

How High School Athlete Student Mentors Impact Elementary/Middle School Students: A Case for Positive Coaching Alliance

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While the physical, psychological, and social benefits of physical activity have been touted for decades, few children in the U.S. are sufficiently active physically. We created a cross-age mentoring program to encourage children to not only engage in sports, but to also gain valuable personal and interpersonal skills from program activities. We interviewed 73 individuals from two community recreation centers—53 elementary school participants, 10 high-school student-athlete mentors, and 11 professional staff members—using semi-structured interviews. We found that cross-age mentorship program in sports created positive one-to-one and one-to-many relationships between the high school athlete mentors and the elementary school participants. Our grounded theory research demonstrates the efficacy of high school student-athletes as mentors in sports programs. We also have described in detail a program that is readily scalable because it is easy to implement, is cost-effective, and has benefits for all involved. Organizations such as after-school programs and community centers can design programs that bring these groups together and provide opportunities for learning and fun.

Keywords: youth, sports, mentorship, emotional intelligence, teamwork

INTRODUCTION

Both the United States Department of Health and Human Services (2018) and the World Health Organization (2018) recommend that children and adolescents ages 6–17 complete 60 or more minutes of physical activity every day. In addition to the more obvious physical benefits (Poitras et al., 2016; Warburton et al., 2006), participation in sports and play brings both psychological and social benefits for the patrons involved (Bruner et al., 2017; Gould & Carson, 2008; Opstoel et al., 2020). Sports and active play should be an easy way for children to get the recommended levels of physical activity while also engaging in something that they enjoy. Yet, only about 24 percent of those aged 6 to 17 years in the U.S. are sufficiently active physically (Katzmarzyk et al., 2018).

How can children enjoy and fully realize the value of sports and active play? This research examines the impact of Student-Athlete Mentor Organizations (SMOs), which utilizes high school students to engage with elementary-aged children during sports and outdoor play. The SMO program provides elementary school children with the opportunity to gain a positive mentor who could have a notable impact on how they behaved and thought. According to Karcher (2018), the smaller age differences contribute significantly to the success of mentorships, and high school students are closer in age than adult coaches to elementary-aged students. Additionally, the SMO's structured activities creates an environment in which younger children could learn valuable life lessons and skills.

We interviewed three categories of participants — elementary school children, high school student-athletes, and professional adult staff—and used grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) with open-ended questions to understand what impacted participants the most. This research aims to fill the gap in understanding the impact that intentional mentoring programs and sports-driven positive youth development programs can have on both the elementary school children who participate in an after-school program and the adolescents who help run that program. It also suggests how programs with minimal resources can examine the pedagogy and achieve the desired benefits of those program that are more resource rich and more tightly scheduled.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This research was informed by theories from several streams of literature. Using grounded theory, the researchers are encouraged to “ignore the existing literature before entering the research field” (Hallberg, 2010, p. 1) and let the theory emerge from the data. The theories included here can give contextual clues from grounded theory that can help the reader examine alternative ways of interpreting the data (McCallin, 2003). The context of sports and play is critical to examine, as are the emergent characteristics of teamwork, emotional intelligence, and mentorship, which were evident in this study.

Sports and Active Play

Youth sports have specifically been defined as adult organized programs with coaches, organized practices, and scheduled competitions (Feltz, 2001). Besides the physical aspects, active play also impacts individuals on the cognitive side (Berger, 2012; Lee et al., 2020; MacMahon, 2012). Sports and play also bring psychological benefits to its participants. Participating in regular exercise such as sports can reduce anxiety, tension, and depression and can increase one's self-esteem (MacMahon, 2012). In a fitness program it was found that the 82 participants experienced both a positive physical and psychological improvement compared to the control group (DiLorenzo et al., 1999). Sports have been shown to enhance mood, reduce stress, and promote a more positive self-image and a higher quality of life (Berger, 2012). The Developmental Model of Sports Participation postulates that youth should participate in various sports to build a solid foundation of intrinsic motivation and motor and cognitive development (Côté & Vierimaa, 2014); (Côté et al., 2009).

Teamwork

One developmental experience youth can gain by participating in sports and active play is the value of teamwork (Nuñez Enriquez & Oliver, 2022). Teamwork may be defined as “a dynamic process involving a collaborative effort by team members to effectively carry out the independent and interdependent behaviors that are required to maximize a team's likelihood of achieving its purposes” (McEwan & Beauchamp, 2014, p. 233). This definition highlights the importance of building teamwork in sports, as teamwork develops critical skills and positive behaviors (Dohme et al., 2020). When asked about the values they have learned through sports participation, the majority of high-school student-athletes mentioned the importance of teamwork (Camiré & Trudel, 2010).

Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence is an important skill that youth can develop through sports. Unlike intelligence quotient (IQ) and personality, emotional intelligence (EQ) is a skill that can be refined and developed. The four sections of EQ as identified by Goleman et al. (2002) are self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management. Further, self-awareness and self-management are grouped to reflect the level of personal competence; social awareness and relationship management are grouped to reflect the level of social competence (Bradberry & Greaves, 2005). Empathy, which is one's ability to effectively respond to another's emotions, will impact one's willingness to intervene on behalf of a bullied peer (Walters & Espelage, 2019). In order to perform well in team sports, athletes must not only be able to recognize their own emotions but also the emotions of their teammates and opponents (Zizzi et al., 2003). With youth and teen participants, 35 percent of those involved in sports reported on the highest level of their ability to control their temper; other youth experiences studied, such as academic or leadership activities, did not show the same positive response (Hansen et al., 2003).

An increased level of EQ is beneficial for sports participation (Megheirkouni, 2019), but there is a multitude of situations where EQE can be useful in life in general. People with high EQ reported that stressful events did not continue to distress them; stressful events included both minor and major negative life events (Armstrong et al., 2011). Being able to monitor, acknowledge, and control one's emotions while also being aware of others' emotions is a critical life skill developed through participating in athletics (Zizzi et al., 2003).

Mentoring

Mentorship is experienced in a variety of ways. The mentor's knowledge, competencies, attitude, and communication skills play an important role in the students' learning (Blechman, 2010). Both parties involved are benefited through mentoring (Coyne-Foresi et al., 2019), and it has been shown to improve outcomes related to behavioral, social, emotional, and academic areas of youth (DuBois et al., 2011). These benefits of mentorship are also visible in sports.

Sports and play help with positive development and decrease the risk of problem behaviors (Danish, 2002). For sports to be most effective, it is suggested that programs be structured in a way to highlight positive child-adult relationships and designed to support developmental behavior (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2005). Concepts of teamwork, EQ, and mentorship illustrate the important qualities that can be obtained through positive youth sport participation.

METHODS

Case Study Site: Student-Mentor Organizations at the Positive Coaching Alliance

Positive Coaching Alliance (PCA) is a national nonprofit organization based in California, whose mission is to create positive, character-building sports environments that result in better athletes and better people (Positive Coaching Alliance, 2019). PCA was founded by Jim Thompson in 1998 and included 18 chapters nationwide. It had partnered with roughly 3,500 schools and youth sports organizations to deliver more than 20,000 live group workshops, reaching 19.2 million youth (Positive Coaching Alliance, 2019). Some of their work included providing leadership development workshops to high-school student-athletes, coaching workshops and certifications, and parent workshops in county schools (Maury, 2016). PCA's workshops and activities include E-Tank (their version of EQ).

With the goal of keeping children engaged in sports and play, this research team and PCA worked together to create the Student-Mentor Organization (SMO). SMOs work with local high schools and Parks and Recreation Departments (PRD) to connect high school student-athletes to elementary-aged after-school participants in PRD programs. SMOs were hosted at local high schools and operated as student clubs overseen by high school faculty members who were also team coaches. Mentoring took place at three local PRD centers. Eight visits were scheduled periodically throughout the school year. Student-athletes were required to attend at least four mentoring events per academic year; however, over 70 percent of the student-

athletes in this SMO attended all of them due to the bonds that they had formed with the elementary school children.

Each semester, participating student-athletes attended one training meeting that was conducted by this article's lead author and lasted approximately one hour. Thirty minutes of the meeting provided the students with materials focused on PCA's concepts as well as providing the students training on how to effectively interact and create relationships with the children. Twenty minutes of the meeting was devoted to planning the upcoming mentor events, and the remaining ten minutes of the meeting was spent reflecting on previous mentoring events or other similar experiences and drawing on those events for guidance and assistance on ideas.

The duration of the mentoring events at the PRC were approximately two hours. One concept was highlighted each month. The first thirty minutes was dedicated to a "group lesson" in which student-athletes shared and discussed one of the PCA principles with the younger children. During the next twenty minutes, children engaged in a group activity that demonstrated the PCA principle. The following ten minutes were spent reflecting on the activity and how the PCA principle was valuable and important for the successful completion of the activity as well as allowing the younger children the option to share their opinions and what they gained from the experience. The remaining sixty minutes were free playtime for all groups to form one-on-one connections and relationships by participating in fun activities, games, and sports that the younger children suggested.

