Using Sport for Long-Term Community Youth Development Programming

Corinne Farneti, Mount St. Mary’s University

Sport for Development - Social Capital (Youth Sport)  
Saturday, June 1, 2019  
20-minute oral presentation (including questions)  
1:05 PM  
Room: Napoleon A3

Over the last few decades, the field of positive youth development (PYD) has experienced growth, moving from prevention of detrimental actions to a proactive, strength-based perspective of development (Catalano, Bergland, Ryan, Lonczak, & Hawkins, 2004; Damon, 2004; Whitley, Forneris, & Barker, 2014). Further research has indicated that positive youth development should be considered from an even broader community context (Perkins, Borden, & Villarruel, 2001; Petitpas, Van Raalte, & France, 2017). Community youth development (CYD) is defined as purposeful, created environments that provide constructive, positive, and encouraging relationships that are sustained over time with adults and peers, while providing opportunities that allow youth to build their skills, and become engaged as partners in the development of themselves and their communities (Perkins et al., 2001). These CYD programs are most likely to be successful when communities make a concerted effort to build a protective environment by providing children with a variety of safe activities that allow for the development of the youths’ competencies and the ability to develop relationships with others (Petitpas et al., 2017).

One population that has received a lot of opportunity in both PYD and CYD programming is youth from underserved communities. Underserved communities are defined as areas with a shortage of personal services for residents, including economic, cultural, and linguistic barriers influencing their health and well-being (Health Resources and Services Administration, 2011). While providing positive benefits to youth, there has been a lack of research regarding program evaluation and long-term effects (Whitley et al., 2014).

The intent of this project was to implement a long-term CYD program with lasting, positive impacts on an underserved community. Partnering with Under Armour, researchers brought 23 Baltimore City middle schoolers to a rural college campus for a 4-day overnight camp, entitled “The Experience”. This pilot program enabled the students to participate in athletic, academic, and outdoor adventure sessions, which focused on self-efficacy, social capital, and the importance of networking. The overarching goals of The Experience were to use sport and other campus experiences to demystify college, provide a variety of fun and challenging opportunities, and to encourage students to imagine various futures for themselves. Additional touchpoints throughout the academic year were also utilized, in various locations including the college campus, the middle school, and at Under Armour facilities in Baltimore.

Interviews, journals, and observations were used to analyze the short-term impact of The Experience. Additionally, the researchers, middle school administrators, and Under Armour philanthropic team used feedback to improve subsequent versions of The Experience. The program impact, long-term evaluation methods, and implementation suggestions for similar CYD programs will be discussed.