

Educational Environments in Yamaguchi: A Developmental Assets Overview

Marilyn Higgins, Ph.D.

Abstract

Drawing on results of over 1200 published studies, Search Institute, in the USA, has developed a list of 40 developmental assets that have been shown to be associated with the positive social and emotional growth of children. These assets are considered building blocks or nutrients important for nourishing and strengthening children's overall development in the affective, spiritual, academic and physical domains. This article discusses the theoretical and research foundations of the asset categories, and reports on an initial attempt by Japanese researchers to adapt this approach for assessing educational environments in a Japanese cultural setting. A survey of 487 parents of elementary school 5th graders and 2nd-year junior high school students in Yamaguchi draws out their view of the relative presence (or absence) of the 40 assets. The data shows that family support, school support, values, social competence, and positive identity are considered strong assets by these respondents. Community support, connection with community role models, opportunities for children to serve usefully in the community, and children's engagement in learning were seen as weaker assets in this locality. Suggestions for reconnecting and revitalizing the links between home, school and community to bolster the missing assets in order to improve the educational environment for children are made.

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Introduction:

As reported previously (Higgins, 2006) “the key to educating world citizens who are oriented toward and capable of achieving sustainable development” lies in rebalancing and reintegrating the educational functions of home, school and society. Amid the frightening news of incidents of social and educational breakdown, the good news is that there is evidence in the currents of educational and social science research that the tide can be turned if we identify and strengthen certain necessary “developmental nutrients” for our children and youth. Analysis of over 1200 studies in the field of child development have led researchers at the Search Institute, for example, to identify 40 assets that are associated with positive social, emotional and academic development of children and youth (Scales and Leffert, 2004). The identification of these assets (including “external” assets such as family, school and community **support, empowerment, boundaries and constructive use of time**, as well as “internal” assets such as **commitment to learning, positive values, social competencies and positive identity**) can provide a framework for people and agencies who are working with youth (and, indeed, youth themselves) to assess the strengths as well as the weakness in the “social fabric” of the educational environments, activities and programs.

Extensive studies carried out in North America (Scales and Leffert, 2004, and others) show clear evidence of the effectiveness of an assets-based approach for assessing and improving the social and personal contexts for youth. Instead of focusing on the symptoms or deficits, this “nutrient approach” shows that the more assets that are present and available for a young person, the more likely he or she will be to exhibit “thriving indicators” such as “helps others,” “overcomes adversity,” “exhibits leadership,” “values diversity,” “maintains good health,” “delays gratification,” “resists danger,” and “succeeds in school.” Conversely, the lack of assets raises the students’ likelihood of being involved in violence, various forms of risk-taking, and school failure. (Search Institute, 2006). The assets approach does not focus on single factors or deficits, but recognizes the balance and interaction of various factors that combine to enrich the matrix for positive youth development.

This outlook aligns well with the current educational views and goals of Japan's leaders as they seek “to reform public education and revitalize education at home and in the community” in order to “guarantee every child the chance to achieve high academic standards and learn social morality.” (The Daily Yomiuri, Oct. 19, 2006, quoting Prime Minister Shinzo Abe.) It is also an approach which is suitable and adaptable for global research and application.

The study reported here conveys the results of an initial survey of parents of elementary school (5th

grade) children and junior high school (2nd year) students carried out in Yamaguchi, Japan, in January, 2006, based on the assets approach. Its purpose is to gain an overview of developmental assets for youth in this locality and to provide a baseline for current and future assessments of effectiveness for proposed integrative programs promoting positive youth development. The survey adds to information gathered previously (Aihara, et al, 2005) on socialization of youth in Yamaguchi. The size and scope of the Yamaguchi survey is small in comparison to those done in the US (Search Institute has surveyed over 2 million youth across North America since 1989 according to their web site), so specific direct comparisons may not be applicable. However, the results from some of the US surveys will be shown in some segments as a matter of interest in order to raise points for consideration and discussion.

Participants:

The participants in this survey were parents of 5th graders in three elementary schools in Yamaguchi City (Odou, Shiraishi and Hirakawa) and 2nd year students in three junior high schools (Miyano, Ajisu and Kawanishi). A total of 515 surveys were distributed, and 487 (95%) were completed and returned. A total of 268 were from the elementary schools (96% return rate) and 219 from the junior high schools (93% return rate.) The majority of the questionnaires were completed by mothers (91%), 7% were completed by fathers, and 2% by other family members or unidentified. Of the students represented, 52% (253) were boys, and 48% (232) were girls, with 2 unidentified.

