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

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.\(^a\)
    • A systematic review of sport-based youth development programs in the United States.\(^b\)
    • A systematic review of the efficacy of sport for development programs in the promotion of psychological, emotional, and social health outcomes in youth populations.

\(^a\)This systematic review was funded by the Laureus Sport for Good Foundation and the Commonwealth Secretariat.
\(^b\)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
Conclusions

• Research must be integrated into praxis, funding, and policy in a rigorous, meaningful, systematic manner

• Resources required to achieve this
  – 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)
Conclusions

• Research must be integrated into praxis, funding, and policy in a rigorous, meaningful, systematic manner

• Resources required to achieve this
  – 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
Conclusions

• Research must be integrated into praxis, funding, and policy in a rigorous, meaningful, systematic manner

• Resources required to achieve this
  – 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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