Creating Positive Change through SDP Programming: A Content Analysis

Marlene Dixon, Texas A&M University
Arden Anderson, Texas A&M University
Bob Baker, George Mason University
Pam Baker, George Mason University
Craig Esherick, George Mason University

Sport for Development - Other (International Sport)
20-minute oral presentation (including questions) Thursday, June 1, 2017
Abstract 2017-030 11:40 AM Room: Maroon Peak

Sport continues to demonstrate an important role in bolstering the development of diplomatic, peace-building efforts (Baker & Esherick, 2009; Lyras & Welty Peachey, 2011). Termed Sport for Development and Peace (SDP), these types of initiatives and programs are concerned with “. . . the international use of sport, physical activity and play to attain specific developmental and peace objectives (Right to Play International, 2008, p. 3). Many have claimed strong outcomes from their programs, yet rely on largely anecdotal evidence to support these claims. Rigorous evaluation of outcomes and processes linked to these outcomes remains a strong need for SDP programs, both in documenting their successes and in providing insight for the design and implementation of SDP programs (e.g., Kidds, 2008; Levermore, 2011).

Background
Baker, Baker, Atwater and Andrews (2016) provided empirical evaluation of the outcomes of a specific SDP program that is conducted as a partnership between the United States Department of State’s Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs and the Center for Sport Management at George Mason University. The facilitators of this program bring visitors to the US for an average of 14 days each, and arrange for them to engage in activities and experiences that are “structured to facilitate international understanding and cultural tolerance, such as home hospitality dinners, tours of cities, and attendance at a variety of sporting and cultural events” (Baker et al., in press). The program is guided by two main goals relative to the US visit: (1) learn more about US society and culture, thereby countering negative stereotypes, and (2) improve their leadership skills through activities that introduce team building, conflict resolution, inclusion, and respect for diversity.

This program, which has now hosted 36 groups (coaches and/or athletes) from 47 countries, has demonstrated effectiveness in creating positive change among the participants in their perceptions of the US, American people and culture, and familiarity with American sport (Baker et al., in press). The participants also indicated a strong willingness to share their experiences with others upon their return to their homes. The evaluation provided evidence of effectiveness, but lacked the capacity to link specific active or passive program components to the outcomes. Thus, they called for a content analysis of the various program activities to be conducted “for the purpose of identifying core elements relative to active or passive engagement directed toward objectives” (p. 16). The purpose of this study is to conduct such theoretically guided content analysis to help support the evaluation of mechanisms and processes toward program effectiveness.

Theoretical Frame
This SDP program is grounded in the principles of Theory O (Beer & Nohria, 2000), which suggests that bottom-up change, although it takes longer and costs more to effect, creates more sustainable long-term results in the participants. This bottom-up change involves impacting perceptions toward people and entities through engagement and interaction. Allport (1954) suggested that meaningful, interactive contact between dissimilar individuals can break down stereotypes, stimulate tolerant attitudes, and change perceptions that people have of each other. The contact, however, must be interactive (not just superficial), must be of sufficient duration (such that anxiety is reduced and comfort levels are achieved), must be between groups or people of equal status, and should include institutional supports and intergroup cooperation toward mutually agreed-upon goals. Thus, one would expect that a SDP program with greater active engagement and cooperation between people of similar status would be more effective at creating change than one where participants passively “take-in” the others’ culture or ideas, or where those elements are imposed by someone of higher status. Using Contact Hypothesis and Theory O as a guiding
framework, the following research questions directed this inquiry: (1) What are the specific program activities? (2) What portion of the program time is spent in each activity? (3) What portion is spent in active vs. passive interactions? (4) What program activities are over/under-represented according to program goals?

Method
Content analysis was conducted using a stratified sample of 12 out of the 23 total programs that the SDP Program has delivered in the latest program cycle. Programs were analyzed according to time spent overall, and time spent in each of the two program goals as well as the sub-elements of those goals. For example, Goal 1 activities included access to sport experts and engagement with elite and non-elite athletes, whereas Goal 2 activities included sessions directed at team building, inclusion, diversity, and conflict resolution. In addition, each activity was coded according to active vs. passive engagement. Two independent coders analyzed each of the 12 documents, and then discussed themes and any time coding discrepancies until agreement was reached. Data was entered into Excel spreadsheets and analyzed according to frequencies by the various activities, active vs. passive engagement, early vs. middle vs. late groups, and group type (e.g., coach vs. athlete, special focused vs. general).

Preliminary Findings
Initial results indicate that across the programs, over 80% of the activities are related to Goal 1, and the other 20% are related to Goal 2. Within these goals, 27% of the entire program time has participants engaged passively with sport experts (typically listening to lectures), while the other 63% of the time is spent actively engaged in sport or non-sport cultural activities, and interactions with athletes (almost all of whom are non-elite athletes). The later programs have less time spent in passive activities than the earlier programs. The Goal 2 activities are primarily related to inclusion (11% of total program time), yet the two inclusion-focused programs received the bulk of the inclusion programming (accounting for almost 80% of total time spent focused on inclusion). Combined, activities related to leadership, conflict resolution, and team building only occupied 7% of program activities.

Discussion and Conclusion
The initial results indicate that the SDP program is well-aligned with Contact Hypothesis and Theory O principles in terms of its emphasis on active (rather than superficial) engagement. Further, the participants seem mostly to interact with those who are of similar status (non-elite athletes), and have sufficient institutional support. However, the program does not seem to provide arenas for cooperation or pursuit of mutual goals between foreign participants and the Americans with whom they interact. Further, the objectives of team building, leadership, diversity and conflict resolution are clearly underrepresented in the program activities, thus it is unclear if participants are gaining any sustainable change in those areas. It is recommended that program facilitators examine ways that they continue to provide more meaningful interactions (especially cooperative), and limit “sport expert” passive programming. It is also recommended that facilitators make a conscious effort to include more programming dedicated to Program Goal 2, which would expand the life change aspects of the project.