The Questionnaire:

The questionnaire included a total of 12 items with numerous sub-items based on the Search Institute's list of 40 assets. The items were designed to roughly identify the parents' view of the strengths and weaknesses in their children's educational environments of the home, school and community, as well as the internal attitudes and abilities their children might display. The responses were organized in a 4-point Likert scale ranging from the highest (1) indicating that parent felt that the asset was present to a high (or sufficient) degree, (2) indicating that the asset was present to some degree, (3) indicating that the asset was rarely present or present only to an insufficient degree, (4) indicating the asset in question was not at all present in the parent's opinion. Specific questions and a summary of responses will be shown in the results section.

In addition, there were four additional open-ended questions. Two were designed to elicit parents' opinions about which virtues were important to them to teach children, what their challenges or difficulties were in this regard. Two others gave the participants the opportunity to express their own views and concerns about their children's educational environmental strengths and weaknesses.

One specific challenge for the researchers in "translating" the items based on expressions from the US studies concerned the variations that were inevitable considering the differences in lifestyle and culture of Japanese youth compared to students in America. This challenge showed up most specifically in the area of judging the **constructive use of time**. Extracurricular activities for American youth often include community-based programs that may be offered several times per week. They also include religious or faith-based programs which are positively connected with spiritual as well as social and emotional development. Extracurricular activities in Japan are structured differently. Many schools mandate school-based after-school sports programs. Many students participate in after-school "cram schools" as well. Music, arts or other community-based programs are rarely offered more than once a week. Religious or faith-based programs aimed specifically at youth are few. However, the researchers posited that parents in Japan may have more than one reason for having their children participate in the specific after-school programs they choose. To draw out these reasons we developed

a multi-faceted question that asked parents to identify not only the extracurricular programs their children were involved in, but also what the primary purposes of these activities were in the parents' minds.

All other items followed quite closely the items on the Search Institute's list of 40 assets. A conscientious attempt was made when translating the items into Japanese to avoid educational or social science jargon and to use practical expressions that parents would be familiar with.

Results:

As noted above, the list of 40 developmental assets based on the extensive studies of the Search Institute (2004) are organized into two major categories: external assets and internal assets. These in turn are further divided into 4 major areas each: External assets include **support** (of home, school and community), **empowerment**, **boundaries**, and **creative use of time**. Internal assets (those that are related to or exhibited by the child) include **engagement in learning**, **connection to values**, **social competencies**, and **positive identity**. In order to discuss each of these aspects in a manner that coordinates with the assets list, the results will be presented in order of the assets list (which is not in some cases the order that the questions on the survey appeared).

Support: It is clear that children tend to thrive when they are surrounded by family, educators and community members who provide not only material, but also emotional support. To assess the first category, parents were asked, "In your view, how well is your child receiving support from the family and community?" Six subcategories were listed. The responses are shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: External Assets - Support

	Sufficient	To some degree	Not so much	Not at all
1.1 Family love and emotional support	43.3%	52.6%	2.5%	0.2%
1.2 Positive family communication	40.9%	54.0%	3.5%	0.2%
1.3 Affection and support from adults other than those in the family	12.1%	66.3%	19.3%	1.2%
1.4 Greetings and expressions of care from neighbors	8.2%	50.7%	35.9%	4.1%
1.5 Emotional support from school teachers and staff	9.9%	67.1%	20.7%	1.2%
1.6 Parental involvement in school activities such as PTA	3.7%	61.0%	32.4%	1.8%

Empowerment is the quality or feeling that as a person, one is able to make a difference in ones own life and in the lives of others. This quality is developed best in children who feel that they are full-participants in the community life, whose opinions and ideas matter, and who are given many opportunities to practice various social skills through service to the community. To assess this quality, participants in this survey were asked: "In your view, how well do your children feel regarded by adults in the community around them?"

