



Promoting Positive Youth Development and Life Skills in Youth Sports: Challenges and Opportunities in the Demands of Professionalization

¹Defri Mulyana, ²Adang Suherman

Corresponding e-mail: defrimulyana@upi.edu, ² adangsuherman@upi.edu

¹⁻²Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia

Abstract

Positive youth development is a strength-based approach in which life skills are recognized as desirable assets that prepare youth to function as productive members of society. In many countries, increasing attention is paid to teaching life skills through sports. Still, researchers have warned of the dangers of believing unthinkingly about the virtues of sport participation. This research offers a brief commentary on the challenges and opportunities in promoting positive youth development and life skills amidst the increasing professionalization of youth sports. In the first part of this article, a case is made for tempering our expectations about the intrinsic developmental value of sport and instead focusing on youth issues for life skills and experiential learning opportunities. In the second part of this article, coach education and the professionalization of youth sports are examined as contemporary challenges in terms of the dilemmas they create and the opportunities they present. The increasing professionalization of sports in Indonesia has significantly benefited athlete achievement and popularity. However, this shift also challenges positive youth development and life skills development. This article describes the challenges and opportunities associated with promoting Positive Youth Development (PYD) and life skills in youth sports in Indonesia.

Keyword: Positive Youth Development Life Skills Youth Sports.

Introduction

Positive youth development (PYD) is based on the systems theory of relational development (Geldhof et al., 2013). It is a strength-based approach to development where the focus lies on promoting the potential of young people. Human development involves a two-way, mutually influencing relationship between individuals and their social, cultural, and physical ecologies, all of which change in an interdependent manner over time. It is postulated that possible adaptive developmental links between youth and their ecology and the plasticity of human development



represent defining features of the positive changes that can occur in relational developmental systems. Thus, instead of being labeled as a problem to be fixed, youth is seen as a resource to be developed with a lot of potential to contribute to society in a meaningful way (Lerner, Almerigi, Theokas, & Lerner, 2005). In the PYD approach, the fundamental principle is that positive developmental trajectories are obtained in contexts that provide youth with (a) positive and sustainable youth-adult relationships, (b) life skills development activities, and (c) opportunities to participate in valued community activities. PYD currently stands as the most widely used approach to studying development in the context of youth sports (Holt, 2016).

Youth sport represents a microsystem-level context that, when properly structured, can offer experiences conducive to PYD and the acquisition of life skills (Camiré, 2014; Van Boekel et al., 2016). Life skills are recognized as a desirable asset that prepares youth to function as productive members of society. They are defined as the intrapersonal and interpersonal assets (e.g., emotional control, goal setting, teamwork) learned or perfected in sports that enable individuals to succeed in different life domains, such as school, home, work, and community (Gould & Carson, 2008). As such, embedded in the definition of a life skill is the idea that a skill learned in a sport must be transferred and applied in settings beyond the sport to be considered a life skill. Pierce, Gould, and Camiré (2017) define the transfer of life skills as follows:

“The ongoing process by which an individual further develops or learns and internalises a personal asset (i.e., psychosocial skill, knowledge, disposition, identity construction, or transformation) in sport and then experiences personal change through the application of the asset in one or more life domains beyond the context where it was originally learned (p. 194)”.

In many countries, increasing attention is given to teaching life skills through sports, with such developmental assets being seen as actual learning outcomes that should be targeted and nurtured through PYD-based interventions (Santos et al., 2017). In the lives of adolescent sports participants, coaches have been identified as an essential non-parental source of influence, directly responsible for delivering sports programs and thus in a privileged position to teach life skills (Cope, Bailey, Parnell, & Nicholls, 2017).

In the face of this challenge, there is an opportunity to strengthen positive youth development through sports in Indonesia. Collaboration between governments, sports organizations, schools, and communities is essential in promoting a holistic approach to youth sports. Efforts should involve providing comprehensive training and mentoring, a youth-centered approach, an emphasis on empowerment and character building, and the use of marks as a means to develop relevant life skills.

This article aims to offer a brief commentary on the challenges and opportunities that exist in promoting PYD and Life Skills amid the increasing professionalization of youth sports. The discussion is divided into two parts. First, the context of youth sports lies in its potential and limitations in aligning with the goals inherent in contemporary PYD and Life Skills rhetoric. Second, the challenges and opportunities for promoting PYD and life skills in youth sports are examined in light of the growing professionalization in this context.



