Balancing the Needs of Key Stakeholders in Youth Sport

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The shift away from the school setting has drastically altered the dynamics of the youth sport environment. In the non-school sport setting, participation is not compulsory. Participants are therefore free to choose a program that fits their needs. This shift is significant, as it has established a service-style youth sport industry where sport providers and coaches designing programming must be cognizant of consumers’ needs. In the case of youth sports, although the consumer is the child, the purchaser is the parent. This is problematic as parents expect programming to replicate professional models of sport (Chalip & Green, 1998), which are detrimental to positive youth development (Strachan, Côté, & Deakin, 2009; Wall & Côté, 2007). Revenue driven youth sport providers are therefore incentivized to design programming that is antithetical to developmentally appropriate practice. As sport providers are dependent on attracting and retaining parents, we must consider how to develop positive youth programming, while ensuring parents are satisfied. The purpose of this study then, is to determine what forms of developmentally appropriate practice will parents find acceptable for their child’s sport experience from their child’s sport programming.

Fraser-Thomas and colleagues’ (2005) applied sport-programming model of positive youth development was used to guide this study. The model proposes successful programming considers youths’ stages of development, is conducted in appropriate settings, and fosters developmental assets, but is dependent on policy-makers, sport organizations, coaches, and parents. The model was therefore used to focus on parents’ consideration of these three key facets to successful programming. Therefore, the following research questions were posed:
1. What are parents’ perceptions of programming designed to consider stages of development and foster developmental assets?
2. How would parents react to these forms of programming replacing professional models of sport?

Method

Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with 20 parents of youth sport program participants in a Midwestern city. A purposive sampling technique is being employed to identify participants whose children participate regularly in park district leagues. Questions will be guided by Fraser-Thomas and colleagues’ (2005) model. Examples of questions include: “how do you expect your child’s practices to be run at their stage of development?”, and “how do you expect sessions to be designed to achieve the desired outcomes you have for your child?” Deductive reasoning utilizing a priori, thematic coding (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014) will be conducted using Fraser-Thomas and colleagues’ (2005) model.

Expected Results

We expect to find that parents struggle to justify investing in some forms of developmentally appropriate practice, such as free-play and deliberate-play (Côté & Hay, 2002). Parents will likely be open to less professionalized models of sport and favor developmental and child-centered practices. The practical implications of this study will provide sport managers and providers with a better understanding of how to design and implement positive youth development programs that appease parents. This research will also further our theoretical understanding of positive youth development, and by extending our general, and limited knowledge of how to work with parents’ towards achieving positive youth development (Fraser-Thomas, Côté, & Deakin, 2005).