Figure 2: External Assets - Empowerment

	Stongly Agree	Agree	Don't agree so much	Totally disagree
2.1 Children's thoughts and opinions are considered important.	7.6%	61.2%	29.2%	0.8%
2.2 Children's thoughts and opinions are listened to and incorporated into community decision making.	3.1%	45.0%	48.7%	1.8%
2.3 There are opportunities for children to participate in volunteer work and help neighbors.	3.7%	36.6%	49.7%	8.6%
2.4 Our neighborhood is a safe and comfortable place to live for children.	6.8%	61.4%	27.7%	2.9%

Boundaries and Expectations: Children develop their sense of direction by having clear goals and expectations within a fair setting of rules that provide for their safety and balance. When the children see the rules and “boundaries” in their lives as “firm, fair and friendly” as well as consistent across the home, school and community, they thrive. However, if rules are unclear, inconsistently or unfairly applied, children will often become either rebellious or inhibited and fearful in their actions. In addition, when adults express reasonably high expectations for children, the children feel a sense of encouragement to work hard toward goals. They tend to make efforts to rise to meet expectations. The parents’ responses on the questions regarding boundaries and expectations appear in Figure 3.

Figure 3: External Assets - Boundaries and Expectations

	Stongly Agree	Agree	Don't agree so much	Totally disagree
3.1 Our family has clear and consistent rules for family life.	8.2%	59.5%	30.4%	0.4%
3.2 The school provides clear rules and fair penalties when rules are violated.	2.7%	39.8%	50.3%	3.3%
3.3 Our neighbors are concerned about children's behavior. They comment to children when children do something wrong.	2.3%	24.0%	67.1%	4.9%
3.4 Parents and adults in the family are good role models for children.	3.9%	49.7%	43.9%	1.0%
3.5 People in the community are good role models for children.	2.1%	24.8%	65.9%	4.9%
3.6 Our children's friends are positive and responsible role models for each other.	4.9%	47.0%	45.0%	1.2%
3.7 Parents, teachers and adults in the local community encourage children to do their best in school and other activities.	6.8%	60.4%	29.2%	1.8%

Constructive use of time: Time is a precious commodity for children. The window of opportunity for establishing the foundations of life-long emotional, academic, physical and spiritual growth patterns is much shorter than it may appear. In the US surveys (Scales and Leffert, 2004) children from 6th to 12th grade were asked about their extracurricular activities including those at school, in the community and their use of time at home. Studies had shown that involvement more than twice per week in specific types of activities such as arts, co-curricular school activities, community-based activities, and religious activities are supportive of positive youth development. No less important is the way time at home is spent. The more involved the youth are in productive activities or communication with parents and the less time they spent involved in individual entertainment interactions with “screens” (TVs, computers games, and the like) the more likely they are to show the qualities of thriving. Figure 4 shows the percentage of US youth who could be said to have these time assets based on a study of 217,277 across 318 communities in the US:

Figure 4: External Assets: Constructive Use of Time

Constructive Use of Time	U. S. Data: % of 6 th to 12 th graders who report the asset is present:
4.1 Creative activities-participates in music, art, drama, etc. 2 or more times per week	20%
4.2 Child programs-co-curricular school or community-based program participation 2 or more times per week	58%
4.3 Religions community - attendance at programs or services 1 or more times week	63%
4.4 Time at home some time most days in high quality interaction with parents and doing things other than watching TV or playing video games.	52%

As mentioned above, out-of-school activities and offerings are structured differently in Japan. While school sports clubs are sometimes mandated as an after-school activity (and often meet several times each week), other community-based programs are generally offered on a once-a-week basis. “Kodomo Kai” is a community/neighborhood organization aimed at providing a unifying social outlet for elementary school students in the same neighborhood. However, recently “Kodomo Kai” events have decreased to only a few times per year if that. Religious programs for children hardly exist at all. However, parents may channel their concern for social and spiritual development of their children into their choice of other activities. For this reason we asked parents to indicate which types of activities their children are involved in and the primary purpose they hope to achieve through these activities. The responses are organized and presented in Figure 5.

Figure 5: External Assets - Constructive Use of Time

Primary purpose for participation in after-school activities:	Percent of respondents	Types of activities:
5.1 Academic skills development	52%	Juku (cram school) (192), English lessons (43), martial arts (39), other (23) Total responses (299) (250 people/487)
5.2 Arts and creative development	29%	Piano lessons (105), calligraphy, etc. (34), dance, ballet (11), other (21) Total responses (171) (140 people/487)
5.3 Social development	43%	Kodomo Kai (neighborhood children's organization) (134), volunteer activities (43), sports (41), other (49). Total responses (267) (211 people/487)
5.4 Physical development	36%	Sports (160), martial arts (17), dance, ballet (6), other (9) Total responses (192) (176 people/487)
5.5 Spiritual and moral development	66%	Sports (225), piano lessons (41), calligraphy (38), martial arts (30), other (86) Total responses (390) (322 people/487)
5.6 Communications/human relationship	60%	Kodomo Kai (neighborhood children's org.) (162), Sports (128), English lessons, (41) volunteer activities (34), other (29) Total responses (394) (294 people/487)
5.7 Other (including child's personal choice)	4%	Total responses (43) (20 people/487)

In addition, we asked parents to give us more specific information about how their children spend time at home. The combined responses are shown in Figure 6.

