May 2023

Adult Rating of Youth

Measurement Manual

The **Adult Rating of Youth (ARY)** asks staff to rate children's and youths' *optimal socio-emotional behavioral skills* based on behaviors displayed during program activities, as observed during several program offering sessions. ARY scores are good indicators of how children and youth are likely to perform in settings where they are well supported. Staff should observe each child or youth for at least four hours of program activities before using the ARY. The ARY can be used as a pre-test for program planning purposes and, also, as a post-test for assessing socio-emotional skill growth. This manual includes the following sections to support successful understanding and implementation of the ARY:

Introduction

QTurn's Quality-Outcomes Design and Measure (Q-ODM) toolbox includes a comprehensive suite of evidence-informed measures designed to assess the quality and impact of out-of-school time (OST) programs. This manual provides information about an observational rating instrument designed to assess children's and adolescents' core socio-emotional skill sets. We also provide some technical information about the measure and general guidance about how to administer, score, and interpret it.

The Adult Rating of Youth (ARY) was developed by first selecting and modifying items from the Adult Rating of Youth Behavior that pertained specifically to schemas or awareness and then developing additional items aligned primarily to schemas and awareness. Each item was refined by iterating variations in wording and examples with experienced OST staff.

The ARY is generally applicable to, and can be used for, any and all types of OST program offerings. The ARY can also be used with children and youth classified as having an individualized education program (IEP) or similar designation in the same way you would use it for anyone else. We generally recommend using the ARY as the primary outcome variable for typical OST program impact studies because we believe that it is the most likely to detect socio-emotional skill growth.

Please keep in mind that the ARY does *not* provide a clinical assessment of children or youth. It is intended only for *lower-stakes* planning, improvement, and program evaluation purposes (e.g., where low scores signal areas of focus and support for children and youth but not failure, sanctions, or other disciplinary action).

The following sections include:

- The theory of change underpinning the measure.
- A technical guide to the measure covering
    - what it is,
    - how it was developed,
    - how and when to use it, and
    - how to administer it.

Theory of Change

The Adult Rating of Youth (ARY) is based on a theory of change (Figure 1) for how children and youth develop and grow their socio-emotional skills within out-of-school time (OST) settings and then transfer these skills to other areas of their lives (Peck & Smith, 2020). Socio-emotional learning (SEL) is the process through which children and youth develop essential life skills such as empathy, regulating emotions, responsibility, and teamwork. Socio-emotional *skills* are the relatively-enduring mental and behavioral results of these learning processes. These skills play a central role in children and youths' ability to do well in school, make successful transitions to adulthood, and achieve positive life outcomes, including educational attainment, employment, and good health.

Understanding how children and youth can achieve (and be supported to achieve) positive outcomes, like empathy, is aided by thinking about socio-emotional skills as integrated sets of schemas, beliefs, and awareness (Peck & Smith, 2020). This is because socio-emotional skills conceived at the 'outcome domain' level (e.g., teamwork) tend to be a combination of more specific mental and behavioral skills (Smith et al., 2016). For example, socio-emotional skill in the teamwork domain includes both mental skills (e.g., abilities to construct accurate world theories and manage one's emotions) and behavioral skills (e.g., reciprocity and collaboration).

Figure 1: *Theory of Change for Multilevel Cascades of Causes and Effects.*
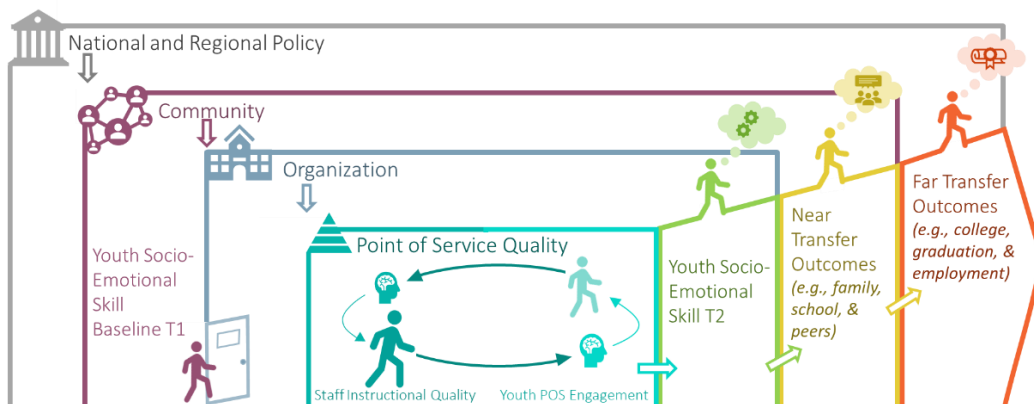
Socio-emotional Mental Skills

