

YOUTH SPORTS DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

The article analysis the importance of the sports development programs among the youth. It also gives the explanation of sports development and its benefits to the society. The social involvement in sports is described as an integral component of youth development.

Keywords: sports, youth sports, development, sports program, sports impact on society, the sports development programs.

INTRODUCTION

Few individuals disagree with or qualify this remark, whether it is made in the context of personal, community, or societal development. The rarely questioned link between sport and development is based on the twin assumption that, unlike other activities, sport has a fundamentally positive and pure character that transcends time and space, resulting in beneficial changes in individuals and communities who participate in or consume sport.

This dual premise has substantial ramifications. It frequently motivates decision-makers at all levels of government to devote public and private funds to sports and sports initiatives. At the local and national levels, it influences parental, peer, and personal decisions about sport involvement, as well as overall social and economic support for athletes, teams, and sport programs. Most importantly, it is frequently woven into popular narratives, reproduced in uncritical forms, and used by well-intentioned individuals and organizations from wealthy countries to justify the creation of sport programs for populations who lack participation opportunities and face challenges resulting from poverty, war, natural disasters, or oppression. Sport-related decisions and policies are still largely shaped by unquestioned beliefs based on wishful thinking, idealized testimonials from current and former athletes, and the hunches of sport scientists seeking research opportunities and job placements for their students, despite recent increases in research on sports and development. Self-interested boosters who prepare bids and ballot initiatives to host sporting events, develop expensive venues, and support privately owned professional sports clubs feed this method even more. Both public and private sector leaders fund policies and programs based on the assumption that sports provide developmental benefits, and they are joined by others who believe that sport participation and consumption will produce healthy, productive people, reduce deviance and disruptive behavior, and alleviate boredom and alienation. Most people perceive little need for critical study and theory that could guide policy formulation, program design, and personal decisions about sports in everyday life because these views, testimonials, and endorsements are intertwined into prevailing narratives.

I focus on youth sports in this paper, analyze development literature, and pose critical issues regarding what constitutes development in structured youth sport programs.

The Word from Sports professionals on Youth Sports

People who are accurately referred to as "sport evangelists" by sociologist Giulianotti propagate and promote the beliefs, wishful thinking, and personal testimonials that often impact sport-related regulations, programs, and personal decisions (2004). These evangelists take an essentialist approach to sport, assuming that it will unavoidably lead to a variety of outcomes, such as rehabilitation for people in need of reformative socialization and revitalization for communities in need of a boost in civic consciousness and engagement. As a result, sport is seen as a valuable tool for resolving problems and increasing the quality of life for both individuals and society.

Benefits of Sports

Sport professionals make a variety of claims, but in the case of youth sports, they can be divided into three categories: personal character development, reforming "at-risk" populations, and developing social capital that leads to future vocational success and civic involvement (Coalter, 2007). These claims support the notion that participation in sports has a good impact on youth development because it:

- Improves health, fitness, and general sense of physical well-being
- Increases self-confidence, self-esteem, and positive body image
- Develops character through discipline, teamwork, and responsibility

These statements are based on the premise that sport has a fertilizer effect for young people, meaning that if it is tilled into their experiences, it will increase their character and potential in socially acceptable ways. This belief continues to shape policy debates among teachers who want elementary schools to fund interscholastic sports teams and city authorities who want their communities to prepare bids to host the Olympic Games.

Second, sport evangelists argue that engagement in sports changes "at-risk" youth by doing the following:

- Removes them from the streets and places them in adult-controlled surroundings
- Teaches them self-control, submission to authority, and rule-following
- Provides them with positive adult role models

This claim, often linked with narratives about reducing drug abuse, violence, and crime rates, is based on the assumption that sport participation among "at-risk" populations produces a car wash effect—that is, it cleanses character and washes away personal defects so that young people become acceptable to those in mainstream society.

Third, sport evangelists claim that sport participation provides individuals with experiences and relationships that lead to personal success and civic engagement because it does the following:

- Creates physical capital that can be used to acquire social and cultural capital
- Inspires educational achievement
- Facilitates the formation of social networks
- Fosters aspirations that transcend sport.

This assertion is founded on the idea that sport has a guardian angel impact, guiding young people in success-oriented and civic-minded ways throughout their lives. The collective claims of sport evangelists and their followers are shaped by neoliberal ideology, which emphasizes

personal development and achievement while ignoring social challenges and the need for communal or community-level progressive change (Darnell, 2010; Hayhurst, Wilson, & Frisby, 2010). The concept that sport engagement gives individuals with crucial developmental lessons is at the heart of this approach, albeit individuals must integrate these lessons into their lives to improve their own life chances. Individuals' positive traits, decisions, and choices will only benefit the communities in which they reside if enough people internalize these lessons.

Although this strategy is not adopted in all child sports programs, the United States and the global social problems business, which is predominantly sponsored by North Americans and Northern Europeans, have a strong commitment to neoliberal concepts. Furthermore, these beliefs are frequently pushed in mainstream global media and sports, where corporate sponsors and media firms routinely employ the cult of the person as a marketing tactic. These ideas, when grouped into interpretative views, form widely shared visions of how social worlds should and should be organized, similar to other interpretive frameworks that are motivated by ideology rather than science and theory. They tend to resist change when combined with similarly shared emotions, identities, and prevailing narratives, even when data contradicts them.

