

Aligning youth sport contexts in the Netherlands

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Aim of the study

Like in many West European countries, children move in different contexts in the Netherlands. Elementary school pupils have two or three hours of physical education per week and many participate in sport and exercise at clubs. In addition, some children play sports in their neighborhood or at after school care.

Historically, these contexts work relatively independent of each other, because of the assumed 'unpedagogical' values of the sport context in comparison to the school context (Stokvis, 2009).

However, in recent years, the potential value of sport and exercise has been recognized by policy makers, based on the idea that sport can contribute to personal and social development of children (Ministry of VWS, 2012).

Therefore, numerous initiatives have been deployed that aim to increase the cooperation between the school, the sports club and the neighborhood. This increased cooperation has been facilitated by the government by financing professionals that work at the cross-roads of those contexts. Every local governing body can independently decide how to employ these professionals.

For instance many municipalities installed frontline professionals such as so-called 'combination professionals' or 'neighborhood sport coaches', who operate in at least two of the contexts in which children participate in sport and exercise.

However, sport and exercise do not unconditionally contribute to the development of children (Coakley, 2011). It is believed that the different contexts in which children participate in sport and exercise need to cooperate, not only on an organizational level, but also on the pedagogical values that underlie the interaction with the children (Coakley, 2011; Weiss & Wiese-Bjornstal, 2009). This cooperation can contribute to the development of physical literacy (Whitehead, 2010), which is related to motivation to participate in sport and exercise and social and psychological development of children (Whitehead, 2010).

In this research project, it was investigated how professionals from schools, sport clubs and neighborhood should work together in order to stimulate the development of physical literacy, which increases the likelihood that children will participate in sport structurally and that sport and exercise contribute to personal and social development of the children.

Method

For this study, fifteen frontline professionals and managers from elementary schools, sport clubs and neighborhood sport have been interviewed using semi-structured interviews. The results from these individual interviews were used as input for focus-group sessions in which the professionals from the different contexts participated. Three good-practices were observed, in which the contexts already work together with the aim of

contributing to the social development of the children. The participants were recruited from the city of Utrecht in the Netherlands.

Results and discussion

The data gathering of this study is still in progress. Final results are expected by the end of June.

Preliminary results reveal that the professionals working at sport clubs, schools and neighborhood sport are all aware of the potential value of working together. They notice that the professionals employed to facilitate the cooperation are mostly focused on one sport, as they are employed (on paper) by a single sports club. Professionals at sport clubs are in need of pedagogical tools to keep different types of children motivated and to maximize the outcome of their lessons (e.g., in order to capitalize on the social and psychological potential of their lessons). Professionals at schools indicate that they want to have a larger overview of the (sport) behavior of their pupils in other contexts, such as the behavior of the children at their sport club.

Several suggestions were made as to how the organization of youth sport could be changed in order to increase cooperation between the different contexts.

References

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