A Media for Development Approach to Telling the Stories of Residential School Boxers in Canada

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Sport for Development - Other (Online Community) 8:55 AM
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In 2008, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) began its consultation process with survivors of the nation’s residential schools to assess the impact of these institutions, while establishing a plan to acknowledge and address the immense social and cultural harm these schools inflicted upon generations of indigenous children. In the final year of consultation, the TRC published the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action (2015), intended “to redress the legacy of residential schools and advance the process of Canadian reconciliation” (pg. 1). Within these 94 calls to action, five are focused specifically on sport and recreation, including call to action number 87, urging “all levels of government, in collaboration with Aboriginal peoples, sports halls of fame, and other relevant organizations, to provide public education that tells the national story of Aboriginal athletes in history” (pg. 10). This study addresses call to action number 87 by researching, cataloguing, and disseminating the histories of boxers from the Kainai Nation in Alberta, Canada, using the tenants of Media for Development (M4D) to inform mainstream boxing fandom about the boxing experiences of students from two residential schools near the town of Cardston: St. Paul’s Anglican Residential School and St. Mary’s Catholic Residential School.

This project intersects the sport-for-development literature in two ways. First, it represents a critical reflection upon sport for development and peace (SDP) in Canada’s residential schools, demonstrating how sport was wielded as a tool in the broader, government-funded assault on indigenous cultures throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Yet, at the same time, this project emphasizes the enormous potential of SDP, particularly radical media interventions, as a means of disrupting Canada’s more common, euro-centric efforts to represent the sporting past. Giulianotti and Armstrong (2014) suggest that radical NGOs and social movements, including groups like Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, should be included under the umbrella of SDP. These are typically highly critical, politicized efforts to spark social change in the inter-related fields of social justice and human rights. Few studies exist, however, studying the frequency or impact of such initiatives. Indeed, there is a relative dearth of Sport Management scholarship dedicated to what other fields label Communication for Development (C4D) or Media for Development (M4D).

As Scott (2014) explains, most M4D initiatives focus on information provision and cultivation of appropriate attitudes. To achieve this, a wide range of historical documents will be consulted to provide an encyclopedic slate of articles to be uploaded to the Canadian Boxiana website – a mainstream boxing new website – detailing the careers and experiences of Kainai residential school boxers. Interactions with these articles will be tracked using Twitter, Facebook, and various search engine optimization tools to assess the project’s overall value as a platform for truth and reconciliation. Once the viability of the project is determined, the boxers themselves will be invited to collaborate in hopes of furthering the depth and authenticity of the online entries.