

# Assessing the Evidence in Sport for Development and Peace: Findings and Recommendations

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# Introduction

- Ongoing concerns:
  - Assumption that sport is inherently good
  - Rigor (and focus) of research
  - Isolation within/outside the field
  - Inputs, processes, outcomes, and impacts

Coalter, 2007, 2010, 2013, 2015; Cronin, 2011; Levermore, 2008, 2011; Jeanes & Lindsey, 2014; Jones et al., 2017; Langer, 2015; Lyras & Welty Peachey, 2011; Massey & Whitley, 2016; Darnell et al., 2018

# Purpose

- Outline findings related to the current state of evidence in sport for development and peace, based on:
  - Empirical research
  - Recently published reviews
  - Three systematic reviews:
    - A systematic review of youth-focused sport for development programs in six global cities: Cape Town, Hong Kong, London, Mumbai, Nairobi, and New Orleans.<sup>a</sup>
    - A systematic review of sport-based youth development programs in the United States.<sup>b</sup>
    - A systematic review of the efficacy of sport for development programs in the promotion of psychological, emotional, and social health outcomes in youth populations.

<sup>a</sup>This systematic review was funded by the Laureus Sport for Good Foundation and the Commonwealth Secretariat.

<sup>b</sup>This systematic review was funded by the Laureus Sport for Good Foundation USA.

# Findings and Recommendations: Rigor

- Limited efficacy data in both academic and grey literature that is publicly shared
- Quality of methods and evidence largely classified as weak or rarely coherent
- Recommendations:
  - **Use systems thinking to incorporate a holistic approach to SDP research** through both instrumental/positivist (i.e., quantitative) and descriptive/critical (i.e., qualitative) research.
  - **Assess program quality and fidelity.**
  - Utilize multiple groups.
  - **Incorporate multi-site comparisons.**
  - **Pursue longitudinal designs.**
  - Use valid, reliable, culturally relevant measures.
  - Account for confounding variables (e.g., maturation bias, selection bias).
  - Measure behavior change directly and objectively, rather than relying on attitude, knowledge, and/or perception.
  - Integrate studies across philosophical, theoretical, methodological, and analytical perspectives.
  - **Contextualize research within geographical, social, political, developmental, and historical landscapes.**
  - **Implement quality training and education for researchers** (i.e., academics, measurement and evaluation personnel).

Coalter, 2013; Massey & Whitley, in press

# Findings and Recommendations: Program Theories

- Program theories inconsistently outlined, adopted, and studied
- Greater focus on program outcomes and impacts
- Recommendations:
  - **Outline and adopt program theories** (e.g., theories of change, logic models).
  - **Strategically and rigorously test program theories through longitudinal studies and/or long-term data collection efforts.**
  - **Measure change over time.**

Coalter, 2013, 2015; Cronin, 2011; Jones et al., 2017; Lyras & Welty Peachey, 2011; Weiss, 1995

# Findings and Recommendations: Systems Thinking

- Systems thinking and systems change are rare
- Linear, isolationist, individualistic planning, implementation, and evaluation of SDP programs still the norm
- Recommendations:
  - **Consider multiple systems** (e.g., microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem), **levels of influence** (e.g., individual, school, community, policy), and **influencers** (e.g., parents, peers, youth workers, teachers, funders, government, corporations).
  - **Consider the interaction of the above factors over time and within an historical context.**
  - **Use transdisciplinary research teams.**
  - **Seek strategic collaboration, formal partnerships, and possible mergers with organizations and programs within and beyond SDP.**

Coalter, 2010; Green, 2006; Langer, 2015; Massey & Whitley, in press; Ricigliano, 2012

# Findings and Recommendations: Complex and Multi-Faceted Roles of Sport

- ‘Sport for good’ remains the dominant (and often only) narrative in SDP
- Recommendations:
  - **Deconstruct the ‘sport for good’ narrative** through intentional, comprehensive, critical exploration of SDP theory, research, praxis, and policy.
  - **Adopt a learning-focused environment.**
  - **Examine assumptions and biases in methods and methodologies.**
  - Report null and negative findings.