In Figure 1, the icons depicting a brain between staff and youth behavior at the point of service indicate that mental skills cause behavior. The term *mental skill* refers to the psychological parts and processes used to interpret social events, generate emotions, reflect on options, and select behavioral responses. There are dozens of specific components involved with these processes (most of which operate automatically, outside of conscious awareness), so we simplify their description into the three core aspects of mental skill that help staff promote learning and help youth take control of their own learning and behavior: schemas, beliefs, and awareness (described below). Figure 2 represents a close-up of these mental processes and their relation to behavior (Peck & Smith, 2020).

Figure 1. The Neuroperson Framework
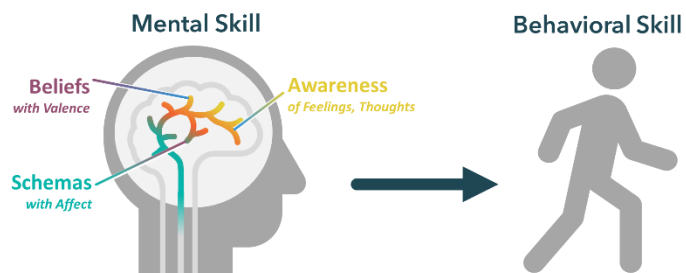
We refer to this set of mental processes as the *neuroperson*[1] because each of the three different aspects of mental skill (i.e., schemas, beliefs, and awareness) corresponds roughly to a different area of the brain. At the risk of oversimplifying, *schemas* record the quality of early and ongoing caregiving, *beliefs* record the details of a complicated self and social world, and *awareness* interacts with schemas and beliefs to convert *automatic* reactions into *intentional* actions. In short, schemas, beliefs, and awareness are the raw material from which all socio-emotional mental skills (by whatever name) are constructed; that is, when considered together, they *are* mental skills.

Mental skills defined in terms of schemas, beliefs, and awareness can be further described in the following terms:

- **Attachment schemas** – These are children's and youth's unconscious, nonverbal frames of thinking about relationships, formed by their early experiences with caregivers. They can be viewed as memories of relationship experiences that are infused with a lot of emotional energy. This means, for example, that activating these memories tends to produce vivid images and strong feelings. As enduring parts of people's long-term memory systems, attachment schemas act like *set points* for the way children and youth initially engage in and respond to program offerings; for this reason, we refer to them as *basic regulation* skills. For example, children and youth who enter OST programs having had a history of harsh parenting experiences, or other adverse childhood experiences (Carlson et al., 2019; Merrick et al., 2018), often show poor basic regulation skills. In addition, where thinking about the emotional states of mind that children and youth bring to program offerings, it is helpful to remember that schemas tend to function automatically, outside of their awareness and control. This means that children and youth are likely to benefit more from understanding and support than rejection and punishment. We focus especially on the following two general kinds of attachment schemas:

    - **Broaden and Build (B&B) Schemas** (aka, secure attachment schemas) are nonverbal skills, constructed from supportive relationships (e.g., warm, responsive), that make children feel safe, happy, and curious. Children and youth with B&B schemas will generally find it easy to explore new situations and to trust and develop positive relationships with new people. As viewed by others, they will generally appear to act with initiative, respond positively when frustrated, and display a comfortable and confident demeanor. B&B schemas also tend to be associated with a strong, well-balanced stress response system (e.g., activated when needed and deactivated when not needed).