The goal of SMO was to make a direct positive impact in the lives of children participating in the PRD after-school programs. SMOs used high-school-aged student-athletes to encourage children to stay involved in sports and physical activity by serving as mentors for younger children. In doing so, the younger children would want to remain in athletics, continuing to receive the multitude of benefits that team-oriented physical activities provided them. Additionally, the high-school student-athletes would be more cognizant of the life lessons they have learned through athletics and could be more purposeful in their sports journey as well as feeling good and forming connections with the youth in their community. Experiential programs like this in an athlete's younger years can help these students overall (Hayes Sauder & Davis, 2017). These mentor organizations created positive one-to-one as well as one-to-many relationships between the student-athletes and younger children and increased the likelihood that children will stay involved in sports and continue to receive the social, emotional, and physical benefits of sports participation. Moreover, it has been noted that the cross-age relationships have helped in the success of the mentorship (Karcher, 2018).

Methodological Approach

Qualitative research is best for studies trying to understand people's motivations, actions, and reasons (Myers, 2009). The narrative approach was appropriate for this research because it examines stories told through individuals' experiences that are specific to a context (Creswell, 2013). The context is important for the youth interviewed because it is the lens through which they processed their "individual experiences" and then organized the meaning to explain to the interviewer (Creswell, 2013, p. 70). This context was influenced by Positive Coaching Alliance (PCA), which provided the framework for the training of the mentors.

We analyzed the content of our interviews utilizing a grounded theory approach. Grounded theory provides a way of systematically collecting and analyzing data to generate theories based on the data themselves, not only to enrich current theories but also to discover new philosophies (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Rather than having a preconceived theoretical idea before starting the research, we looked for concepts and theories to emerge from the data (Myers, 2009).

Beginning with open coding techniques, we explored and compared the data to determine similarities and differences. Open coding is important as it sparked our thinking and allowed new ideas to emerge (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Using comparative methods, we consistently made comparisons at every level of analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). After establishing strong relationships and codes, we focused on a more directed and selective form of coding to sift through large amounts of our data, utilizing the frequent codes in the open coding process (Charmaz, 2006). The goal was to simply construct a more

descriptive and representative understanding and view of the SMOs by using data from the experiences, thoughts, and feelings from those involved.

The Interviews

We interviewed after-school participants, high school mentors, and professional staffers concerning the SMOs. Our objective was to gain insight into the psychological and social impact of SMOs on both the elementary school children being mentored and the high school athletes serving as mentors. We also interviewed staff members to confirm what we heard from the other groups. All interview participants were volunteers, and not all participated. For interviewees under the age of 18, the research team had permission from a legal parent/guardian before conducting the interview.

The primary interviewer was the creator of the SMOs, who was very involved in all aspects of the program. As a result, interviewees were more comfortable opening up and using slang terms that may not be generally known without knowledge of PCA material.

Sample

Our sample consisted of 52 County PRD after-school program participants from two community recreation centers. Our participants were selected for this study because they were directly impacted by the SMO on one of three levels: The participant was either an after-school program participant, a high-school student-athlete in the SMO, or a professional staff member or coach of the high schoolers. The range of experience level of the professional staff members was eight months to 27 years. Table 1 presents the demographic breakdown of those interviewed.

**TABLE 1
AGE, ETHNICITY, AND GENDER OF INTERVIEWEES**

	After-School Participants (n=52)	High School Athletes (n=10)	Professional Staff Members (n=11)
Age Range	6 to 11 years old	15 to 18 years old	n/a
Ethnicity			
Hispanic	58%	40%	27%
White (non-Hispanic)	15%	40%	45%
African American	15%	0%	27%
Mixed/Other	12%	20%	0%
Gender			
Male	54%	60%	45%
Female	46%	40%	55%

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

This data collection consisted of qualitative in-depth interviews using a semi-structured interview guide. Interviews were recorded on two separate tape recorders by two different interviewers. The interviews yielded 11 hours, 21 minutes of tape and 230 pages of transcribed text.

As Strauss and Corbin (1990) suggest, we used open coding and broke down the data, examined it, compared it, conceptualized it, and categorized it. Constant comparison was done across the interviews and the researchers, to avoid biases, and validating the codes and categories. After establishing key terms, we used MAXQDA software to locate these key terms for further examination, and three themes emerged. They were teamwork, EQ, and mentorship. Other interesting points included respect, character development, and effort. After analyzing the data further, the three themes established were the most representative of the data. Teamwork, EQ, and terms around the idea of mentorship populated 406 strips of

code. Though interviewees never explicitly stated the importance of mentorship, we were able to infer from the transcripts that what interviewees were describing was the act of mentorship.

