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Using technology to design and delivery positive youth sport programs (2015)

Project Summary

The purpose of this study was to use technology to teach and promote the research within the field of positive youth development (PYD). Coaches are very influential in the lives of youth and, although coaches recognize the value of personal development, many are unsure of how to teach this within the context of sport programs. Project SCORE! (Sport COnnect and REspect) was developed as a tool for coaches to use to integrate the research from PYD into sport (www.projectscores.ca). The program is focused around the growth of the 4 C's – competence, confidence, character, and connection. Ten simple lessons were developed for coaches to follow. Research has found that Project SCORE! was successful in enhancing youth experiences in sport and was also valuable for coaches. Although some edits are still necessary to the website itself, the resource is very promising for use with coaches across Canada and as an example of how to teach sport in a more meaningful way for youth of all competitive levels.

Research Methods

This project was delivered in different phases. In Phase 1, the website, Project SCORE!, was created (www.projectscores.ca). This creation was completely original and included the development of the logo, text for the site, lessons, additional resources, and the SCORE! tracker (a tool to track completed lessons). This phase also included the attainment of ethical approval for the project. Next, Phase 2 was the pilot phase of the site. Four coaches, who work with youth athletes (i.e., 12-16 years old) in a variety of sports completed Project SCORE! and provided feedback through semi-structured interviews. The feedback given led to Phase 3 which included edits of the site (i.e., the creation and insertion of short YouTube videos related to the lessons) as well as recruitment for the larger quantitative phase of the study. Phase 4 consisted of the research phase. In this phase, two different studies were completed. In one study, coaches were recruited to complete the lessons and the youth athletes' experiences were measured before and after the program. In total, 48 athletes completed the Youth Experiences Survey for Sport (YES-S; MacDonald et al., 2012). These results showed positive changes in personal and social skills, goal setting, and initiative for the youth athletes. Exit interviews were also done with coaches about their experiences with the program and, generally, the experiences were positive. Coaches report witnessing positive changes in their athletes and also experienced their own personal growth. On the other side, the coaches were apprehensive about taking time in practice to complete the lessons. The second study was conducted with summer sport camp leaders (N = 13) and they did some of the lessons from Project SCORE! over the course of a week long camp with youth sport participants. The same questionnaire and protocol was followed for this study. Although the only significance this time was a small increase in initiative, the sport leaders reported seeing positive changes in the participants and also reported personal growth. The final phase of the project was an evaluation of the program. Coaches in two locations (Winnipeg and Charlottetown) participated in a think aloud protocol to evaluate the site and its various components. This protocol leads the coaches through the website and gathers their thoughts as they are navigating. There were a few comments about some content that can be edited so that it is more user-friendly including decreasing the amount of additional resources and maybe

even decreasing the number of lessons. Overall, coaches did enjoy the program and noted many strengths (i.e., the necessity of the program for increasing positive outcomes for youth).

Research Results

The key finding for this project is that, through the use of Project SCORE!, youth experiences in sport can be enhanced. The use of this online resource provides a vehicle for deliberate positive youth development delivery within the context of sport. The program trains coaches about how to provide positive youth sport programming which is key to increasing enjoyment.

A secondary finding is that coaches have experienced their own personal growth through Project SCORE!. By delivering the program, coaches have had the chance to refine skills that they had been using and/or learn new ways to deliver their programs. This has helped to increase the confidence of coaches and, in some cases, served to reinforce existing behaviors.

In terms of limitations, it was a challenge to retain all the coaches that began the program. Specifically, although the program is designed to be simple, some coaches were overwhelmed with other aspects of coaching to devote time to completing the program. By including an evaluative piece to this project, refinements are being made to the program to help coaches deliver the lessons with even more ease.

Project SCORE! has the potential to be a cornerstone resource for coaching education. The use of technology (i.e., website) allows the program to be portable and accessible for coaches in all parts of Canada. This type of reach is what is needed to help enhance youth sport for all young people and assist coaches in delivering meaningful and positive sport experiences.

Policy Implications

The Canadian Sport Policy has been an instrumental tool in shaping the direction of sport delivery in Canada. Education is a key part of the policy and a key objective is the provision of 'values-based play and sport among children and youth'.

In order for this to be successful, leaders (i.e., coaches, sport camp instructors) need to be taught how to integrate teaching personal development and sport in programs. The delivery needs to be deliberate. We all have to remember that 'skills are taught, not caught'. If we want children and youth to develop positively, we need to consider all aspects of development. Sport leaders at all levels, need to be trained and have applied experience teaching PYD through sport.

Project SCORE! helps to create a more integrated view of sport development with the knowledge that properly trained adults are the key to reaching the objectives outlined in the Canadian Sport Policy for youth in Canada.

Next Steps

The first 'next steps' is considering how to make Project SCORE! even more user-friendly for coaches. The goal is to make the program more accessible to coaches in all parts of Canada. We are a part of a SSHRC Partnership grant, led by Dr. Nick Holt, that is working to promote the research related to PYD and sport across Canada. This is a great opportunity for Project SCORE! to gain more visibility and use with coaches as it is a free resource.

Another idea for Project SCORE! is to extend the site to accommodate a Parent Lounge which would be similar to the Coaches Locker Room currently on the site. This will be an evidence-based guide for parents with practical and applied lessons for them to use and integrate into their child's youth sport experience. It would compliment Project SCORE! and be a great way for parent committees/board to learn more about positive youth development through sport and how to implement various ideas.

Key Stakeholders and Benefits

- Coaching Association of Canada
- Provincial Coaching and Sport organizations
- Sport Matters
- True Sport
- Sport schools in Canada