Youth Sports, Positive Youth Development, and Life Skills

Sport is practiced by millions of youth worldwide, and in many countries, sport is one of the most popular activities for youth to stay active (Larson & Verma, 1999). The issuance of Law No. 11 of 2022 as a substitute for Law No. 3 of 2005 concerning Sports is a solid legal umbrella for implementing sports in the country. The regulation is also a form of national commitment from the executive and legislative branches. At a more operational level, Presidential Decree No. 86 of 2021 concerning DBON elaborates policies, strategies, and achievements in three sports scopes: educational, recreational, and achievement sports in the 2021-2045 period. In terms of regulations, this is certainly more than sufficient to operationalize work in the sports sector. This is a challenge considering that the data available so far has not been encouraging. Unfortunately, the fitness level of children and adolescents also does not show good numbers. The 2022 National Sports Development Index Report (Kemenpora) states that the physical fitness of students who are in the "low" and "very low" categories is 82.7% for SD/equivalent, 85.8% for SMP/equal, and 83.9% for high school/equivalent. This condition is, of course, a whip for all sports stakeholders, especially in efforts to realize Indonesia Gold in 2045, where we will get a demographic bonus. The same situation also occurs at the fitness level of people in general, especially at 30-60 years old.

The Indonesian government and various institutions have also recognized the potential of sport in positive youth development. Programs such as Physical, Sports and Health Education (PJOK) in schools and sports extracurricular activities, such as football, badminton, volleyball and basketball, have become essential to the education curriculum. The aim is to encourage young people's participation in sports and to integrate the values of sports into their lives. In addition, inter-school, regional and national sports competitions are also a place for youth to show their abilities and develop a spirit of healthy competition. This provides opportunities for their growth and development as athletes, as well as expanding their social network. In addition to the government's efforts, various non-governmental organizations, sports clubs and communities also play an essential role in promoting sports for youth in Indonesia. They provide facilities, training and opportunities to participate in various sporting activities. This initiative focuses on athletic development and building character, leadership values and social skills. It is important to note that sports for youth in Indonesia must also pay attention to inclusivity and gender equality. All children, regardless of background, skill or gender, should have an equal opportunity to participate in and benefit from sports. With continuous efforts to promote and increase youth sports participation in Indonesia, this is hoped to be created.

Despite calls to temper claims of goodness and purity inherent in the sport, such virtues remain abundant in popular discourse, with many organizations framing their vision/mission statements so that sport is positioned as a legitimate contributor to broad development goals. For example, in Canada, the mark is set as promoting "positive sportsmanship, citizenship, and student-athlete total development through interschool sport" (School Sport Canada, 2019, About SSC, paragraph 2) while also being used "as a tool for social and economic development.", and the promotion of positive values at home and abroad (Sports Policy Canada, 2012, p. 3). In line with that, in the sports code of ethics of the Portuguese Institute of Sport and Youth (2015), sport is positioned as: "*Presence in society through being an educational and training tool, for personal and*



social development and entrepreneurship, of extraordinary power. In and through sport we believe we are capable of building a better world for ourselves and for future generations. Sport involves an intersectorial, intergovernmental, intergenerational structured dialogue of a transverse and multidisciplinary nature which transforms it into a valuable social, educational and prophylactic resource (p. 4)”.

Although empirical (e.g., Chinkov & Holt, 2016; Weiss, Stuntz, Bhalla, Bolter, & Price, 2013), theoretical (e.g., Holt et al., 2017), and policy (e.g., Darnell & Millington, 2019) evidence and justification for using sport as a tool for development, it is a disservice to all when the sport is (unthinkingly) positioned as offering specific economic solutions, beyond what non-sporting activities can offer, to problems that extend so far, as social justice, inequality, and human rights. While the quality of evidence on exercise interventions for development is generally weak (Whitley et al., 2019a; Whitley et al., 2019b), sport should be conceptualized as one element within a more comprehensive integrative approach to development without the virtues of insular development.

