

The impact of sports leadership training and engagement on youth development

Authors: John Taylor

Institutions: University of Stirling

E-mail: john.taylor@stir.ac.uk

Abstract keywords

Sports leadership; youth development, programme evaluation.

Aim of abstract/paper - research question

The aim of this paper is to investigate the impact of two sports leadership programmes on youth development. It assesses what impact sports leadership training and engagement in delivering sport had on the leadership skills, effectiveness skills, self-efficacy and self-esteem of the young people involved.

Theoretical background or literature review*

While volunteering in sport has become an increasingly important area of enquiry, little is known about the particular contribution sports leadership can make to youth development and helping young people make the transition from adolescence to adulthood (Ministry of Development, 2009). Young people are often portrayed as a public nuisance and a problem to be dealt with (Jones, 2009), however, those involved in youth development argue that youth leadership can be utilised as a tool to affect positive changes in local communities and society more broadly (Kress, 2006). Due to its appeal, sport has the capacity to attract young people into leadership roles and to provide opportunities for other young people to be engaged in what are considered positive and constructive activities.

Recognising the potential of leadership training to develop the personal skills of young people and for community development reasons, The Robertson Trust, in partnership with the Scottish Government, Youth Scotland and Sports Leaders UK, funded and supported two programmes that utilised a range of nationally recognised sports and dance leadership courses to train young people. Using the evaluation findings of these two programmes this presentation focuses on the impact of the programmes on the personal and social development of young leaders.

Methodology, research design and data analysis

Quantitative and qualitative data were collected from c.400 course participants and other stakeholders across the two programmes. Most of the young people were physically active with some having previous experience leading sport and physical activities. Through the use of pre-course and 6-month follow-up surveys (paired data were obtained from a total of 74 young people), it was possible to assess the impact of the courses and leadership activities on the personal development of the course participants. Measures used in the surveys included eight effectiveness

skills included in the Life Effectiveness Questionnaire (LEQ) (e.g. time management, self-confidence, task leadership), and measures of self-efficacy (General Self-Efficacy Scale) and global self-esteem (Rosenberg Scale). Interviews and group discussions explored the importance of the training to the young leaders and assessed the longer term-impacts of participants' motivations and commitments.

The evaluation of one of the programmes is complete ('Girls on the Move' Programme), with the other (Sports Leaders UK Project in Scotland) in the latter stages of data collection and analysis and is due to be completed in the summer of 2012.

Results, discussion and implications/conclusions**

The findings demonstrate the sports leadership programmes challenged the young participants and impacted on their personal development. Positive changes were recorded in the young people's effectiveness skills, self-efficacy and self-esteem, some of which were statistically significant. While these changes cannot be attributed to their leadership experiences alone (e.g. family, school, work and peer groups will all have impacted on the young people during this time) the findings support a position that sports leadership can contribute to key elements of youth development. While engagement in the courses showed positive outcomes, it was active engagement as a leader that contributed most to the young people's self-concept - increases in self-efficacy and self-esteem were greater in those that took on leadership roles. The leaders' feelings of self-worth were enhanced by appreciation received from local sports managers and from the young people that took part in the activities they were delivering. In addition, the programmes influenced leaders' decisions on future career options, with some electing to take part in training and education that will further develop their involvement as leaders in sport and dance.

Sports leadership opportunities have the potential to impact positively on young people, helping them develop the skills, attitudes, competencies and values that are considered important in helping young people make the transition from adolescence to adulthood. The findings demonstrate the value of youth leadership and provide a rationale for organisations and sport managers to introduce, or build on existing, youth leadership opportunities. However, sport managers need to ensure that opportunities are available for young leaders to practice their skills, as it is in the act of leading that the benefits for youth development are most pronounced.

References – limited to 5

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