



Sport improves youths' behaviour:

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MYTH BUSTED?

Summary

Sport is often claimed to improve socio-economically disadvantaged young people's behaviour. My research challenges this myth. I argue sport itself does not improve behaviour - passion for an activity does.

Introduction

The popularity of sport in the UK has led to the widespread belief that sport can be a powerful 'cure' for many social problems.

Specifically, sport is considered ideally suited to help socio-economically disadvantaged young people develop [1]. One way sport is claimed to do this is by tackling young people's behavioural difficulties [2].

These behavioural difficulties are often summarised as 'lacking discipline'. This is code for disruptive young people who do not listen to authority figures (adults) and who are incapable of following instructions.

To instil discipline in these socio-economically disadvantaged youths, UK society often turn to charity-run sport programmes.

To what extent can charity youth sports programmes improve young people's behaviour?

References

- [1] Anderson, E. (2010) *Sport, Theory and Social Problems*. London: Routledge.
- [2] Parker, A., Meek, R., & Lewis, G. (2013). Sport in a Youth Prison: Male Young Offenders' Experiences of a Sporting Intervention. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 17(3), pp. 381-396.
- [3] Damon, W. (2008). *The Path to Purpose: How Young People Find Their Calling in Life*. New York: Free Press.



Methods

I focused on a single UK youth sports charity as a case study. I interviewed 3 sports coaches and 6 young people (13-15 years old) affiliated to the charity, as well as observing 23 coaching sessions.

Conclusion

Sport itself does not improve young people's behaviour – this is a myth. Passion for an activity leads to behavioural improvement.

When young people become passionate about an activity, they become attentive, keen, and willing to learn. They become intrinsically motivated [3].

Think about your own life: how do you behave when you truly *want* to do something in comparison with times when you do *not* want to do something?

Sport merely happens to be a *type* of activity. Any other activity could improve behaviour **as long as a young person was passionate about it**.

Findings

"I suppose in many ways, the kids that come to our ... programs ... they want to be there, they are committed to be there, they enjoy being there, so behaviour is never really an issue".

James - coach.

"If they don't love it, they wouldn't continue to play, and they wouldn't come to morning trainings, 7:30am to 8:30am... It's ridiculous but... if you don't like the sport, then you won't do it. You won't really care about it. Putting your hours, your time, into something you don't really like..."

Sue – young participant. 14 years old.