Figure 6: External Assets - Constructive Use of time

Time spent on average week day: Per activity /Percent of responses	None	1/2 hr.	1 hour	2 hours	3+ hrs.	Average
6.1 Homework or study	6.4%	39.4%	45.2%	7.0%	1.0%	0.8 hrs.
6.2 TV, computer games, etc.	1.6%	12.7%	33.7%	40.7%	10.1%	1.4 hrs.
6.3 Helping, chores	33.1%	61.4%	2.7%	0.4%	0.4%	0.4 hrs.
6.4 Talk or play with parents	1.2%	31.4%	40.2%	14.6%	9.9%	1.0 hrs.
6.5 Free reading	38.6%	44.4%	11.5%	2.5%	0.4%	0.4 hrs.

Engagement in Learning: Children who thrive are more likely to have developed internal drive that directs their own learning. Children who show a love of learning, and who feel connected emotionally and personally to teachers and school staff are much more likely to be succeeding in school and exhibiting other positive attributes. The following chart (Figure 7) shows the parents' responses to questions regarding their children's motivation to learn.

Figure 7: Internal Assets - Engagement in Learning

To what degree does your child show a positive attitude toward study?

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Don't agree so much	Totally disagree
7.1 Child is motivated to study and learn.	6.8%	48.7%	38.0%	5.3%
7.2 Child likes to study on own, whether in or out of school (library, home, etc.).	2.3%	22.6%	57.7%	16.2%
7.3 Child usually does homework and turns it in on time.	35.7%	46.4%	15.6%	0.8%
7.4 Child feels relaxed with and likes teacher(s) and school staff.	12.9%	56.7%	26.7%	2.1%
7.5 Child likes to read books (outside of comics or magazines).	16.4%	31.4%	38.8%	12.3%

Values: Scales and Leffert (2004) describe values as “the guideposts individual internalize to create a framework for their thinking and their behavior.” The assets lists six values: caring, equality and social justice, integrity, honesty, responsibility, and restraint (ability to resist temptation or delay gratification of desires, particularly related to issues of health.) Authors felt that this list measures a balance of concern for others (caring, justice, responsibility) with concern for and monitoring of ones own person (integrity, honesty and restraint). The six values selected by the Search Institute to include in their assets list overlaps (but are not identical to) lists that have been developed by a number of widely-based consortiums including the American “Character Counts!” alliance of education and human-service organizations, which brought together educators, youth leaders and ethicists to develop a list of six “pillars of character” (trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring and citizenship.) A more international group, the Institute for Global Ethics, surveyed participants from 40 countries at the “State of the World Forum” 1996 meeting asking respondents to indicate the single most important value from a list of 15 values. The responses were compassion (21%), responsibility (16%), truth (16%), reverence for life (12%), freedom (9%), self-respect (8%) and fairness (6%) (Kidder & Loges, 1997, cited in Scales and Leffert, 2004, p. 151).

Parents in our study were also ask to indicate from a list of 15 virtues, which three they deemed most important to teach in the home, school and community. The parents indicated that consideration (mentioned by 78%), honesty (67%) and courtesy (66%) were the most important virtues or values to learn at home; cooperation (68%), consideration (65%) and responsibility (55%) were the most often selected virtues to be learned at school; courtesy (73%), consideration (58%) and cooperation (56%) were the top three virtues parents wanted their children to learn in the community. It is noteworthy that often these virtues or values overlap, and that if one is displayed, others will be a facet of it. For example, courtesy is an aspect of consideration, honesty is an aspect of responsibility and so on.

Research reviewed by Scales and Leffert showed the tendency of children with stronger exposure to values to be better able to persevere when things become difficult. The important aspect regarding values formation for children at this age level is what they are being exposed to through the warm but firm words and deeds of the family, friends, school and neighborhood around them. Therefore, the questions were designed to measure both the parents’ involvement in communicating with the children about key values, as well as the parent's sense of their child's ability to understand and

express the value. Responses are shown in Figure 8.

Figure 8: Internal Assets - Values

“How much do you and your child talk about values such as the following?”

