

Optimism and English School Children:

Reliability, validity and use of the Children's
Attributional Style Questionnaire (CASQ) and the Youth
Life Orientation Test (YLOT).

Submitted by Andrew John Richards to the University of Exeter as a thesis for the degree of
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Abstract

This study explores the use of two tests of optimism: the Youth Life Orientation Test (YLOT) and the Children's Attributional Style Questionnaire (CASQ) in six English primary schools with children aged between 9 years and 12 years. The study grew out of some problems I was confronted with as part of my professional practice regarding the outcomes for children in a school that was failing to meet Government Targets in attainment.

In the study I worked with the staff and 9 – 11 year old children in six primary schools in rural, town, suburban and inner-city contexts. The total number of children was 305. The children were tested using the CASQ and YLOT and a range of other measures. Cronbach alpha internal consistency coefficients (coefficient alpha) and test-retest coefficients for the subscales and overall scale of the CASQ and YLOT were calculated. The validity of each measure was explored using evidence from: test content; internal structure; relations to other variables; and from the consequences of testing. Lastly the use of the YLOT as a proxy and nature of any associations between the measures used was explored looking at individual; school and community level data.

The study found that the YLOT has good psychometric properties and could be used as a basis for further work both professionally and for research. The Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient for the whole scale was 0.81. The psychometric properties of the CASQ were poor in that the subscales had very low reliability coefficients and the aggregated total scale reliability coefficient was still too low at 0.53 to be able to recommend the use of the CASQ. Before the CASQ could be used there would need to be extensive work to increase its reliability and validity through lengthening the test or changing the format of the questions to reduce their specificity.

The use of the YLOT as a proxy indicator of mental health and associations with school and community level data were discussed. The YLOT could provide an indication of well being particularly in relation to childhood depression. The community level data were not sensitive enough to discern hypothesised associations between communities and the children attending the schools sited in the communities.

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