Sport must be part of a balanced approach to addressing social change in civil society, with its legitimate but humble place and role. In the future, to truly recognize the potential of sport, we must engage in efforts to (a) refrain from concluding that micro-level individual outcomes inevitably lead to macro-level community impacts while (b) consider the historical, social, and cultural contexts in which sports organizations operate (Coalter, 2010). Furthermore, as Darnell and colleagues have discussed (in press), the success of sport as an intervention “may be epiphenomenal to the application of sport itself; rather the social, interpersonal, and affective aspects of the intervention are at least equal to, and often more significant in producing positive outcomes than the exercise” (p. 17). Thus, when promoting development at different levels and in various forms, the underlying focus should be less on the sport and more on the people. Concretely, this translates into building meaningful relationships at multiple levels (i.e., between participants, between sports organizations, and between sports and non-sporting organizations) and directly applying a developmental approach embedded in everyday programming.

Based on the arguments put forward, when we consider that there may not be much inherently magical about sport in terms of its potential for psychological, social, and cultural development, it becomes essential to ask the question of how we can intentionally design youth sports experiences that are conducive to PYD. and development of life skills.

Turnnidge, Hancock, and Côté (2014) initiated a productive line of inquiry by distinguishing implicit from straightforward approaches to developing and transferring life skills that can be used in youth sports. The implicit method refers to a sports program focusing exclusively on sports skills, where the trainer does not deliberately address life skills. Previous research has shown how in an implicitly structured sporting environment, youth can still acquire some life skills when they experience its inherent features (e.g., a competitive environment) and social dimensions (e.g., positive peer relations) in a healthy way (Chinkov & Holt, 2016; Holt, Tink, Mandigo, & Fox, 2008; Jones & Lavalley, 2009).

Thus, in the implicit approach, it is still possible for youth to learn Life Skills. Still, without a deliberate Life Skills strategy, the coach has little/less control over the developmental trajectory of



their athlete from a Life Skills perspective. In contrast, the direct approach refers to sports programs where coaches target life skills teaching deliberately, with sports skills and life skills being integrated (Bean & Forneris, 2016; Camiré, Trudel, & Forneris, 2012). Examples of explicit Life Skills strategies include coaches defining Life Skills with their athletes, reinforcing the transfer of Life Skills to contexts beyond sport, intentionally creating Life Skills teaching moments, and providing real leadership opportunities (Allen, Rhind, & Koshy, 2015; Camiré et al., 2012; Pierce, Kendellen, Camiré, & Gould, 2018). The straightforward approach is increasingly being advocated by researchers because there is an accumulation of empirical and theoretical work suggesting that life skills initiatives that coaches plan deliberately are critical in optimizing the successful internalization and generalization of athlete's life skills (Allen et al., 2015; Bean & Forneris, 2016; Holt et al., 2017; Pierce et al., 2018).

To move beyond the implicit/explicit dichotomy and more precisely describe the degree to which trainers are intentional (or not) in teaching life skills, Bean, Kramers, Forneris, and Camiré (2018) created a series of implicit/explicit life skills development and transfer. The premise attached to the continuum is that sports participants are more likely to learn and transfer life skills when taught by coaches moving up the six levels of the continuum: (a) structuring the sport context, (b) facilitating a favourable climate, (c) discussing life skills, (d) practising life skills, (e) discussing transfers, and (f) practising transfers. The continuum levels are designed to build on one another, meaning that effective life skills interventions require coaches to structure their context and facilitate a positive climate before successfully implementing strategies to get their athletes to discuss and practice their life skills and transfer. While it is recognized that many factors beyond a coach's direct control can affect their ability to be intentional in their life skills teaching endeavours (e.g., various athlete skills, access to resources, access to transfer opportunities), the continuum represents a concrete tool that can help coaches better understand the initiatives they should undertake to promote PYD and life skills development.

Several conclusions can be drawn in assessing and summarizing the current evidence in youth sports research related to PYD and life skills development. Given that youth sport is only one of many contexts in which youth operates, we must temper expectations and remain realistic about the intrinsic power of sport to drive the desired developmental outcomes. Instead, as recent evidence suggests, we must be intentional about crafting the context of youth sport in a calculated way where youth are exposed to life skills messages and experiential learning opportunities. Although recent evidence shows how straightforward approaches should be prioritized to optimize athlete development in youth sports, genuine and vital challenges must first be overcome before progressing towards a state where youth sports structures are implemented to serve participants. Longevity development and the greater good of society. Such challenges are discussed in the following sections, considering the opportunities for positive change they offer.