	Stongly Agree	Agree	Don't agree so much	Totally disagree
8.1 Consideration and caring: Child feels he/she should help others and try to do so when needed.	33.9%	59.3%	5.7%	0.0%
8.2 Fairness: Child understands what fairness is, why it is needed, and tries to act fairly toward others.	25.5%	58.1%	15.4%	0.2%
8.3 Integrity: Child can express opinions and act according to what they believe is right.	28.3%	58.9%	11.5%	0.2%
8.4 Honesty: Child can tell the truth even when it may result in some problems.	29.2%	55.9%	13.3%	0.8%
8.5 Responsibility: Child can act responsibly on own choices.	43.7%	50.7%	4.7%	0.0%
8.6 Restraint (Healthy Lifestyle):Child shows awareness of good health and dietary habits.	46.4%	47.0%	5.7%	0.0%

Social Competencies are a set of skills that enable young people to interact with a other people in a variety of situations, to face new situations, face hard decisions, and to seek positive solutions skillfully and appropriately. Such skills as planning and decision making, relationship-building on one hand, and resistance skills and conflict resolution skills on the other hand have been associated with increased self-confidence and general psycho-social health, decreased problem behaviors and depression. Parents responses to questions about their children's competence in this selected set of skills is presented in Figure 9.

Figure 9: Internal Assets - Social Competencies:

How well do you feel your child can do the following:

	Stongly Agree	Agree	Don't agree so much	Totally disagree
9.1 Can make own plans based on own ideas.	15.6%	58.9%	23.0%	1.6%
9.2 Can carry out plans, once decided.	20.3%	66.7%	11.7%	0.6%
9.3 Shows respect for feelings of others.	18.9%	61.4%	18.1%	1.0%
9.4 Child is willing and able to make friends.	25.7%	56.5%	16.6%	0.6%
9.5 Responds patiently even when feeling frustrated.	9.0%	58.9%	28.1%	2.3%
9.6 Interacts positively with people who may be in a different age group or of a different cultural or national background.	17.0%	48.3%	32.2%	1.4%
9.7 Resists others who attempt to persuade them to do something wrong.	15.4%	63.0%	19.9%	0.6%
9.8 Makes efforts to handle conflicts without being violent.	14.6%	64.7%	18.3%	1.4%

Self efficacy and positive identity concerns how the child views his or her own ability to bring about desired changes and to what degree he or she is beginning to take responsibility for his or her own present and future. Identity development, of course, is considered a central task of the adolescent period (Erikson, 1968, cited in Scales and Leffert, 2004, p. 193). In general, the more a child feels that he or she has some measure of control of their own identity and has an empowered sense of efficacy (able to make choices that will make a positive difference in their present and future), the more positive their relationships are with peers and parents, the better their adjustment and performance in school and the less likely they are to give into negative peer pressure, get into risk-taking behaviors, become depressed or resort to violence. Parents' view of the skills and issues related to positive identity of their children in this study are presented in Figure 10.

Figure 10: Internal Assets - Self-efficacy and positive identity

To what degree would you say your child exhibits the following qualities:

	Stongly Agree	Agree	Don't agree so much	Totally disagree
10.1 Makes and carries decisions about things that concern him/her.	13.1%	65.9%	20.1%	0.4%
10.2 Likes himself or herself.	20.5%	64.3%	14.2%	0.6%
10.3 Thinks about his or her purpose in life.	10.5%	38.0%	45.4%	5.3%
10.4 Is positive about future; has hopes and dreams.	17.5%	55.4%	24.4%	2.3%

Discussion:

The purpose of this research has been to create a baseline of data related to social and moral education environments in Yamaguchi City in order to guide their maintenance, strengthening and

ultimate improvement. We based our questionnaire on the “assets approach” of the Search Institute in the US because of the extensive research that has gone into developing and testing this practical list of external and internal environmental conditions known to be related to the positive social and moral, as well as physical and academic development of children and youth (cf. Search Institute, 2006; Scales and Leffert, 2004, and others).

In analyzing and commenting on this data, we want to examine the items that are particular strengths (assets that are present), and those that may be considered weak (or relatively less present assets). For example, if we look at items which 75% or more of parents feel are present at least to some degree for their children, we make note that family love and emotional **support** (1.1), positive family communication (1.2), affection and support from adults outside of the family (1.3) and emotional support from school staff (1.5) could be considered in the “plus side.” However, over one-third of parents did not consider the greetings or expressions of care from neighbors (1.4), nor their own involvement with school (1.6) as adequate .

