavior.

The third mistaken goal is revenge. This goal “arises from the intensification of the power contest” (Dreikurs, 1964, p. 62). With this type of behavior, the adult reaction is to feel hurt. For example a player may say, “Well, I think you’re a horrible coach and you have no idea what you’re talking about.” It is a natural reaction to have hurt feelings after words like this. The important thing to remember is that the player is looking for revenge and will say anything to illicit that type of response. Because of this coaches cannot let their self esteem depend on what a player says in the heat of the moment. Students tend to behave this way when they feel the most unlovable. One of the best ways to handle a situation like that is to put an arm around him/her and say, “You must feel really bad to say something like that to me.” This may be difficult to do with a player who just said something so hurtful, but coaches need to consider the deep discouragement that is the root of this behavior. Further discussion may need to happen with the player about working on a relationship with mutual respect.

The fourth mistaken goal is to demonstrate complete inadequacy. This goal is used by students who are totally discouraged (Dreikurs, 1964). They believe that there is no way to succeed so there is point in trying. They may exaggerate any “real or imagined weakness or deficiency to avoid any task where expected failure may be even more embarrassing” (Dreikurs 1964, p. 63). In terms of athletics, this may be a student who came out to try something new and when he/she felt like it was too difficult decided to stop trying. This is something that would be more common on the younger teams. The adult’s response to this type of behavior is frustration. The initial reaction for coaches may be to kick this player who is not trying off the team. However, this is the type of student that could greatly benefit from extracurricular participation.
One way to help this type of player is to discover any strengths he/she has and focus on that. Another idea is to work on skills one-on-one with this player or have an encouraging teammate work with him/her. The best way to help any players struggling with feelings of inadequacy is to increase the feeling of belonging and contributing. Actually, the best anecdote to any misbehavior is to increase belonging and contributing. The next section will discuss how a coach can build this feeling.

**Belonging and Contributing**

As was stated earlier in this paper, what fundamentally motivates behavior is the goal to contribute and to belong (Oberst & Stewart, 2003). Counselors can explain more in detail what this concept means as it is described in the Adlerian section of this paper. There are various ways coaches can build a team atmosphere in which the participants feel like they belong to the group and are contributing members as well.

When the different level teams are established and begin their practice, the coaches of each level should encourage their players to get to know one another. This should be facilitated by the coach to ensure everyone is participating. For example during stretching the coach can lead a regular check-in. In the beginning, this can include basic get to know you questions. On larger teams, groups can be split up randomly and changed from day to day.

As the season progresses these check-ins can become more specific. For example, during a check-in at a practice right before a game a coach can ask each member to share an individual goal and a team goal that they hope to accomplish in the game. The coaches can share their goals as well. Coaches can then encourage the team to hold one another accountable for the goals that they set. A follow-up to discuss whether or not these goals were accomplished can happen during the check-in after the game. If players feel discouraged over a goal not being accomplished,
coaches should address it right in the moment by either giving the player some positive feedback or suggestions on how the goal can be met next time.

Coaches may also want to consider having the team spend time with each other outside of practice. One way to build the belonging and contributing is to participate in some kind of community service project. Not only is the team working to help each other out, the participants get to make positive contributions to society. Even if teams are only able to do this once during their season, it is something that would make a lasting impact. Coaches may also want to try to organize some kind of pizza party and watch a televised game or a movie about the sport their playing. If teams are unable to get together outside of practice there are other options. One idea would be for coaches to have a piece of paper with each participants name on it and hand it out to everyone. Coaches can then have the players write down a couple positives that each member has and an aspect they can improve on. Coaches can gather these papers and do a quick write-up for each player. Like was recommended in the group check-ins, this can be divided into smaller groups on larger teams as well.

One thing to point out to coaches is that these activities would not take away from the competitiveness of the team or how hard they work in practice. Teams come together a lot during difficult practices or tough games. However, it is the coaches’ responsibility to acknowledge the effort of the group as a whole. Coaches should remind players that teams win together and teams lose together. It is important that each member knows that his/her contribution is important. Coaches should get to know the strengths of each player and take time to acknowledge those strengths in front of the team. Even players that may not contribute by playing in the game themselves can help the team with their positive attitude and encouraging words. Saying this for each player in front of the team not only will help the participants know what they bring to the
team, they will also realize the ways in which everyone contributes. When teams learn how to come together and work through the hard times, they learn the valuable attribute of resiliency.