Positive Challenges and Opportunities

Youth Development through Sport, The social structures and organizations in a youth sports system do not function in a bubble. Like other social entities, they are continuously influenced by dynamic



forces driving social change. In a constantly evolving society, the challenges posed by social change must be recognized and appropriately addressed. The two main challenges facing youth sports are examined in terms of the dilemmas they create and the opportunities they present.

Educating Coaches to Be Explicit In youth sports research in North America, life skills have been examined empirically for more than 30 years. Many years. However, life skills are still taught inconsistently in a deliberate manner, given that most coaches overseeing youth sports programs are not trained to facilitate youth development (Petitpas, Cornelius, Van Raalte, & Jones, 2005). Looking beyond North America, little sport-specific research and practical effort have been devoted to understanding and promoting PYD in culturally diverse populations (Wium & Dimitrova, 2019). Given the coach's central role in establishing a sporting context and facilitating an appropriate developmental climate (Bean et al., 2018), formal coach education has been developed as a significant pedagogical initiative in preparing coaches to boost PYD and Life Skills (Newman, Ortega, Bawah, Paluta, & Vargas, 2016). Furthermore, trainers have requested that they be given greater access to formal trainer education by having these learning situations more widely recognized as professional development opportunities and available in various online formats (Camiré, Rocchi, & Kendall, 2016).

Despite being positioned as an essential and desirable learning situation (Erickson, Bruner, MacDonald, & Côté, 2008; Nelson, Cushion, & Potrac, 2006), formal trainer education is also often criticized for being disconnected mainly from actual and real-world coaching practice. problem (Paquette & Trudel, 2018). As they relate directly to PYD and life skills, even if trainers have access to formal trainer education, “mainstream trainer education programs lack content relevant to positive youth development, instead maintaining a focus on technical and tactical skills” (Vella, Oades, & Crowe, 2013, p. 526).

In response to the lack of integrated PYD and Life Skills materials in mainstream formal trainer education programs (Santos et al., 2017), researchers have developed PYD-focused trainer education courses, which have been offered in countries such as Canada (e.g., Camiré, Kendall, Rathwell, & Felber Charbonneau, 2018; Falcao, Bloom, & Gilbert, 2012; Strachan, MacDonald, & Côté, 2016), United Kingdom (e.g., Harwood, Barker, & Anderson, 2015), Australia (e.g., Vella et al., 2013), United States (e.g., Ferris, Etekal, Agans, & Burkhard, 2015), Singapore (e.g., Koh, Camiré, Bloom, & Wang, 2017), and Portugal (e.g., Santos et al., 2019). The proliferation of PYD focuses developed by trainer education course researchers is cause for optimism, especially since such courses have been created and implemented in many countries on several continents. However, although the evaluation indicated that trainers considered the system to be well structured and appropriately delivered, it is essential to note that the reach of their population is generally limited, with outcome findings showing how implementation efforts often meet with limited success from a Life Skills coaching perspective.

Thus, the perennial dilemma is determining how PYD-focused trainer education courses, designed to equip trainers to become explicit life skills teachers, are widely accessible while also being created and implemented in ways that meet the real-world needs of trainers. From an accessibility and convenience standpoint, online approaches have attracted much interest (e.g.,



Strachan et al., 2016). However, the limitations of online coach education are directly attested in a recent intervention study conducted by Santos et al. (2019), where trainers appreciate the flexible nature of online PYD-focused trainer education courses but admit it leads to little coaching outcomes in the field due to a lack of a practical component. In the future, significant challenges remain in how trainers, on a population scale, can be made aware of, and most importantly convinced, of the importance of using sport to develop life skills, not just sports skills. As the empirical evidence base continues to build on the developmental benefits to be gained associated with explicit life skills coaching, innovative pedagogical approaches should be presented as part of an ongoing effort to get coaches to prioritize the development of both sports and life skills. Many approaches, pathways, and applications for PYD-focused coach education courses have been recently discussed by Santos, Gould, and Strachan (2019). They should continue to be refined, especially with the increasing professionalization of youth sports in mind.