In the area of **empowerment**, although children's opinions and thoughts may be considered important (2.1), at least half of the parents felt that children's opinions are not listened to or incorporated into community decision-making, nor were there sufficient opportunities for children to serve or act as volunteers in the community. In the Aihara (et.al, 2005) study, over 95% of parents surveyed said they wished there were more opportunities for children to offer service to the community. The Ministry of Education in Japan has noted community service activities should be promoted through integrated educational activities from the schools. Such interaction with the community will increase the network of adults who students get to know, it will increase their awareness of role-models as well as their own sense of efficacy as they learn to put their knowledge into action to help others (Langness, 2004). In the free comments section of the questionnaire, some parents noted that when they and their children shared involvement in community volunteer activities their children had better communication both at home and in the community. It was also noteworthy that nearly one-third of parents in Yamaguchi felt that their neighborhoods were not a safe or comfortable place for children. Some parents commented directly that the problem was that they knew so few people, that they did not have a sense of trust. More community involvement in arranged service-learning activities might be a remedy for that problem as well.

Regarding **boundaries and expectations**, there seems to be a sense of ambivalence. About two-thirds of the parents felt their family had clear and consistent rules (3.1), and that parents, teachers and the adults in the local community encourage children to do their best (3.7). But over half of the parents did not feel that the school rules were either clear or fairly applied (3.2), and over two-thirds felt that there was inadequate support in the neighborhood in terms of comments to children who are misbehaving. The weak support in the neighborhood has been a topic of general comments both by parents in this survey and the general public in other venues, because this recent condition is not in keeping with Japan's group-oriented past. People no longer are clear about what the guidelines are, whether they should make comments to children, and what, if anything, they should do or say if they notice children who are not acting appropriately in their opinion. Just over 70% of parents' responses suggest that parents do not really consider people in the community to be good role models for their children. But, honestly speaking, nearly half (45%) did not feel that the adults in their own family were good role models either (3.4). About the same number (46%) responded that they don't really feel that their children's friends are positive and responsible role models for each other.

In the items that invited parents' free comments there were a number of thoughtful remarks related to this problem. Some parents noted that there seems to be a gap in expectations between their generation and their children's. Others pointed out the movement toward cultural pluralism that has created expectation gaps even within the current social expectations. Because they did not know what other parents expect of their children, they did not know whether or how far to trust their children's friends. Other parents commented that they were unsure about what kind of future was in store for their children, so they were unsure what kind of guidelines to draw for them, and how much to insist if the children argue that times have changed. This uncertainty about boundaries and expectations was one of the most commented on themes in the parent's responses.

On the topic of **constructive use of time**, Scales, Sesma, and Bolstrom (2004) have commented that "children do not need a diet of time use that is wholly structured, but they do need most of it to be supervised or at least monitored by parents and other adults." (p. 122) As in the US, after-school programs for children and youth in Japan whether provided by the school or in the community generally mix periods of free time with organized sports, academic enrichment, or cultural activities such as arts, music, etc. According to the research cited by Scales, et al. (ibid), such programs reduce risk for school failure, are associated with better academic achievement, reduce behavior problems and improve socio-emotional adjustment, increasing social competency with peers as well as adults. Nearly 100% of students in our study were involved in one or more after-school program.

Scales, et al (ibid) note that although there are relatively fewer studies available on religious activities, "The available research does suggest that children's participation in religious programs and services is associated directly, or indirectly with [among other positive outcomes] ...decreased risk-taking behaviors and attitudes, ...increase sense of well-being, ...greater sense of connectedness to community, ...greater social responsibility, ...higher quality parent-child relationships." As mentioned above religious programs aimed at children and youth are not widely available in Japan (indeed, only 11 [2.2%] out of the 487 respondents in our study indicated an involvement in religious activities. Nine of these mentioned spiritual and moral development directly as their reason for participating, and 8 of the 11 mentioned at least two reasons for which their children were involved in the religious programs.

We posited that parents are, in any case, concerned about the spiritual development of their offspring. When asked to make note of the primary purposes for their selection of extra-curricular programs for their children, we were surprised to note that 66% of parents listed "spiritual and moral development" (more than any other reason category.) Most related it especially to sports programs. Over 50% of those involved in sports programs listed "spiritual and moral development" as a reason for their participation. Every program on our list was selected by at least some parents primarily for the reason of "spiritual and moral development." Among the most common were piano lessons, calligraphy and martial arts.