    - **Narrow and Constrain (N&C) Schemas** (aka, anxious, avoidant, and disorganized attachment schemas) are nonverbal skills, constructed from non-supportive relationships (e.g., neglectful, hostile) that make children feel anxious, hyper-aroused, or confused. Children and youth with N&C schemas will generally find it difficult to explore new situations and to trust and interact positively with others. As viewed by others, they will generally appear to take no initiative, over-react when frustrated, and display an anxious, withdrawn, aggressive, or awkward demeanor. N&C schemas also tend to be associated with imbalanced stress response systems (e.g., activated when not needed and not deactivated after threats are gone).

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[1] The neuroperson part of the theory of change (see Figure 2) is a practical simplification of the more detailed Basic Levels of Self (BLoS) model (Roeser et al., 2006; Roeser & Peck, 2009).

- ***Beliefs* about the self and world** – Beliefs are the most common and well-studied aspect of mental skills, probably because they are relatively easy to consciously reflect on and describe. However, people have hundreds of beliefs, and they go by many different names (e.g., attitudes, values, expectations, self-concept, self-efficacy, ideologies), so it can be confusing to decide which ones to focus on. In addition, given that there are so many available measures of beliefs, we focus mainly on schemas and awareness.

  Basic beliefs form over time into complex belief systems, such as attitudes, goals, and plans. Values, opinions, and mindsets are also examples of beliefs. Beliefs are formed automatically during social interactions and intentionally during self-reflection. They are also relatively malleable (compared to schemas) and can change as a result of a single social interaction, or even just reflecting on a previous or anticipated social interaction. We consider them central aspects of socio-emotional skill because of their strong influence on both perception and behavior. For example, beliefs about the speed, depth, and temperature of a river, coupled with beliefs about one's swimming ability, strongly influence the decision to swim across the river (and the accuracy of those beliefs strongly influences the success of any attempt to swim across the river).

- ***Awareness* –** Also known as *executive attention* or *executive functions* (Peck & Smith, 2020), the ability to control the focus of awareness refers specifically to consciously focusing attention on thoughts and feelings occurring in the present moment. This sounds simple enough, but if you have ever tried to meditate then you probably realize how difficult it is to sustain the focus of awareness for more than a few moments (e.g., it is very easy for thoughts and distractions to pull the focus of awareness away from what we are trying consciously to focus on). Awareness is the basis for all forms of self-reflection, which includes things like memorization, recollection, problem solving, planning, and noticing and controlling impulses. Similar to schemas, awareness has been relatively neglected by those concerned with socio-emotional skill growth and positive youth development. However, the ability to control the focus of awareness allows youth to use intentional forms of agency to change their behavior and promote the development of their personal and social identities.

Most of the many available socio-emotional skill frameworks and measures focus on youth's beliefs while neglecting both schemas and awareness. Thinking about socio-emotional mental skills in terms of schemas, beliefs, and awareness simplifies a lot of complexity while highlighting the critical but neglected roles that schemas and awareness play in youth's healthy development. Schemas are critical because of their strong influence on youth's habitual emotional tone and reactivity; meeting youth where they are at requires understanding that schemas automatically influence their thinking, feeling, and behavior and usually do so outside of their awareness. Consciously shifting and sustaining the focus of awareness is critical because of its potential for intervening in what otherwise seem like automatic processes (e.g., emotional and behavioral reactivity). Growing these socio-emotional skills allows children and youth to become more effective authors of their own healthy development.

Adult Rating of Youth (ARY)

About the ARY

The Adult Rating of Youth (ARY) is an observational rating instrument used to assess *optimal* socio-emotional behavioral skills generated by three distinct but interrelated aspects of mental skill (i.e., schemas, beliefs, and awareness). Optimal skills are the best someone can do while receiving high-quality support to enact these skills within, for example, OST program settings. The ARY focuses on specific observable behaviors associated with the socio-emotional skills of children and youth from 5 to 18 years of age and can be used within the context of any type of OST program offering.