Despite a general lack of research evidence, sport evangelists' assertions have guided and justified sport-related program and funding decisions at local and national levels during the past century (Kay & Bradbury, 2009). Even when programs fail repeatedly, there are no critical evaluations of sports culture and organization, or the contexts in which sports are played and given meaning, nor are there critical examinations of the dual assumption that sport is essentially good and that its goodness is automatically experienced by those who participate. Instead, blame is placed on those individuals whose inferred character faults or faulty social and cultural contexts are said to prevent them from internalizing the critical developmental teachings of sport.

Sport and Positive Youth Development Research

When looked at as a whole and judged on methodological quality, research on the relationship between sport and youth development has led experts to the conclusion that the relationship is conditional. Sport engagement by itself does not result in any predictable developmental outcomes for young people. Instead, outcomes are influenced by and reliant on a variety of factors, including the following:

- Type of sport played
- Orientations and actions of peers, parents, coaches, and program administrators Norms and culture associated with particular sports or sports experiences
- Socially significant characteristics of sport participants Material and cultural contexts under which participation occurs
- Social relationships formed in connection with sport participation
- Meanings given to sport and personal sport experiences
- Manner in which sport and sport experiences are integrated into a person's life
- Changing definitions and interpretations of sport experiences that occur during the life course.

Research on the developmental influence of sport participation among young people classified as “at-risk” supports the general research findings on sport and youth development. However, it is more likely to identify specific contextual factors as prerequisites for positive developmental outcomes. For example, sport participation must occur in settings where young people are physically safe, personally valued, morally and economically supported, personally and politically empowered, and hopeful about the future.

In addition, research focusing on sport participation and the incidence of aggression and violence among young people indicates that positive developmental outcomes are most likely when coaches are trained to teach an explicit philosophy of nonviolence, respect for self and others, the importance of fitness and self-control as a part of overall development, confidence in physical skills, and a sense of responsibility to self and others. Apart from these conditions, playing sports, especially contact sports, is more likely to be associated with high rather than low aggressive orientations and actions.

The relationship between sport participation, educational achievement, social capital formation, and personal success has more often been the focus of personal testimonials than social research. Tracking and measuring changes in social capital and associated life chances along with their real-life consequences over time is methodologically challenging. It is difficult to analytically separate the developmental changes related to sport participation from more general developmental changes in young people’s lives and from the influence of social forces and structural factors unrelated to sports.

Another challenge is that institutional review boards often are skeptical of proposals to study young people because children are unable to provide informed voluntary consent and are considered a protected population in the ethical guidelines that govern research. In addition, social researchers (as opposed to medical researchers) may not be able to provide clear statements of the exact nature of the research setting and the anticipated benefits and possible risks associated with the project, especially when it involves participant observations in settings characterized by spontaneity and unanticipated events and actions.

Nearly all the research on sport participation and educational achievement has been done in the United States where sport participation is institutionally linked with schools, attendance patterns, eligibility to play school sports, formal team selection processes, grades, and social status among peers and teachers. Under such conditions, it is not surprising that studies consistently show a positive sport participation–academic achievement relationship. However, this tells us more about the organization of schools than the developmental implications of playing sports, and it provides no information about developmental outcomes among young people whose participation occurs outside of school-sponsored sports.

The topic of youth sport participation and the development of social capital and social networks has recently attracted attention from a few sociologically oriented researchers. For example, Perks (2007) analyzed data from a representative sample of Canadian adults and found a small but consistent positive relationship between recalled past participation in youth sports and current involvement across a range of community activities. However, the extent and type of sport participation was not known, and the large majority of the people in the study sample participated in youth sports prior to the 1980s—a time when programs were publicly funded

and community based, with teams constituted from local neighborhoods where people knew one another.

Using a culturally reflexive version of participatory action research, Schinke and his colleagues (Blodgett et al., 2010a, 2010b; Schinke et al., 2010) found that youth sports served as a site at which Canadian Aboriginal family members developed social capital as they worked with each other and pooled resources so their children could play sports. However, the collectivist culture of the Aboriginal community constituted a unique social context and the researchers facilitated the formation of social capital by including members of the community on the research team and encouraging them to use in other community contexts the capital and research skills honed during the 5-year project.

Kay and Bradbury (2009) report a similar outcome in a project in which young people were trained to work as youth sport volunteers. Through their volunteer experiences, the young people developed social capital and a growing sense of altruism and citizenship that were linked with forms of social involvement that went beyond youth sports into other community contexts. However, Kay and Bradbury report that forming and using social capital is a complex process influenced by multiple factors that have not yet been clearly identified.

Research on adult populations indicates that the social capital formed in connection with sports is frequently characterized by intragroup “bonding” rather than intergroup “bridging” processes, although both may occur under certain circumstances. This raises questions about the types of developmental outcomes associated with youth sport participation. In cases where bonding prevails, participation may facilitate the formation of homogeneous relationships that could limit personal success and restrict civic engagement in particular ways (Harvey, Lévesque, & Donnelly, 2007). In addition, when patterns of youth sport participation are linked with socioeconomic status (SES), ethnicity, and social definitions of race, the social capital formed in connection with sports may be characterized by exclusive forms of bonding rather than inclusive forms of bridging among young people (Kelly, 2011). That is, they may bring together and facilitate relationships among people who share similar SES and racial and ethnic identification rather than “bridging” differences and connecting people across structural and identity categories. This possibility begs further research across different types of youth sport programs.

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