Another common reason for selecting after-school programs was for communications and human relationships (60%). Participation in "kodomu kai," sports, English lessons and volunteer activities were often for the purpose of increasing communications and human relations opportunities. In Yamaguchi, just 52% of parents selected academic skills development as a primary reason for after-school activities. Just 48% mentioned sending their children to cram schools for any reason. It would be interesting to compare this data to similar data take from various parts of Japan including the large urban areas.

As has been noted in the research literature (cited above), the effects of structured co-curricular,

after-school activities for children and youth are multiple and overlapping. However, the psychological and physical problems that have been associated with “over-scheduling” children so that they do not have enough rest or leisure time are also issues of concern for educators and parents. Issues of the quality, effectiveness and balance of time spent were not within the scope of this research, but may be topics of further study. In general, it seemed that parents were relatively satisfied with the after-school programs for their children.

Time spent at home is another aspect of the same issue. The effects (positive and negative) related to time spent at home vary not only with the amount of time at home but also with the quality and balance of activities with parents, balance of time spent alone or in “self-care.” In general, studies have shown that when time with parents includes a variety of enriching activities including play, reading, working together on chores or projects, the positive outcomes include both better academic and social adjustment. About one-third of the parents in our study said their child spends only 30 minutes or less per day in talk or play with them. Free reading (other than comic books) is engaged in at least an hour a day by only one in six students (14%). One out of three students do no household chores at all (with over 90% of the two-thirds who do chores helping out less than 30 minutes per day). Most students (91%) spend only an hour or day or less on homework or study according to their parents (with 45.8% doing less than 30 minutes of study, including 6.4% who do no study at all according to their parents). These figures compare to the ones obtained from the students themselves in the study by Aihara, et al, (2005).

Half of the students spend at least two hours per day watching TV or playing computer games, with 10% of parents saying that their children spend over three hours per day absorbed in the TV or game screen. However, when looking at the overall balance of time spent at home, one could see an average division of 1.4 hours in TV or computer games, 1.2 hours in study or free reading, and 1.4 hours interacting with parents or on household chores.

Moving into the **internal assets**, it was notable that most parents (82%) understood that their children generally did their homework and 68% agreed that their child feels relaxed with and likes their teacher (s) and the school staff, yet nearly three out of four (74%) said that their child does not really like to study on their own, less than 50% said that their children liked to read on their own (other than comic books or magazines) and just 55% thought their children were motivated to study and learn. The figures suggest that the internal asset of **commitment to learning** is not as established in these children as would be best for them at this age.

Regarding **values**, however, well over 80% of parents responded that they agreed that their children are talked to and understand values including consideration (93%), fairness (84%), integrity (87%), honesty (85%), responsibility (94%), and restraint (as it relates to awareness of good health and diet) (93%). This is a strongly positive outcome and suggests that most parents surveyed here are providing a strong foundation for values development for their children.

Social competency was an area where parents also felt a general sense of confidence. The only areas in which fewer than 3 out of 4 parents agreed were on the issues of whether the child responds patiently even when frustrated (30% disagreed), and whether the child could interact positively with people who were of a different age group, cultural or national background (about 34%, or one out of three, disagreed.) This may connect to the lack of opportunities the children are given to meet and interact with people in different age groups or social backgrounds. It is suggested that as their community interactions increase, their capacity for positive interaction, and perhaps even their

patience with frustrating circumstances can be increased.

Finally, although about three out of four parents felt that their children had a **positive identity**, a positive view of the future, and could make and carry out decisions for themselves about things that concern them, less than 50% felt that their child thinks much about their purpose of life. The research reviewed by Scales and Leffert, 2004, and Scales, Sesma and Bolstrom, 2004, suggests that a strong sense of purpose in life has been associated with protecting children from negative interactions (bullying), risk taking and negative attitudes such as depression or suicidal thoughts. It is posited that a sense of purpose in life also plays a role in raising positive feelings overall and energizing a young person's internal assets across the board. However, not enough research has been carried out with a view toward the positive rather than merely the "defensive" aspects of sense of purpose to draw a clear conclusion from their data. However, Langness, (2004) found that when students identify themselves with broadly based positive identities such as "helpers," "healers," "heroes," etc., and were taught to evaluate their own actions and the actions of others in light of the character qualities (habits-of-heart) that were being displayed in a person's interactions with others, their overall interest in learning and responsibility-taking for their own future became remarkably more positive.

