Participants

Participants were community-dwelling elders and residents of local retirement apartments.

Procedure

Following pretest, a subset of participants were randomly assigned to participate in the Senior Odyssey program (or to a wait-list control). Based on the principles and activities of Odyssey of the Mind (www.odysseyofthemind.com), the Senior Odyssey program engages cognition in the context of collaborative creative activity on a regular basis over a 20-week season. Senior Odyssey incorporates both divergent and convergent problem solving to exercise speed of processing, working memory, fluency, visual-spatial processing, and inductive reasoning in a context that rewards active participation and creativity.

Measures

Participants were administered a battery assessing performance on a variety of cognitive measures (e.g., Ekstrom et al., 1976; Salthouse, 1991), personality (i.e., mindfulness, Bodner & Langer, 2001; MID openness, Lachman & Weaver, 1997; need for cognition, Cacioppo & Petty, 1982, & Dixon et al., 1988), and activity level (Hultsch et al., 1999) (see first column of Table 2).

During the 6th, 10th, 14th and 18th weeks of the program, participants in the experimental group completed a short assessment of their personal involvement in the program. This assessment consisted of ratings for the statements “I put forth a lot of effort in working on the problems,” and “I felt like I was a strong contributor to my group,” on a 1 to 5 scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). Immediately after each Senior Odyssey session, coaches used anchored scales (1 = not at all engaged, 7 = highly engaged) to rate each participant on their levels of cognitive engagement (e.g., at the high end, pays attention, offers answers, tries to complete all tasks) and social engagement (e.g., at the high end, relates to other group members on a personal level, instructs others in how solutions were derived, piggybacks on others’ ideas).

RESULTS

More cognitively able elders had relatively more active lifestyles, showed a stronger predisposition toward cognitive engagement, and were more active group participants. However, the predisposition toward cognitive engagement was not predictive of group participation, suggesting that intellectual and collaborative engagement may represent independent contributors to cognitive competence.

REFERENCES

Lachman, M., & Weaver, S. L. (1997). The Midlife Development Inventory (MDI) personality scales: Scale construction and scoring (Tech. Rep. No.1). Waltham, MA: Brandeis University, Department of Psychology.

The table of results contains the following columns:

- **Activity**
- **Self-Eff**
- **PACE**

The correlation matrices for the cognitive abilities are provided in the results section. The significance levels are indicated using the symbols *p<.05, **p<.01, †p<.10.

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