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Why do they stay? Teenagers about participation in club sport

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Background

This presentation deals with girls and boys that continue with organized sport during teenager years. To take part in organized sport is very popular among children and youth in Sweden as in the western world. Together with family and school the Swedish sports movement is the largest fosterer among Swedish children and youth. There are 20,000 sport clubs in Sweden and they belong to The Swedish Sport Confederation. The Confederation is a free non-governmental organisation, but it is dependent on public financial support. The financial support is a part of a national sports policy effort to contribute to improved public health, promote integration and to ensure good ethics. During the latest decade the support has increased with 240 percent and is now almost 190 million euro per year. The government provided financial support to sports clubs during 2004-2007 in an effort to facilitate access for even more youth to participate longer. Swedish sport clubs are especially successful in recruiting children from seven to twelve years of age, but they are less successful in making children continue as they get older. The proportion of members decreases from 13 to 16 years of age and then even more during late adolescence. Age is not the only factor that seems to be of importance for sport participation but social class is significant as well. Studies also show that more boys than girls participate in organised sport even if a rising tendency is that girls are more active nowadays than before. Participation in organized sport seems to be related to a number of variables and not only to the individual youth's interest and wish. Parental support and commitment, the choices of friends and the type of sports locally available are all examples of external factors that can play a part in whether or not a child wants to participate in sports. The point of departure is that also internal factors, for example the manners in which the sporting activity is organized and performed is significant in determining whether or not the teenager wants to continue to participate. Examples of this include how one is received when practising, how the sport is presented and in what context, what expectations and demands are posed for participation. To a large extent the will to participate is determined by whether the sporting activity seems comprehensible, manageable and meaningful to the youth placed in its way.

Research Questions

The present study takes its point of departure that a sense of coherence is central when young people chose to participate in club sports. In other words, the assumption is that the same factors that are important for people's feeling of comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness play a role for teenagers willingness to participate. The aim of the study is to scrutinise girls' and boys' motives to participate and continue in club sport even if they are not top level athletes in relation to their sport background on the one hand and the kind of practice they encounter (content, coaching style, competition, peers etc) on the other. What are their motives to continue with sport even if they have modest sporting ambitions? A sub purpose is to contrast the data towards Aron Antonovskys salutogenic approach and sense of coherence theory with the components - comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness, (Antonovsky, 1987) when analysing the pedagogic interaction between the youth and their experiences of sport practice.

Methods

The survey is qualitative and based on 18-indept interviews with 9 girls and 9 boys between 15 and 18 years of age from 7 different sports, (athletics, basketball, floor-hockey, handball, equestrian sport and soccer). The selection of clubs and youngster's was done with the help of a database from the Swedish Sports Confederation. The main themes concerned, how the teenagers describe themselves in relation to their sport, what are the motives to continue with sport, what factors facilitate and are

important to be able to continue with sports. The interviews have been analysed in theme and Antonovskys salutogenic sense of coherence has served as inspiration for the analysis.

Frame

The theoretical approach is also inspired by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. His analytical approach starts from the notion that the teenagers' taste for sport and their success in continuing sport participation conditioned by on the one hand their sport and family background, previous experiences from sport, and on the other hand what kind of sport practice they meet during their leisure time and what is valued within the sport practice and in the team.

Research findings

Preliminary findings show that the youth are controlled by the logic of competition where the sense of coherence is to challenge and develop physical ability, not performed in terms of winning or losing. To be able to do so they have to have a long experience of sport from early childhood, be comfortable in the culture of sports. The present data will be discussed from a critical pedagogical perspective in the context of existing research.