

(SP) DOVES OLYMPIC MOVEMENT: ORGANIZATIONAL ISSUES AND PSYCHOSOCIAL IMPACT OF A SPORT AND CULTURAL ENRICHMENT PROGRAM ON CYPRIOT YOUTH

Alexis Lyras

University of Connecticut, USA

Introduction

During the first years of the new millennium a number of international organizations such as the United Nations, the International Olympic Committee, the International Sport Federations and the European Union have stated that sports can become a useful tool toward resolving a number of social problems such as poverty, racism and inter-ethnic conflict. One of the orientations of this new practice is to use sport to reduce nationalism in the multicultural world we live in and promote cross cultural and inter-ethnic dialogue in regions where conflict exists (Amara, Aquilina, Henry & Taylor, 2005; Fountain, 1999; Reich & Pivovarov, 1994; United Nations, 2003; 2005). Cyprus has a long history of inter-ethnic conflict. The complexity and the controversies of the Cyprus problem at both the national and the international level have kept both communities segregated and in a state of hostility for more than forty years. Many attempts have been taken on numerous occasions to build bridges between the two communities, but these have met with only a limited degree of success. The Doves Olympic Movement (Lyras, 2003) is an educational sports initiative founded in 2003 which aims to utilize the Millennium Developmental Goals of the United Nations under the framework of the philosophy and principles of the Olympic Movement (Lyras, 2003; Lyras, Yiannakis & Kartakoullis, 2005). Through this program, children, parents and instructors from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, gender, religion and ethnicity, come together and engage in activities that facilitate character development and promote social inclusion. The program aims to use sports to achieve stability, peace and personal development. In the summer of 2005 the Doves Olympic Movement conducted the first bi-communal educational sport initiative on the Island of Cyprus. The pilot program called Doves Olympic Movement Summer Camp 2005 (Lyras, Yiannakis & Kartakoullis, 2005) was the first step toward implementing a four year long initiative. The aims were to provide the new generation in Cyprus with all the essential resources to help them overcome long held negative beliefs and practices of the past. The purpose of the pilot program was to encourage Greek and Turkish Cypriots to develop “a better understanding for each other’s needs; inter- ethnic tolerance and acceptance; friendships among members of both communities, and patterns of working together in the pursuit of common goals” (Lyras, Yiannakis & Kartakoullis, 2005, p. 2).

Methods

The present research is a field experimental research using mixed methods to assess the psychosocial impacts of a sport and cultural enrichment program on Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot Youth. Mixed methods (quantitative and qualitative) were also employed to identify the perceived components of the Doves Olympic Movement Summer Camp 2005 (Lyras, Yiannakis & Kartakoullis 2005) that more effectively bring about positive cross cultural changes in attitudes and new patterns of collaboration between Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot youth and instructors.

Results

Preliminary analysis indicated changes in attitudes and behaviors of the participants. The program helped children and instructors break down stereotypes and the wall of prejudice. As seen in the post-test results, a statistically significant change was seen in the participants' belief that the new generation can develop new practices for peace and understanding between the two communities.

Discussion

At the end of the International Year of Sport and Physical Education 2005, more than four hundred researchers and practitioners from around the world came together at the 2nd Magglingen Conference on Sport and Development (UN, 2005) to discuss and suggest an action plan that would transform today's sport practices. Among the most important conclusions of the conference was the absence of substantial information in this new line of inquiry. One of the major recommendations of the conference proposes that research institutions develop new lines of inquiry based on the "documentation, analysis and validation of experiences; and development of monitoring and evaluation methods" (UN, 2005, p.5) of sport programs and initiatives that aim to achieve peace and development. In other words it is expected that researchers of this new sport culture should provide detailed description of the context and the outcomes of these initiatives, to better describe, explain and predict change and development. Such information will provide significant findings and suggestions for successful replication of similar projects around the globe.

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E-mail: alexis.lyras@uconn.edu