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The organization of a social integration program for children in a sport camp

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Theoretical background

Today most of the European societies are characterized by cultural and linguistic diversity as a consequence of historical events and human migrations. Ethnic diversity is more commonly known as multiculturalism, and it is the acceptance of diverse ethnic cultures in societies. In Greece, one in every ten students is a member of a racial or ethnic minority. As communities become increasingly diverse, the ability to interact and cooperate with members of diverse ethnic groups will be a prerequisite for a peaceful and productive existence. Encouraging children to form interracial friendships expose to the value of different cultures and reduce racial stereotyping is one possible method of promoting interethnic contact skills and building strong societies. The interactive nature of sports gives children the opportunity to interact, cooperate through play and be a part of a team, irrespectively of their origin, or background. Since sports include the element of interaction by their sporting ability and not other differences (such as origin) sport camps offer an excellent opportunity for social integration. Sport managers could organize social integration programs for children and promote their business success.

Objective

This research attempted to implement a specialized intervention program aiming to achieve social integration of Greek and immigrants through participation in sport activities of children who are at risk of social exclusion, in a sport camp. More specifically, the research aimed to investigate: a) the effectiveness of the program, b) the change of attitudes of the native and expatriated children before and after the intervention program. The program included traditional games from different cultures and countries and games that promoted the cooperation, human rights, trust and friendship of children of different ethnic group.

Method

Sample

The participants of the study consisted of 472 children from the municipality of Thessaloniki, Greece, aged 7-17 years old that volunterely participated in a sport camp. The 350 of them were native Greek and 120 of them were part of different ethnic groups.

Questionnaires

Two questionnaires were developed according to the relative literature (Dubois & Hirsch, 1990; Hunter & Elias, 2000): a) the first (19 items) evaluated the effectiveness of the intervention program and b) the second (22 items) evaluated the change of attitudes of the native participants towards the expatriated children. The program consisted of thematic sport and game activities and promoted human relationships, human rights, friendship and respect of the differences.

Results

A principal component analysis for each of the two scales was performed to develop the factorial structure and the factors that emerged accounted for 69% and 72% of the variance respectively. In terms of the reliability analysis, the alpha scores indicated that the factors of both scales had acceptable internal consistency (>0.69). Differences were found in the opportunities that the native children had before and after their participation in the program to: a) “learn about expatriates’ lifestyle”, ($t=2.28$, $p<.05$) “make new friends”, ($t=7.82$, $p<.05$), “trust expatriates” ($t=3.49$, $p<.05$), “cooperate with expatriates”, ($t=8.18$, $p<.001$) “live with expatriates” ($t=5.40$, $p<.05$), “play with expatriates” ($t=5.40$, $p<.05$), and “spend quality time with expatriates” ($t=5.40$, $p<.05$). Differences were also found in attitudes of native children for the expatriates before and after their participation in the program and they: “had better opinion about them” ($t=3.60$, $p<.001$), “liked to make them friends” ($t=3.43$, $p<.001$), “felt they were friendly” ($\chi^2=6.80$, $p<.05$) and “liked to have a friend from another country” ($\chi^2=5.72$, $p<.05$).

Conclusion / Application to practice

From the results of this study it was found that this integrative program was very effective since native children, trusted, cooperated became friends and respect children from other countries. After their camp experience, participants recognized the importance of the link between equal participation, trust, cooperation, friendship and respect to expatriate children.

This program could be used as a paradigm for sport camp managers and opens new horizons in their businesses. Conclusions are useful in both scientific and applied level, since they advance the knowledge base in the field of social integration through sport. However, it is evident that much more empirical research is necessary if the benefits of sporting participation for young people and society are to become much more than a theoretical aspiration (Bailey 2005).

References

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