The ARY was not designed to be an exhaustive measure of socio-emotional skills; rather, it was designed to focus on a few key types of behavioral skill related especially to emotion regulation (i.e., schemas) and reflective thinking (i.e., awareness). If your primary goal is to assess socio-emotional skill growth, we generally recommend using observational measures like the ARY because they focus on optimal behavioral skills, which we view as the most valid and sensitive (to change) information about socio-emotional skills.

The ARY was developed by first selecting and modifying items from the Adult Rating of Youth Behavior that pertained specifically to schemas or awareness and then by finding, adapting, or creating additional behavioral-observation items aligned primarily to the two neglected but fundamental aspects of mental skills: schemas and awareness. Each item was refined by iterating variations in wording and examples with experienced OST staff and youth workers.

Although behavior tends to be a combined function of schemas, beliefs, and awareness, each of the core ARY items was designed to focus on behavior associated with either schemas or awareness; specifically, (a) Broaden & Build Schemas, (b) Narrow & Constrain Schemas, or (c) Awareness. Within the complex interplay among mental skills, and between mental and behavioral skills, some kinds of behavior (e.g., impulsivity) tend to be influenced more by schemas, whereas other kinds of behavior (e.g., "paying attention") tend to be influenced more by awareness. This means that each of the behaviors named in the ARY items is, technically, a combined function of schemas, beliefs, and awareness but that each item also highlights behavior associated with a particular kind of schema (i.e., broaden and build or narrow and constrain) or mode of awareness (i.e., intentionally focused or passively 'going along for the ride').

Psychometric details, including validity and reliability information, for the ARY are pending. However, given the very close alignment between (a) our conceptual definitions of mental and behavioral skills and (b) the item content on the ARY, we view the ARY as a highly face valid measure of children's and youth's optimal socio-emotional behavioral skills and the socio-emotional mental skills most likely to influence them. In addition, given our experience with this and similar measures, and despite including relatively few items per construct, we expect the ARY scale scores to reflect high levels of construct validity and be sufficiently reliable; that is, alpha coefficients of reliability should generally exceed .70.

After analyzing the data, we generally provide reports to each organization that show the three primary ARY scale scores (i.e., Broaden & Build Schemas, Narrow & Constrain Schemas, and Awareness) as a set of profiles (e.g., High, Moderate, and Low Skill) that characterize the participating children and youth, along with some basic descriptive information (e.g., the percentage of youth in each profile). This optimal socio-emotional skill profile information can be used to inform future planning (e.g., organizations serving high percentages of youth in 'high-risk' ARY profiles may decide to focus program activities more closely on the needs of these youth). If the ARY is also used as a follow-up measure, then similar aggregate information can be used to assess socio-emotional skill change (e.g., by comparing the percent of youth in a high-risk ARY profile at baseline to the percentage of youth in a similar high-risk

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ARY profile at follow-up). Finding evidence of optimal socio-emotional skill growth using ARY scores supports conclusions like (a) the youth participating in this OST program are improving their socio-emotional skills and, potentially (e.g., where program quality data are included), (b) the reason youth are improving their socio-emotional skills is because we are creating high-quality OST program offerings.

How and When to Use

The ARY should be used by staff to assess a child's or youth's optimal socio-emotional behavioral skills. It can be used after at least two weeks (or four hours of program participation) from when the child or youth first entered the program in order to assess their *baseline* socio-emotional behavioral skills. Baseline socio-emotional behavioral skill information can be used to better familiarize you with the children and youth attending the OST program offering and plan program activities (e.g., to tailor program activities to the needs of the children and youth who are attending). If the aim is to assess 'pre-test' skill information for the purposes of assessing change with a post-test, it is best to collect ARY information as early as possible (i.e., near the four-hour mark of program participation) because later assessments may not accurately reflect a child's or youth's 'pre-test' skills (i.e., they are likely already growing their skills during the first few weeks of program participation).

The ARY can also be used as a pre-test, near the beginning of the program, together with a post-test, shortly after or near the end of the program, in order to assess optimal socio-emotional skill growth. Although ARY scores tend to be especially sensitive to socio-emotional skill growth, if your primary aim is to assess socio-emotional skill growth, we generally recommend waiting at least two to three months to conduct follow-up ARY ratings. Information about optimal socio-emotional skill growth can be used to understand both children's and youth's development and the relation of this development to other aspects of OST programs (e.g., the impact of instructional quality on optimal socio-emotional skill growth).