Resiliency

According to the National Endowment for the Arts, resiliency is the “ability to successfully adapt and develop in healthy ways, despite exposure to risk and adversity” (1998, p. 8). Coaches who work to build positive relationships with their players are contributing to the development of their resiliency. According Steese, Dollette, Phillips, Hossfeld, Matthews, & Taormina (2006), “resiliency research maintains that children and youth who have supportive and caring relationships with at least one adult in their community are likely to succeed despite severe hardship” (p. 55). The coach can be that adult for their players. “Hallmarks of the development of resiliency in youth are high expectations, caring and support, and meaningful participation within their communities” (Steese et al., p. 55). Two powerful tools coaches can use in times of adversity which will help develop resiliency in their players are appreciation and encouragement.

Appreciation and Encouragement

Appreciation and encouragement are two Adlerian concepts that coaches should use generously. The wonderful thing is that it is not just the coaches showing appreciation and giving encouragement to their players. The players do this for one another and for the coaches as well. Appreciation can just be a simple, thank you for working hard today. It can also be an activity in which each member of the team says what they appreciate about the person to their right. The important thing for coaches to remember is that appreciation is not based on whether the team wins or loses. Coaches should try not to look at only the final result to gauge how the team performed. A loss does not always mean a team did not do well. Likewise, winning does not
mean a team performed to their full potential. The ability level of opponents in high school sports can vary greatly. Instead of coaches looking at did we win or lose, there are other questions to ask at the end of a game. The focus should be on the effort versus the result. Did they play as a team? Did they have a good attitude and encourage their teammates throughout the game? Did they play at the level that they are capable of competing at? Did they give 100% while they were playing and stay “in the game” even when they were not playing? It is within these types of questions, that meaningful appreciations can come out.

Players should feel consistently encouraged by their coaches. They should always feel that their coaches believe in them and want the best from them. Players should be encouraged to give 100% of themselves. Players do not always have to be compared with one another during practice drills or in games. There are obviously differences in athletic ability. Instead of telling players to come in first in every drill, coaches should encourage their players to give everything they have. Coaches can commend those who may be behind others but are clearly pushing themselves. Coaches can also call out those who could and should be working harder. This should not be done in a negative way, but in a way that acknowledges the fact that more is expected from them.

**Conclusion**

The developmental effects that participating in extracurricular activities has on youth has become a popular area of interest. This paper focused on three of the Search Institute’s developmental assets to show specifically how joining these activities benefits students. It then highlighted some of the Adlerian principles that relate to participation. Through the research done for these sections, the author can confidently state that getting students involved with extracurricular activities would benefit them greatly. The implications for school counselors gave
some recommendations to how to get students interested in participating in school-based activities.

In the final section, an idea for a mentorship program for coaches was proposed. An excellent benefit for having a program like this is that it is a way to open up communication between counselors and coaches. This may encourage coaches to introduce the counselor to students who are in need of extra support. If coaches know the counselor is an available resource and someone they have already built a relationship with, they will feel more comfortable referring students to the school counselor. This way when the season comes to an end and the player loses contact with the coach, he/she will still have support from the school counselor.
References


Rowe, S. (2011, October 17). Search Institute founder dies; Minnetonka resident was instrumental to youth efforts in St. Louis Park and beyond. *Sun Newspapers*.


EFFECT OF EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES


Activities, engagement, and emotion in after-school programs (and elsewhere). *New Directions for Youth Development, 105*, 121-129.

Appendix

Table 1: Data based on Search Institute surveys of almost 150,000 6th- to 12th-grade youth in 202 communities across the United States in calendar year 2003.
Table 2: Data based on Search Institute surveys of almost 150,000 6th- to 12th-grade youth in 202 communities across the United States in calendar year 2003.