



Game on: Sport participation as a vehicle for positive development for youth facing barriers

Key Details

KEY WORDS

youth sport, physical activity,
community-based, program evaluation,
positive youth development, life skills

POPULATION GROUP

All youth; youth living in poverty

STEPPING UP THEMES

Health and Wellness

RESEARCH ORIGIN

Ontario

SOURCE

YouthREX

“When youth workers are deliberate in their planning and explanations to youth on how and why such skills are important for their development, there are more opportunities for youth to experience PYD outcomes.”

1. What is the research about?

Sport is the most popular extra-curricular activity for youth across Canada.

Research demonstrates that sport not only supports opportunities to be physically active, but can also serve as a vehicle to facilitate positive psychosocial outcomes and wellbeing for youth. However, psychosocial development is not an automatic outcome of participation in sport programs. Rather, life skills need to be intentionally incorporated into program design in order to have the best opportunity for psychosocial development to occur. This report reviews frameworks and best practices that can be used to structure sport programs to create conditions for supporting youth’s psychosocial development and ultimately, wellbeing.

2. Where did the research take place?

This research reviewed Canadian and international research and grey literature related to supporting positive youth development outcomes in the context of sport and physical activity programs.

3. Who is this research about?

This research is about youth, age 12 -25, with a priority given to youth who face barriers to accessing sport and physical activity programs, primarily because of poverty, but other barriers are also considered. The report focuses on how youth workers can structure non-competitive community-based sport and physical activity programs to support positive wellbeing outcomes for youth facing barriers.

4. How was the research done?

The authors reviewed a range literature sources including academic, peer-reviewed journals, books and book chapters, and grey literature which includes policy documents, reports, and case examples. Three search databases were used, including York University and University of Ottawa library databases (e.g., PsychINFO, PubMed, Social Work journals, Education Resource Information Centre), as well as Google Scholar.

The following search terms were used when navigating through the databases: positive youth development; youth sport; physical activity; program quality; life skills; community-based, deliberate; intentional; evaluation; physical activity; low-income; barriers; low socio-economic status; Ontario; Canada(ian); at-risk. Priority was given to recent studies (those published within the last five to ten years), Canadian studies, studies that used multiple research methods, including youth voice, and those that are applicable to grassroots and community-based groups.

5. What are the key findings?

The report provides a background review of positive youth development literature and how it can be applied to youth sport programs. The authors outline key evidence-based frameworks for supporting youth development outcomes. These include Eccles and Gootman's eight *Program Setting Features*, Pepitas' *Framework for Planning Youth Sport Programs*, the Teaching Personal Social Responsibility model (TPSR), and the Sports United to Promote Education and Recreation (SUPER) program. Evidence-based strategies for fostering psychosocial development within community based youth sport programs include: fostering positive relationships; intentionally teaching life skills, and incorporating youth voice. The authors provide case examples for integrating their key findings. The authors recommend that opportunities for professional development for youth workers related to the report's findings are essential.

6. Why does this research matter for youth work?

The popularity of sport participation makes sport programs an ideal place to create conditions and structures that enhance the development of youth life skills and positive wellbeing. Sport programs have the potential to yield both physical and psychosocial benefits when they are intentionally structured to do so. This report outlines and supports the importance of deliberately and explicitly providing opportunities for youth to develop life skills in a psychologically safe and supportive environment that allows for youth voice.

If community-based youth sport and physical activity programs are to be successful in fostering the holistic development of youth, program staff need to extend their focus beyond solely sport-specific and physical skill development, but also psychosocial development. Youth sector stakeholders should not only provide an environment that supports these strategies, but also one that educates youth on the transferability of such life skills into other domains, such as school, home, work, and the greater community. This transfer from the sport context to other important life contexts is essential for positive development and for youth to contribute positively to society, particularly those facing barriers.



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