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Administration and Scoring

ARY Items

The ARY includes 12 core items (corresponding to the three primary scales), 6 optional items for adolescents (2 each for the three primary scales), 14 additional items (corresponding to the two optional *belief* scales), and two additional "background" questions about how well the adult rater knows the child or youth they are rating. (We also have an item bank of additional core ARY items.)

The response scale for the ARY items (including the optional belief items) is:

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always

Background

B1. How long have you known this child or youth?

[1 = < 2 weeks; 2 = 2-7 weeks, 3 = 2-5 months; 4 = 6-12 months; 5 = > a year]

B2. For about how many hours of program time have you observed this child or youth?

[1 = < 4 hours; 2 = 4-7 hours, 3 = 8-15 hours; 4 = 16-32 hours; 5 = > 32 hours or more]

Broaden & Build Schemas

1. How often did the youth appear to be comfortable in the setting and confident in their behavior (e.g., did not appear anxious when peers were acting out; appeared confident when trying out new tasks; remained calm when challenged)?

2. How often did the youth take the initiative (e.g., jumped in to help clean up; volunteered for a challenging task; quick to raise hand in response to a question put the group)?

3. How often did the youth display curiosity (e.g., asked questions to seek additional information; explored options that went beyond conversational or task requirements)?

4. How often did the youth act with kindness or generosity (e.g., used kind words or gestures toward self or others; voluntarily helped resolve a conflict between others)?

   (optional for adolescents) How often did the youth easily manage both positive and negative feelings (e.g., didn't lash out at others when feeling bad; didn't brag or gloat when feeling good)?

   (optional for adolescents) How often did the youth respond positively when frustrated by challenging tasks, minor set-backs, disagreements, or critical feedback (e.g., didn't blame others or stop trying; thought about it and tried again or sought help)?

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Narrow & Constrain Schemas

5. How often did the youth appear to be uncomfortable in the setting or nervous about their own or others' behavior (e.g., hypervigilant; agitated; appeared upset when peers were acting out; appeared nervous when trying out new tasks; became anxious when challenged; appeared worried about what someone else might say or do)?

6. How often did the youth get frustrated easily (e.g., challenging tasks, minor setbacks, disagreements, or critical feedback cause more frustration than expected for a successful program experience)?

7. How often did the youth withdraw from participation (e.g., stopped paying attention; stopped participating in an activity; appears to spaced-out/mind wandering)?

8. How often did the youth display disruptive behavior (e.g., hyperactive; fidgety; interfered with others' space and focus; interfered with their own learning by talking or ignoring etc.)?

   (optional for adolescents) How often did the youth focus on peers to the exclusion of adult guidance (e.g., can't resist phone; resistant to adult guidance and monitoring; anxious at physical separation from peers)?

   (optional for adolescents) How often did the youth act impulsively (e.g., act or react without thinking; hit someone in response to a verbal provocation; called someone a derogatory name when they didn't get their way; skipped a critical step in a project)?

Awareness

9. How often did the youth stay focused and on-task despite distractions (e.g., stayed on-task while others were off-task; paid attention to staff while others were talking or packing-up to leave; recognized and described feelings during moments of upset)?

10. How often did the youth smoothly transition from one task to another (e.g., settled in quickly and on-time following arrival or snack break; put their phone away immediately after being asked to pay attention; did not keep working on part "A" of a task when asked to move on to part "B")?

11. How often did the youth manage their time (e.g., by prioritizing steps in a process; moving on when a step may not have been completed perfectly but was good enough; or shifting easily between tasks)?

12. How often did the youth engage in practices that required sustaining the focus awareness (e.g., practiced one-pointed concentration; practiced non-judgmental self-awareness, or mindfulness; practiced somatic experiencing, focused breathing, guided imagery, yoga, etc.)?