Professionalization of Youth Sports While there is a need for innovative pedagogical approaches to coach education, it is essential to consider that the success of this approach is bound to be bound by the demands attached to the sport context in which coaches operate. Therefore, the limited success demonstrated in trainer education courses focusing on PYD in the past (e.g., Santos et al., 2019), in terms of manifest behavioural manifestations of trainers teaching Life Skills, may be related to the pedagogical features of those courses. . as is the case with the ecological characteristics of the sports environment, together influencing the extent to which coaches can apply PYD material on the playing field they learn in courses. Given that a critical measure of success for a trainer education course is the outcome of the trainer's behaviour, it is undoubtedly essential that we not only reflect on the pedagogical quality of the system but also examine the nature of the opportunities that exist for trainers actually to put their learning into practice. Specifically, concerning promoting PYD and life skills, such reflection requires dismantling the current parameters governing youth sports to appreciate better the real-world feasibility of having coaches explicitly teach life skills in performance-oriented professional youth sports settings. As Sean Gregory eloquently described in his Time magazine, the \$15 billion youth sports industry (Gregory, 2017), youth sports are now a fully commercial enterprise with critical development considerations for youth and high financial stakes for parents, administrators, and the community. There are numerous examples of the paradigm shift in youth sports that have occurred in the last decade. For instance, for many sports, websites (e.g., www.middleschoolelite.com) offer detailed national athlete rankings starting at age seven. Many small communities now rely on increased travel linked to youth sports tournaments, "using tax money to build or incentivise play-and-stay mega-complexes, betting that the influx of visitors will lift the local economy" (Gregory, 2017, para 26).

The seismic changes that have taken place have significantly impacted coaches, making it increasingly difficult for them to reconcile development goals in an increasingly professional climate where competition is fierce and privatization is the norm. We may be getting closer to reaching a state where an increasingly professional climate will, for the most part, seriously hinder coaches' ability to promote PYD explicitly. Thus, an important question must be asked: Are PYD and the increasingly performance-oriented youth sports system irreconcilable? Who is responsible for the current situation? Concerning the first question, there is room for optimism because performance and



development should not be considered mutually exclusive, with many examples of programs successfully integrating the two outcomes (e.g., Camiré, Trudel, & Bernard, 2013; Pierce, Gould, Cowburn, & Driska, 2016).

Regarding the second question, it seems that all youth sports stakeholders share responsibility for the current situation. To move forward productively, everyone involved in youth sports must play an active role because hard choices must be made. Top-down approaches and bottom-up approaches need to be applied concurrently if coaches are to operate in a sporting environment where explicit teaching of life skills is considered a desirable, feasible, and achievable goal. Changes at the micro (e.g., in sports teams, in coach education) and macro (e.g., in national sports organizations, in federal policy documents) levels are necessary and need to be carried out synergistically. Concretely, this requires, for example, equipping trainers with the proper knowledge and tools to teach expressive life skills while providing them with the legitimate opportunity to operate in an environment where organizational policies promote and mandate a straightforward teaching approach

Synergies between micro-macro levels of change are critical because untrained trainers cannot be expected to teach life skills explicitly and effectively, even if their immediate environment supports PYD and trained trainers cannot be expected to teach life skills explicitly if they operate in a win-at-all cost environment. The critical interrogation moving forward lies in determining whether we, as a society, are truly ready to make the changes necessary for youth sports to be realized as an initiative for the greater good. For example, can we enact the micro-macro-level modifications needed to create actual cultural change, whereby the existence of parents taking over as paying clients by pressuring coaches to play their kids and win games is eradicated? Similarly, can we enact the necessary micro-macro level changes to create an authentic cultural change whereby the presence of administrators within sports clubs/organizations who solely reward/retain coaches based on their performance records is eliminated? If meaningful changes are not enacted, youth sports coaches will inevitably feel pressured to maintain a performance/winning focus and will likely find it increasingly challenging to address PYD explicitly.

Moreover, maintaining the status quo and allowing the youth sports system to drop further down the professionalization abyss will inevitably result in youth paying the most excellent price, as the current structure “rewards low-income families. Some children who do not show talent at a young age are discouraged from participating in organized sports. Those frequently pursuing scholarships have little chance of earning” (Gregory, 2017, p. 10). On the other hand, the opportunities that can come from meaningful change are exciting, refreshing and sizable, from limiting the physical and psychological costs associated with sport specialization early on to revitalizing the concept of access, where children can focus on having fun with peers and exercise their right to play in a physically and psychologically safe sporting setting.