Bean et al., 2014; Bean & Forneris, 2016; Coalter, 2010; Gould & Carson, 2008; Langer, 2015; Massey & Whitley, 2016

# Findings and Recommendations: Participatory Paradigms

- Inconsistent engagement with a broad and diverse set of actors through participatory research paradigms
- Recommendations:
  - **Incorporate participatory paradigms that work toward flattening traditional power differentials.**
  - **Engage a broad and diverse set of actors.**
  - Gain input from a range of stakeholders.
  - **Examine questions about what constitutes data and evidence.**
  - **Consider innovative and diverse research methodologies that engage with individuals and communities.**
  - Consider the structural, social, political, and economic realities surrounding SDP programs.
  - **Seek to understand existing systems of hegemony and oppression.**

Collison & Marchesseault, 2018; Darnell et al., 2016; Darnell & Hayhurst, 2012; Genat, 2009; Lindsey & Grattan, 2012; Mintzberg, 2006

# Findings and Recommendations: Transparency

- Few records with enough methodological details for critical appraisal
- Results shared are largely positive
- Recommendations:
  - **Report research methods and methodologies in research-focused records** (e.g., academic articles, research reports) **in a comprehensive, transparent manner.**
  - **Outline research methods and methodologies in non-research-focused records** (e.g., annual reports), **with links and references to documents with more detailed information.**
  - Examine questions about what constitutes data and evidence.
  - **Report null and negative findings.**
  - **Examine inconsistent and/or contradictory findings.**
  - Discuss practical significance.

Coalter, 2010, 2013; Langer, 2015; Massey & Whitley, in press; Sugden, 2010; Darnell et al., 2018

# Findings and Recommendations: Access

- Most records inaccessible to a wide audience due to presentation/dissemination
- Recommendations:
  - **Create and use public outlets beyond peer-reviewed journals.**
  - **Present methods, methodologies, and findings in alternative formats** (e.g., presentations, newsletters, videos, news articles).

Schulenkorf et al., 2016

# Conclusions

- Research must be integrated into praxis, funding, and policy in a rigorous, meaningful, systematic manner
- Resources required to achieve this
  - For SDP programs:
    - **Seek a greater number of and more specialized human, financial, and infrastructural resources**
    - **Rethink hiring, retention, and professional development practices**
    - **(Re)allocate budgets**
    - **Make new/revised funding requests**
    - **Reimagine collaboration and partnership norms**

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  - For researchers:
    - **Critically examine geopolitics of knowledge production**
    - **Pursue rigorous, longitudinal research that may result in fewer (but hopefully more impactful) publications**
    - **Consider sharing results in accessible forms/formats**
    - **Report null and negative results that may complicate relationships with other actors** (e.g., funders, programs)

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  - For funders:
    - **Set expectations (with associated funding and support) for rigorous, (frequently) resource-intensive research**
    - **Cultivate a learning-focused climate over longer funding cycles**
    - **Consider how to communicate expectations about null and negative findings with grantees**

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- Research must be integrated into praxis, funding, and policy in a rigorous, meaningful, systematic manner
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  - For policy makers:
    - **Lobby for and/or develop an overarching policy and funding framework to guide actors in the SDP field and the research supporting these efforts**
    - **Support the development of program theories**
    - **Broaden the conceptualization of what counts as data/evidence and whose voices should be heard**
    - **Reimagine collaboration and partnership norms within/beyond SDP**

# Conclusions

All actors in SDP must realize, appreciate, and commit to the integration of research into praxis, funding, and policy in a rigorous, meaningful, systematic manner...

with the understanding that this may require significant changes to the systems, levels of influence, and influencers – and the interaction of these factors – within/beyond SDP.

# Thank You

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