   (optional for adolescents) How often did the youth evaluate alternative plans for reaching a specific goal (e.g., develop alternative plans, or a plan-B, in case things don't work out)?

   (optional for adolescents) How often did the youth use reflection as part of the problem-solving process (e.g., considered alternative plans for solving a problem; chose words carefully during a social conflict; showed thoughtfulness while describing their feelings)?

(Optional ARY *Belief* Scales)

Emotion Knowledge

1. How often did the youth accurately name personal feelings (e.g., "I was angry," "that made me happy," or "I'd be surprised if…")?
2. How often did the youth describe feelings using more than simple words like happy or sad (e.g., embarrassed, exuberant, ashamed)?
3. How often did the youth accurately name *other* people's feelings (e.g., "she was happy" or "he looked frustrated")?
4. How often did the youth describe the reason for their feelings (e.g., "I got into a fight with my mom," "he called me names," or "that problem was annoying")?
5. How often did the youth effectively express their emotions to others (e.g., put their feelings into words; used phrases like "I felt…" instead of "you're wrong")?
6. How often did the youth identify the relation between the feelings of one person and the feelings of another (e.g., "she's sad because her mom is sick")?
7. How often did the youth identify the relation between situations and emotions (e.g., describes how peers would feel if their event was canceled)?

Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion

1. How often did the youth challenge or correct other's bias or use of intolerant language (e.g., "that didn't seem very nice" or "that sounds racist")?
2. How often did the youth seem tolerant, accepting, or appreciative of physical, social, or cultural differences in other children and adults?
3. How often did the youth stand up for other youth when they were teased, insulted, or marginalized?
4. How often did the youth verbally demonstrate active role-taking (e.g., considered themself in someone else's situation)?
5. How often did the youth verbally acknowledge how someone else's feelings or opinions differed from their own?
6. How often did the youth modify their behavior to acknowledge the value of someone else's ideas (e.g., went along with a plan, even though they didn't agree with it)?
7. How often did the youth demonstrate an understanding of the value of a diverse community (e.g., acknowledge how people with different strengths and weaknesses can work together to achieve a goal)?

Scoring

The mean of the response values across all items within a scale should be calculated to produce a single scale score for each youth. If some item responses are missing, scale scores can be calculated as long as there are responses to at least two thirds of the items in each scale (but remember to calculate the mean score based only on the number of questions for which youth have actually provided a response). Each of the scale scores should range from 1 to 5.

Instructions

Read the statements about youth behavior and, using the given response scale, mark the circle that best describes how often you saw the behavior *during the past two weeks* (or *four hours* of program activity). Please do not skip any items. There are no right or wrong answers.

Protocol

Please read and carefully follow these criteria for observational ratings using the ARY:

1. Identify the adult who will conduct the ratings of each participating youth's behavior.
   a. The adult rater should be a person who regularly leads the session in which the youth participates and has had the opportunity to observe the youth for approximately four hours of program-offering time, over a period at least two weeks, before completing the ARY.
   b. Although there is no training requirement, we recommend training on the use of the ARY, and the adult who rates youth on the ARY should, ideally, be among the best trained in the areas of youth development, social-emotional skills, and adult practices that promote positive youth development and socio-emotional skill growth.

2. Identify the youth who will be rated, and write their ID number on the rating form.

3. Observe youth during program activities for at least two weeks and for *at least* two hours per week of program time. The ratings should be based on direct observations of the youth, considering only behaviors the rater has actually seen. Behaviors that were reported to have occurred in other settings, or were not observed by the rater, should not be scored.

4. With reference to the guidance below, complete ratings for youth using the Ratings template provided.
   a. Rate only those youth who have been identified (as outlined in step 2 of the protocol).
   b. Ensure that you correctly enter their ID number.
   c. Allow about 5 to 10 minutes to compete the ratings for each youth.
   d. The ratings should be completed during a quiet time where there are no distractions.

5. For most or all of the rating items, we could have added the phrase "when appropriate" because we want to know how often the behavior is observed in situations where the behavior is considered appropriate for that situation.

6. There are no right or wrong answers. Please do not skip any items.

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