Outcomes of a Sport-Based Intervention on Adolescent Authentic Leadership Development

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Within the field of education and in society, practitioners and educators are constantly seeking ways to engage and positively develop youths who may be deemed at-risk. Various after-school and in-school programs have reported positive development among participating youths. Roth and Brooks-Gunn (2003) indicate that participation in positive youth development (PYD) programs are likely to result in youths who are competent, confident, caring, and who exhibit character and positive social connections. Sports participation can also be a way to engage youths and to foster positive youth development through the medium of sport (Fuller et al., 2013; Perkins & Noam, 2008).

An essential element of Sport Based Youth Development programs is the explicit design that uses the context of sport to teach specific life skills. A life skill that has been thoroughly researched within the sport management literature is the topic of leadership. While the majority of the research on leadership focuses on adult-level leadership, fewer studies have examined adolescent-level leadership. Studies on adolescent-level leadership have elucidated leader characteristics, transformational leadership outcomes in sport settings, and the development of leadership in adolescents. Yet a paucity of leadership research exists concerning other leadership models, specifically authentic leadership among adolescents. Furthermore, the effects of adolescent leadership have been examined predominately in a sports context, and there is little research that examines the application of authentic leadership traits outside of sports. More research is required to fully elucidate if sport participation can be used to develop authentic leadership traits and if the skills are transferred outside the realm of sport. Therefore this research examines whether a sport-based leadership program develops authentic leadership traits among adolescent boys and if these traits were exhibited in their daily school experience.

This pilot study examines if a sport-based authentic leadership program can be used to develop authentic leadership skills. Specifically, the sport-based leadership program is designed as an in-school intervention, focusing on a select group of males (~20) in the 7th-8th grade in a low-income school. This pilot study is currently taking place during the 2016-2017 academic year for approximately 18-weeks. To test our hypothesis that our intervention will facilitate authentic leadership skills among adolescent boys, we will administer pre and post-tests utilizing a validated authentic leadership questionnaire (Walumbwa et al., 2008). Responses of other students’ who were not selected for participation in the intervention will act as a control group. Furthermore, we will also conduct focus group interviews with the participants and teachers of the participants to assess if leadership traits were exhibited in the school context. To assess program impact, questionnaire responses will be analyzed using paired sample t-tests. Moreover, a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) will also be utilized to detect significant mean differences among the intervention group and the control group (SPSS Version 24, IBM Corp, Armonk NY). The interviews from the respective teachers of our subjects will be coded (using NVivo 10 software) into the authentic leadership framework.

Results from this study will expand the research on adolescent leadership development and will also contribute to the sport management literature by further examining the unique role that sport plays in authentic leadership development. Moreover, the outcomes of this study may provide a framework for future school-based interventions that desire student leadership development, and positive youth development. Lastly, this pilot study can inform future research that aims to develop authentic leadership traits among adolescents.