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International perspectives on extracurricular activities: Conditions of effects on student development, communities and schools – Editorial

Although the provision of extracurricular activities at school has a long tradition in some countries, it was only at the beginning of the millennium that the quality of education and extracurricular activities started to receive increased attention in educational policy and practice in Europe. In 2003, for example, the “all-day school” started to be promoted in Germany and the number of these schools was expanded across the nation. At the same time, “the integrated school day” with organized extracurricular activities as a part of school had just been introduced in Finland with the goal of decreasing the amount of time children spend unsupervised. A similar development can be identified around this time in England, where “extended services” were provided, including extracurricular activities at schools, in an attempt to build cooperation between schools and families. In Switzerland there have been similar changes to the school system over the past decade whereas in the United States of America this development began in the 1990s. In most of the countries represented in this special issue of the Journal for Educational Research Online, extracurricular enrichment is offered in schools in the form of after-school activities. Extracurricular activities take place on a regular basis and are supervised by adults. They include academic activities such as remedial courses and non-academic activities such as sports, theatre, and gardening. In addition, community programs are offered at schools by youth organizations such as scouts. Typically, all these activities do not adhere to a curriculum and performance is not graded.

As a result of the current educational debates and developments, interest has grown in the educational benefits of after-school programs and extracurricular activities. Cognitive and non-cognitive effects of participating in extracurricular activ-

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ities have been analyzed primarily in the USA. The assumption that participation in these activities leads to a favorable development of children and adolescents can be based on ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006), in which extracurricular activities are considered a microsystem in children's life embedded in the mesosystems of schools and families. The "positive youth development" approach (Larson, 2000) suggests that extracurricular activities stimulate the development of intellectual, psychological and social skills because they offer opportunities to belong to a group and the presence of an autonomy-supporting adult giving guidance and promoting feelings of physical and psychological safety. This is in line with self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985), which assumes that the three basic needs for autonomy, social relatedness and competence drive individual motivation processes.

The purpose of this special issue is to connect and add to American research in the field by presenting and discussing empirical results on the conditions and characteristics of after-school programs that contribute to a positive development of children and adolescents. Although there is a large body of research focusing on outcomes, little is known about the processes that lead to these effects. Moreover, studies on this topic from European countries are still rare and results are diverse. Many European studies are cross-sectional and/or lack control groups, meaning selection effects cannot be differentiated from benefits of participating in extracurricular activities. Current research often measures participation in extracurricular activities on a general level without taking dosage or quality into account. Also, there are only a few studies that analyze effects of extracurricular activities considering interindividual differences in the impact of participation, based for example on student's age or family background. In this issue these limitations are overcome as focus is on research from European countries and the USA which consider conditions (e.g., intensity, quality and family background) that foster beneficial results of participating in extracurricular activities. In this issue emphasis is on the outcomes of longitudinal studies on after-school or school-based extracurricular programs. The issue is divided into two parts: First, conditions of positive effects of participating in extracurricular activities on student development are described, and second, the influences of extracurricular enrichment on the association among schools, families and communities and on school enhancement are investigated.

1. Conditions of positive effects of participating in extracurricular activities on student development

To address limitations of current research, longitudinal studies on the effect of extracurricular activities are presented in the first part of this special issue. Focus in these studies is on duration and frequency of participation in extracurricular activities and the quality or type of the activities as prerequisites of positive effects on student development.

In the first article *Metsäpelto and Pulkkinen* give an overview of European research on the benefits of participating in extracurricular activities, focusing especially on the Finnish approach of the “integrated school day”. The authors describe how an intervention study at the beginning of the decade led to the introduction of afternoon activities as an integral part of the school day in Finland. Reviewing the current literature, the authors summarize how children in Grades 1 to 7 choose their extracurricular activities and how they benefit from them. In their intervention study they analyze the advantages of the integrated school day, applying a longitudinal design with a non-intervention comparison group. The 9- to 10-year-old children participating in the program for two years show advantages in social development. Further analyses show that a longer duration (i.e., more years) of participation has a positive influence on social development whereas regularity of participation and breadth of activities do not. Concerning school achievement, their data reveal that the type of activity seems to matter. Thus, they close a research gap by identifying the role of dosage and type of activity for beneficial effects of extracurricular activities on primary school children.