Parents in our survey were very generous with their comments on the open-ended questions. They brought up a number of concerns, as mentioned earlier, particularly in the area of the frustration and uncertainty they feel about establishing guidelines and values for their children as they grown into adolescence. The comments would make an excellent topic for future analysis and discussion.

Conclusion:

Taking an overview of the 40 assets identified by the Search Institute as they are viewed in Yamaguchi by the parents in this study, it can be noted that the external assets of family support, and internal assets of values and social competence seem to be quite strong, with over 80% of parents feeling that these assets are present for their children at least to some degree. Emotional support from the school is also considered relatively strong. However, at least one out of three parents felt that the following external assets are weak or non-existent:

1. Parent involvement in school (less than 4% indicated that it was adequate).
2. Caring neighborhood (40% judge as low or not at all).
3. Adult role models within the family (45% judge as low or not at all).
4. Adult role models outside the family (71% judge as low or not at all).
5. Positive peer influence (51% judge as low or not at all).
6. Youth viewed as resources for the community (58.8% judge as low or not at all).
7. Opportunities for youth to serve others (50.5% judge as low or not at all).
8. School rules fairly and consistently applied (54% judge as low or not at all).
9. Neighborhood rules or boundaries (58.5% judge as low or not at all).

In addition there is the question of whether parents and children feel safe in their own neighborhoods (nearly one-third said they do not) and whether even family rules or boundaries are adequate (nearly one-third expressed a sense of inadequacy in this regard). Constructive use of time at home is also an issue worth considering when over half of children spend more than 2 hours per day absorbed in TV or video games and one in three spend less than 30 minutes talking or playing with parents.

The internal assets that parents indicated concern about include:

1. School engagement (75% judge as low or not at all.)
2. Sense of purpose (51.5% indicated that their children rarely or never think about it.)
3. Reading for pleasure (52.5% say their children rarely or never do.)
4. Achievement motivation (44.5% judge their children's drive as low or not at all.)
5. Cultural competence (35% judge as low or not at all when relating to people of different ages or cultural backgrounds.)

Previous studies have indicated that these assets can be strengthened, not just one at a time, but as an interlinking network through integrated service-learning activities that engage members of the community in encouraging children's own sense of contribution and identity as the helpers, heroes, healers and humanitarians for their own locality and in the wider world. Programs such as the Full-Circle Learning model (Langness, 2004) have proven to reinforce many of these missing personal, family, and community assets while improving children's academic skills due to their increased interest in learning, as they put their newly learned skills to work immediately in service to others.

Based on these findings, we hope to promote such service-learning projects involving students in strengthening the links between home, school and community as they learn not only the “how,” but the “why” of learning. Setting up such programs can be done formally or informally within existing institutions such as the “kodomokai,” the PTAs, and even within the scope of the recently integrated-learning time in schools and after-school clubs, as well as community-based activities, if there is vision, and commitment to revitalizing a wholistic concept of education to include the “heart” as well as the “head” and the “hands” within the three educational arenas of home, school and community.

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山口県における教育環境：40の発達資産という観点からの考察

ヒギンズ・マリリン
実践英語 I

1,200にのぼる研究報告を概観した結果、アメリカのサーチ・インスティテュートが、子どもの社会面や感情面の発達に関連する「40の発達資産」というリストを作成していることを突き止めた。この発達資産という概念は、子どもの身体や感情、精神面や学習面を含めた全体的な発達を促し強めるための、重要な栄養素あるいは積み木の一つひとつに例えられよう。

本稿は、この発達資産の理論的・研究的基礎について触れ、同時に、日本の文化的・教育的背景を評価分析するために、この概念を応用することを試みる初期的な研究について報告するものである。山口県において、40の発達資産のうち何がすでに用意され、またされていないかをみるために、小学5年生と中学2年生の親487名の意見を聞く調査を実施した。

調査結果から、これらの親は、家庭での子どもへの支援、学校での子どもへの支援、価値観育成、社会的能力の育成、肯定的な自己像などの項目群については、それらを伸ばすための発達機会は用意されているといった意見を持っていることがわかった。

反対に、地域からの子どもへの支援や、地域におけるロールモデル、コミュニティ活動への参加、地域での学びなどの項目群については、十分な発達機会が用意されていないと感じていることが明らかになった。

これらの弱点となっている発達資産を克服し、子どもへの教育環境を改善するために、家庭・学校・地域間の連携のきずなを強めことを提言している。