



## Positive youth development and physical activity/sport

### interventions: Mechanisms leading to sustained impact

#### Key Details

##### KEY WORDS

physical activity programs, positive youth development, program evaluation, sustained impact, youth disaffection, physical activity programs

##### POPULATION GROUP

All youth

##### STEPPING UP THEMES

Health & Wellness

##### RESEARCH ORIGIN

International

##### SOURCE

Academic

**“These data offer insights into the mechanisms that can lead to positive impact from physical activity/sport interventions/programmes. Perhaps more importantly, the findings illustrate the complex ways in which these different mechanisms interact to product positive outcomes” (p 256).**

#### 1. What is the research about?

Sport, physical activity and outdoor or adventure programs have been used around the world to promote positive development and engage young people in society in general. In the UK, sport-based programs have been implemented to address the increasingly levels of youth disengagement. This research examines two sport and physical activity programs in the UK in order to identify key features of program design that support positive youth outcomes – for example, increased feelings of engagement, satisfaction and pro-social behavior.

#### 2. Where did the research take place?

This research took place in the United Kingdom.

#### 3. Who is this research about?

This study is about youth, age 13 -14, who participated in sports programs intended to re-engage them in school. The youth were experiencing school-related issues, for example, bullying, poor attendance, challenging behavior, low confidence, difficulty communicating, and poor social skills.

#### 4. How was the research done?

This large scale, longitudinal four-year study used multiple methods to collect qualitative and quantitative data on both the youth (n=5,240) who participated in the programs, and the teachers and mentors who were involved in the programs. Interviews, both one-on-one and focus groups, were conducted with teachers, students, and mentors. Students completed questionnaires, which included ratings scales, and collected demographic information. Teachers and mentors provided journals and profiles of the students to researchers. Researchers also created logic models for each program, observed some of the program activities and collected field notes.

Data was collected at multiple stages and summarized to determine changes at six, 12, 24 and 36 months intervals after their involvement in the programs.

#### 5. What are the key findings?

The most important aspect of the programs was that they were forums for socializing and building relationships. Sport itself did not contribute to the long-term program impacts, relationship building and positive social interactions did.

The research found six additional elements that contribute to sustained positive outcomes for youth:

1. Programs should be selective about participants in order to achieve the best “fit” between youth needs and program structure and objectives.
2. Working with youth outside of school spaces, increase youth engagement. Doing so creates a physical and psychological disassociation from the negative experiences at school.
3. Give youth ownership of program activities. Work with youth to set goals that they can then achieve through selected programming. Youth can take responsibility for how they will participate and what they can accomplish. Provide space and resources to review and support youth goals.
4. Provide opportunities for young people to get to know adults ‘as people’ instead of maintaining strict lines of separation that reinforce hierarchy and authority. This research found that positive adult-youth relationships contributed to positive youth outcomes. The adults in this study participated in program activities with the youth. It is important, also, that in order to maintain the improvements, the relationships are maintained too.
5. Offer young people the opportunity to engage in group work. Teamwork supports social skill development. Youth enjoyed social interaction with peers they didn’t typically interact with.
6. Develop post-program pathways for youth so that the positive changes they experience can be sustained and further developed. Youth programs are often short-term but youth need long-term support to produce long-term change. If your program is short-term, develop relationships with other programs that the youth can access after your program.

## 6. Why does this research matter for youth work?

Physical activity and sport participation is very popular and offers an opportunity for facilitating a range of positive outcomes for youth. This research provides identifies six key elements that can be incorporated into the design and implementation of youth sport programs. This evidence-based framework can support the design of youth physical activity and sport-based programs.

The model can be used to support positive youth development and the design of more effective and responsive programs that develop the youth skills, self-esteem, and positive relationships. Additionally, this study can encourage the development of more physical-activity and sport-based programs given the demonstrable, sustained positive impact of the programs evaluated.



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