Examining the effects of participating in an after-school program in Los Angeles (LA’s BEST) on achievement in reading and mathematics, *Huang, Leon and La Torre Matrundola* come to a slightly different result from that of *Metsäpelto and Pulkkinen*. Summarizing the current situation and research in America on this topic, they identify the effect of dosage (intensity) of participation in extracurricular activities on achievement. Their data allow comparison of longitudinal effects of the program in two cohorts of students. The authors report effects of LA’s BEST on achievement in mathematics but not in language learning. In addition, the impact of intensity is demonstrated. The most beneficial effects are found for students who attend the program frequently (in this case a minimum of 100 days per year). This result does not necessarily conflict with the Finnish result, where duration of participation seems to be more influential than regularity of attendance. Rather, it seems to be an important task for researchers to clarify the relationship between intensity and duration and to identify the frequency (in days) that compensates for a shorter duration (in years) of extracurricular participation. However, both studies reveal that when studying the effects of extracurricular activities it is essential to consider dosage of participation.

Fischer and Theis take a closer look at quality features of the activities in all-day schools in Germany. However, they also assume that dosage plays a crucial role and compare secondary-school students who participate in extracurricular activities in all-day schools for at least two years (duration) to their counterparts who do not participate for such a long time or who do not partake in extracurricular activities at all. Focus of the article is on the influence of the fulfilment of the basic needs for autonomy, competence and social relatedness in extracurricular activities as conditions for beneficial effects on school attachment and achievement. Effects of the degree of challenge, student-staff relationship and autonomy in the activities are analyzed. With their longitudinal approach the authors also consider inter-individual differences and compare the relative importance of the quality features

for the development of school attachment and achievement in Grades 5, 7 and 9. In all age groups, student-staff relationship seems to be the most important predictor for school attachment; surprisingly, its influence even increases in Grade 9. Furthermore, the authors show that although no direct effects of the quality features of extracurricular activities on school achievement (grades) can be found, achievement is strongly connected to school attachment. Thus, the provision of high quality extracurricular activities can (indirectly) influence school achievement.

2. Influences of extracurricular enrichment on the association between schools, families and communities and school development

In this part of the issue, community and family factors are investigated as conditions for effects of participation in extracurricular activities. Focus is on school enhancement and the impact of extracurricular enrichment on teachers.

Dyson and Kerr look at the development of extended education in England focusing on the micro- and mesolevels. Even though the school day in England traditionally includes the early afternoon, participating in extracurricular activities is voluntary and schools differ in the amount of activities they offer. Considering educational differences between social classes, the English government has introduced programs to provide services for children and families in cooperation with communities. The authors describe the constitution and development of “extended services” and refer to their impact on children at risk at the individual level as well as to the impact on school life and on the relationship between schools and communities using evidence from international (especially American) research and practices. They enrich the discussion by asking if and how schools can help compensate for deficits in the family or community context.

Whereas *Dyson and Kerr* emphasize the interplay between policy and schools in overcoming social disadvantages, *Schüpbach* focuses on family resources. Using a sample from Switzerland, the author analyzes the combined influences of extended education and family background on language development in primary school. Compensatory effects of extracurricular activities have been explored mostly by looking at the participants’ social background or socio-economic status (SES). Results are diverse: while some scholars come to the conclusion that extracurricular activities are especially beneficial for children from low SES families, others do not find similar effects. *Schüpbach* shows that processes in the family are far more influential on language achievement than SES. Moreover, participating in extracurricular activities at school seems to have particularly positive effects on children who are highly promoted at home. Thus, extended education in Switzerland does not seem to succeed in compensating for shortcomings in the students’ families; however, analyses show that extended education is valuable in promoting language development in all children. The author discusses this with reference to the

goals of extended education in Switzerland, which focus more on care and supervision than on educational or academic promotion.

The responsibility of socializing children and adolescents seems to have shifted recently from families to school. This is connected to a change in the role of teachers. In Germany introducing and running all-day schools has caused worry from several corners, including that of teachers. Teachers and students in the field of education fear that working in an all-day school could lead to an increase in workload and stress. *Fussangel and Dizinger* highlight the implications of the extended school day from this perspective. They compare teachers in newly established all-day schools in Germany to teachers in half-day schools or schools that have been all-day schools for a long time. All in all, they find that teachers' stress and workload do not depend on school type. Although the provision of extracurricular activities in all-day schools often is an additional task for teachers, this does not lead to a perceived increase in the overall workload or stress.

Overall, this special issue illustrates the variety and high quality of international research on extracurricular activities and their impact on student development. The authors investigate from different perspectives conditions of the effects of participating in extracurricular activities and interactions with the environment in which they take place. Thus, this special issue allows identification of research gaps that hopefully will be closed in the near future. International cooperation and intercultural comparisons seem to be promising in this context.

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