In the face of this challenge, there is an opportunity to strengthen positive youth development through sports in Indonesia. Collaboration between governments, sports organizations, schools and communities is essential in promoting a holistic approach to youth sports. Efforts should involve



providing comprehensive training and mentoring, a youth-centred approach, an emphasis on empowerment and character building, and the use of marks as a means to develop relevant life skills.

In Indonesia, challenges and opportunities for promoting PYD (Positive Youth Development) and Life Skills can face unique conditions. The following are some points regarding the situation in Indonesia:

Challenge:

1. Inequality in access to education: There is still inequality in education in Indonesia, especially in rural and remote areas. Some areas may face challenges in providing all youth quality PYD and Life Skills programs.
2. Lack of awareness and understanding: Awareness and understanding of the importance of PYD and Life Skills may still be low in some environments and communities in Indonesia. Efforts are needed to increase knowledge and provide relevant information to parents, teachers and the community.
3. Limited resources: Especially in less developed areas, there are limited resources such as funds, facilities and trained personnel to support implementing PYD and Life Skills programs. Increased investment from the government and other parties is needed to address this challenge.
4. Changing culture and values: Indonesia has great cultural diversity, and some traditional values may not align with the PYD and Life Skills approaches. Adapting these programs to the local cultural context and involving local stakeholders in the process are challenges that must be addressed.

Opportunity:

1. National education program: The Government of Indonesia has recognized the importance of developing youth social and life skills through programs within the 2013 Curriculum framework. This provides an opportunity to integrate PYD and Life Skills approaches into the national education system.
2. Community organizations: Various community organizations in Indonesia are concerned with youth positive development and life skills education. Opportunities exist to collaborate with these organizations and expand the reach of PYD and Life Skills programs.
3. Technology and Internet access: Advances in information and communication technology and increased internet access in Indonesia provide opportunities to provide online PYD and Life Skills resources and training. This can help overcome geographic barriers and improve program accessibility.
4. Public and private sector partnerships: Partnerships between the public, private and non-government sectors can help strengthen efforts to promote PYD and Life Skills in Indonesia. This involves leveraging different resources and knowledge and broadening the program's scope.
5. Programs that focus on developing entrepreneurship and employability skills: Indonesia has a large and growing young population. Programs that integrate entrepreneurial development and vocational skills can provide opportunities for youth.



Method

This research is based on a comprehensive literature review of the literature relevant to PYD, life skills development, and sports professionalization in Indonesia. Data is collected through verified sources such as scientific journals, government publications, and related research reports.

Discussion

This brief review has raised and explored several challenges and opportunities amid the increasing professionalization of youth sports. In the future, to maintain youth sports structures that truly offer young athletes the opportunity to develop, practice, and perfect sports skills and life skills in an integrated manner, researchers have an essential role in pushing an agenda that constructively critiques the status quo. Sport touches the lives of millions of youth around the world. As such, there is a great responsibility to ensure that youth sports programs are conceived and delivered as important developmental initiatives serving the greater good.

Professionalizing sports in Indonesia has increased youth access to training and better sports infrastructure. However, too much focus on competitive and achievement aspects often neglects youth development. Challenges associated with promoting PYD and life skills in youth sports include a lack of thorough understanding of the concept, inadequate support and resources, and pressure to achieve success as quickly as possible.

The importance of promoting PYD and life skills in youth sports should not be ignored amidst Indonesia's increasing professionalization of sports. A balanced approach is needed between sporting achievements and positive youth development. Through proper collaboration and support, Indonesia can create a sporting environment that produces quality youth, both as athletes and individuals with solid life skills who are ready for the future.

Conclusion

This brief review has raised and explored several challenges and opportunities amid the increasing professionalization of youth sports. In the future, to maintain youth sports structures that truly offer young athletes the opportunity to develop, practice, and perfect sports skills and life skills in an integrated manner, researchers have an essential role in pushing an agenda that constructively critiques the status quo. Sport touches the lives of millions of youth around the world. As such, there is a great responsibility to ensure that youth sports programs are conceived and delivered as important developmental initiatives serving the greater good.

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