
SURFING AS A TOOL TO PROMOTE INCLUSION, YOUTH DEVELOPMENT AND EDUCATION IN PORTUGAL

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Abstract

Aim of the abstract: Emphasize the actual situation of surf as a social tool in Portugal.

Theoretical background

The physiological effects of participation in sport and physical activity are widely recognized, and one of the best established findings in the research literature. As Stephenson (2002) noted, children tend to move to the more intimate, enclosed spaces indoor when they are upset or anxious. Outdoors offers a rich landscape of sensory experiences that stimulates the whole body. On the other hand indoors have air, temperature, sound, smell, texture regulated.

According to Andrews's approach (2003) with regard to all of the other benefits of participation in sport identified in the research literature, the evident benefits appear to be an indirect outcome of the context and social interaction that is possible in sport rather than a direct outcome of participating in sport.

As an outdoors sport and with water background in constant motion, surfing appears as an asset compared to traditional sports. It has a broader approach, covers several areas of occupational performance, as well as various physical and psychosocial skills of the individual, in one single activity. It can have a significant role to play in the life of children with disabilities, just as they do for all children. It can promote physical well-being, combat discrimination, build confidence and a sense of security, as well as play an important role in the healing and rehabilitation process for children affected by crisis, discrimination and marginalization..

Surfing can be a complete and integral activity taking into account the huge amount of features associated with performance in areas of human occupation, performance skills, but also characteristics of the context (Lopes, 2006). Thus, we can identify four major intervention factors in practice centered with surfing: Aquatic Environment (water physical

properties); Environment – Individual Interaction (Sensory Integration in an environment rich in stimuli): Individual - Coach / Therapist Interaction (works concepts like expression feelings and emotions; Group Interaction (works concepts such as socialization, leadership, inter-help).

Since May 2012 Surfaddict®, a non-profit organization, is responsible for organizing events in several beaches in the Portuguese coastline, providing accessibility conditions for surfing, and a great team of volunteers that guarantee the safety procedures. Everyone - regardless their disability - is able to experience catching a wave. It also provides specific training to surfers and surf schools, preparing them to work and surf with people with different kinds of disabilities. Custom-made and adapted surfboards and wetsuits are available, especially designed for our association and with valuable input from disable surfers.

Methodology

Retrospective analysis of participants records attending several events organized by Surfaddict® since May 2012.

Results, discussion and implications/conclusions

In Portugal there are nowadays 114 surfschools and 61 surfclubs based on the Portuguese Federation database 2014

(<http://www.surfingportugal.com>). With an average of 5 events per year, Surfaddict® have achieved more than 200 people with disabilities to be able to surf, such as limb amputations, spinal cord injuries, trisomy 21, autism, blindness, spina bifida, cerebral palsy, among others.

The expected outcome was highly overcome by the growing number of participants attending to the meetings and also participants attending consecutive events. Participants were asked to give some feedback about these events and social networks such as Facebook® is used to advertise the events. Some feelings such as fear, anxiety, and apprehension were frequently observed in the beginning due to the limitation of performance and absence of previous contact with surfing, and during and after the practice feelings such as pleasure, overcoming, autonomy and happiness were brought up.

Surfing has been steadily growing in Portugal over the last decades not only as a sport, but also as a social and economic activity. While surfing can be seen as an added value in the prevention and treatment of many pathological conditions, contributing to social inclusion, avoiding sedentary lifestyle and stress, improving self-esteem and encouraging teamwork as well as stimulating protection of the environment and quality of life, there is still a lack of information and studies using surfing as therapeutic tool, as well as surfers and surf coaches with specific knowledge about disability. Surfaddict® was pioneer in showing the value of surfing, as a therapeutic tool in several disabilities in Portugal. Surfing is finally being regarded as highly important in Portugal, not only by the surfers, therapists, social workers but also by general public and several politicians.

Our strategy for the next years will focus in showing that social inclusion development led by surfing will require the professionalization of surfing coaches in Portugal.

References

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