

Environmental and Programmatic Interaction in a Youth Sport for Development Context

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Aim

The past 15 years has seen a large growth of Sport-for-Development (SFD) programs globally. Many of these programs focus on enhancing the lives of youth by engaging them through sport, while educating and teaching other life skills that enhance positive youth development, particularly for youth who are otherwise under-resourced. While scholars have recently begun to unpack the programmatic elements critical to program success (e.g. Schulenkorf, 2017), a consensus is yet to be reached on which elements are essential when considering various environmental contexts. Through the integration of the same change agent (i.e., tennis) in varying environmental contexts, the purpose of this study is to understand the role of purposive programming, capacity, and external factors in the delivery of a youth SFD program.

Theoretical Background

Early research on sport for development programs assumed that sport in itself was an avenue to foster youth development (Coakley, 2011). However, recent criticism has led to broader examinations of how positive individual and community development can be achieved through SFD programming. For example, ecological perspectives of positive youth development suggest that social forces, along with biological and psychological forces, all affect human development. Therefore, the macrosystem in which participants of a program reside cannot be ignored when designing SFD curriculum (Edwards, Mumford, & Serra-Roldan, 2007).

More recently, scholars in the SFD field have acknowledged the importance of including the needs of local stakeholders in program design (Schulenkorf, 2017), suggesting a bottom-up approach may be most effective in program creation. Other studies have acknowledged the importance of also understanding the general environmental context in the creation of programming (e.g. Svennson & Hambrick, 2016). Empirical studies using this approach have typically examined a single program within a single context, yet examination of the same change agent across multiple environments has the potential to provide additional insight on the interplay between SFD programs and their environment. Further, this kind of comparison also allows for a fuller understanding of the role of intentional design and macro-factors in the success of a particular program. Therefore, this study asks the following research questions: (RQ1) In what ways do varying environmental contexts impact the development of a youth SFD program? (RQ2) In what ways does a youth SFD program interact with its environment to create successful outcomes?

Research Design

The United States Tennis Association Foundation (USTAF) has approximately 350 National Junior Tennis and Learning (NJTL) Chapters across the U.S.A., 50 of which primarily aim to positively impact the lives of underserved youth through the sport of tennis. The USTAF provides its NJTL's with education curricula meant to increase motivation for learning, character building, and foster habits of regular physical activity. These curricula, however,

offer flexibility for each chapter to adapt in a way that best meets the needs of its own community and environment. Data will be collected from eight purposefully selected USTAF NJTL sites which are representative the different demographics served by the 50 chapters around the country. Chapters are rated on a scale of 1-4 stars based on their enrollment and local resources. Two chapters from each of the star ratings were selected, of which six have been designated as urban, one as suburban, and one as rural.

Logic models of each chapter will be built using data from: interviews with program directors; focus groups with program staff and participants; one-day observation of program activities; and analysis of supplemental materials provided by each chapter. We will use Wells & Arthur-Banning's (2008) model to frame the analysis of the logic models, which will then be analyzed in relation to organizational capacity (Doherty, Misener, & Cuskelly, 2014) of each site. We will also account for environmental characteristics by collecting secondary community statistics on crime, socioeconomic status, and graduation rates. Participant representation of these communities will also be analyzed through secondary zip code analysis. Analysis will focus on comparing if/how program logic models vary in relation to the organizational capacity and environmental characteristics at each site. Data collection is scheduled to begin in May of 2018 and will be completed by the end of July, 2018.

Potential Findings and Contribution

We expect to find relationships between the type of environment in which a program exists, the organizational capacity of the chapter, and the programming each chapter delivers through the curricula offered. It is also possible that a program's successful outputs (such as regular participation) is dependent on the interplay between the external environment and the type of programming offered. Findings will contribute to the conversation surrounding youth SFD programs by elucidating environmental differences that may or may not influence successful program implementation, as well as the ways in which organizational capacity and programming strategies may or may not effectively overcome or utilize these conditions.

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