LEARNING SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL SKILLS THROUGH SPORT

Daniel Gould
(Michigan State University, USA)

Those involved in sport programming have long been interested in understanding how to maximize the learning of social and emotional skills in sport participants, particularly children and youth. Researchers have also begun to study the area, examining the benefits and detriments of participation (e.g., Drowkin et al., 2003; Hansen et al., 2003), the efficacy of interventions designed to teach social and emotional (e.g., Weiss, 2006) and the process by which coaches teach life skills to young athletes (Gould, Collins, Lauer & Chung, 2006). This presentation will summarize what this research reveals about learning social emotional skills through sport. First, it must be recognized that developing desirable social and emotional skills does not occur by merely participating in sports programs; they must be taught. Second, three sets of conditions have been associated with positive youth development through out-of-school activities. These include: (1) the context—an appropriate psychologically and physically safe environment (2) external resources surrounding young people with a positive community and caring mentors; and (3) internal assets—learning skills that are important for managing life situations (Weiss, 2006). It has also been shown that coaches who were recognized as effective at teaching desirable emotional and social skills are characterized by four areas of competence: (1) having a well-developed coaching philosophy that places primary importance on developing life skills, (2) excellent coach-athlete relationship skills, (3) specific life skill teaching strategies, and (4) the ability to be aware of context specific conditions that influence life skills development. Specific strategies for teaching desirable social and emotional skills include both direct methods like reinforcement and instruction and indirect methods like creating motivational climate by emphasizing certain goals and exposing young people to peer models. Evidence shows, however, that life skills strategies are not viewed as separate and distinct coaching activities by coaches but are infused into their general coaching strategies (Gould et al, 2006). Most interesting is the recent theorizing on how coaching and mentoring youth involves balancing efforts to structure and lead youth versus allowing youth to make decisions and choices (Larson, 2006).

References


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