

## ASSESSING THE ROLE OF COMMITMENT WITHIN YOUTH SPORT DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS

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positive development. When discussing youth development programs that are also related to sport, Fraser-Thomas et al. (2005) state that positive developmental outcomes are very clearly experienced by the participants. The mechanisms by which this occurs, however, is not yet clear. The research to be presented represents 18 months of data collection with 3 non-profit organizations in Philadelphia which use sport to attract urban youth to their programs. Beyond sport, these programs attempt to make enduring changes in the community by also stressing character development, education, responsibility, and healthy life choices to their program participants, who range in age from 6 to 18 years of age.

Germane to the theme of the 2011 EASM conference, commitment is among the assessed attitudes for youth in the programs. Based on the distinction of foci versus bases of commitment articulated by Becker (1992), the current research attempts to assess outcomes (5 C's of the Positive Youth Development Model; Lerner et al. 2005), as a function of the foci of commitment (whether to sport or to organization), and/or their stage placement of involvement per the Psychological Continuum Model (Funk & James, 2001).

### Abstract

The inner-city environment (particularly in the United States) is such that negative influences are prevalent, and often lend themselves to higher rates of youth crime rates and increased numbers of high school drop-outs (U.S. Conference of Mayors, 2009). America's Promise Alliance (2009) recently released graduation rates from the 50 largest cities in the U.S. In their report, *Cities in Crisis 2009*, they found that roughly half (53%) of all young people in the nation's 50 largest cities are graduating from high school on time (62.1% in Philadelphia for the 2005 class). This represents a considerable distance from the national graduation rate of 71%.

In the face of this, many organizations have taken on the mission of providing additional mentoring for young people, where so often educational budget constraints prevent this from happening within the mainstream. In assessing the efficacy of such programs however, the terminology of outcome is often confused with that of output. In short, inputs represent total dollars spent on certain programs, while outputs represent the mere existence and delivery of such programs, as expressed in easily gathered data such as participation rates and dollar amounts spent. Outcomes, in contrast, represent the actual timely and enduring change in attitudes and behavior that can occur within participants, as a result of participation in such programs. It seems that a fundamental perception problem exists within the non-profit framework, in that many organizations view assessment as an unnecessary burden that takes resources away from the participants they serve, or fail to see it as a strategic device for securing external resources (Urban Institute, 2009).

There is a generally accepted conclusion that participation in community youth organizations has been found to relate to a variety of positive outcomes (e.g., Larson, 2000), and Mahoney et al. (2005) acknowledged that many organized youth programs are high on many features that promote

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