Validity and Reliability

Throughout this study, assessing the validity and reliability of analysis was crucial. For this project, *validity* represented the credibility and trustworthiness of the source and the authenticity of the information (Schwandt et al., 2007). The validity of this research is limited to our interpretation of the responses and our ability to identify the salient factors from the interviewees. In establishing reliability, we tracked the consistency of the interview process and the data. Throughout this process, we analyzed the data and provided assessments of findings, reviewed and discussed our findings, and went back and forth to ensure agreement on what the findings represent. This was an iterative process that included individual analysis, discussion, and revision. We found that this process was essential to ensure that findings were accurate and representative of the data.

Rigor

This study included a rigorous approach to every step of the research process. Data was collected extensively and analyzed on multiple levels, ranging from broad theme scanning to line-by-line analysis. We utilized purposeful sampling of the qualitative data and checked and reviewed the findings to ensure that all data was handled meticulously (Creswell, 2013). We began the initial interviews together to ensure calibration and inter-rater reliability.

FINDINGS

The importance of this topic was validated after conducting interviews with participants on multiple levels: student, mentor, and counselor. The participants were asked to discuss factors and conditions that affected the young students. High school mentors understood the importance of athletics, not just for physical fitness, but because athletics teach so many great life lessons. One mentor said, “I realize that you use sports as a platform to you know better ourselves as humans. Because you can only play for so long, but every lesson that you learn in sports is something that you can apply to life.”

When asked if sports were important, 100 percent of interviewees, including youth, mentors, and professional staff, stated that they were. For many, athletics were a way to stay active and keep themselves focused. One high school mentor shared that sports were a way for him to stay out of trouble, “it gives you something to do, it gets you off the streets and gives you something to focus, and to put like effort into yourself.” The SMOs gave high school students an opportunity to become more involved in their community and give back. A few students alluded to this program as an eye-opening experience that allowed them to see how fortunate they are to have been able to participate in sports programs and learn the great life lessons taught through sports without even realizing it. One mentor stated, “I’d say it kinda made me realize how fortunate I am that I was brought up with like a whole team around me in a sports system. And I think it’s kinda really showed me how like essential that is for a lot of kids.” The three main findings that impact was manifested in SMO were in the areas of teamwork, EQ, and mentorship.

Finding #1: Teamwork

When asked about the important values that participants (after-school and high school mentors) thought they gained or learned from participating in this program, 56 percent of interviewees mentioned the concept of teamwork. After-school participants were able to draw connections between the value of teamwork related to sports and outside of sports. See first quote in Table two which shows an understanding that teamwork is applied everywhere in life—sports, school, home life, career—and it is a great concept to be learning as a child through sports or play.

Participants at each level in the Student-Athlete Mentor Organization (SMO) demonstrated a deeper understanding of the value of teamwork. Participants drew connections with their ability to work together and the success of their team and the speed at which it took them to achieve success. Through participation

in the SMOs, high school athletes, youth after school participants, and professional staff stated that working as a team and helping each other out makes activities easier and more fun to participate in. By using teamwork, participants are able to achieve their goals and apply that concept to play, their home life, and their schoolwork.

**TABLE 2
TEAMWORK QUOTES**

Quote	Interviewee
I learned that using teamwork can help you in a lot of situations. Like say in a job you need to work with different people. ‘Cause usually people work by yourself individually. And, then when you start working with other people, it’s hard. So, it’s good, to learn it as a little kid.	After-school participant
What I’ve learned... is that teamwork is a very important thing. Because teamwork is something that we might do in like our daily lives. Because, you could be a team with your mom, like cleaning up the house, or doing the dishes.	After-school participant
And you start to see like, working together, how that can change things. If you don’t work together it deflates. And, we have, the more times we did it, the more they were, got used to it, and it worked better. And that was an obvious change in mentality.	High school athlete
It teaches them a great deal about teamwork. You know, when the baseball team came out, it showed them teamwork and was very impactful. Showed them to work together. To fill up each other’s emotional tanks. The kids were walking around building each other up; it was great, to say the least.	Professional Staff

Finding #2: Emotional Intelligence

EQ, coined “E-Tank” by PCA, is another value that participants thought that they gained from participating in this program. Through the SMOs, high school mentors were able to teach the after-school participants the impact their words can have on others.

After the program, participants understood the benefit of having EQ allowed them to form better relationships with others. Students were able to understand that their actions impacted the actions of others, and it was better in the long run for them to make sure they left a positive impact on their peers. A low E-Tank indicated that a person might be having a bad day, and it was up to those around him/her to help fill their tank, as a full tank brings positivity, optimism, and success, and a low tank brings negativity, aggression, and doubts. As one after-school participant summarized the activity, “They were trying to teach us how nice it could be if you would make their E-Tank like filled and give them compliments and stuff. And with negative things, that it can be rude, and it can hurt someone.” See Table 3 for participant quotes concerning EQ.

**TABLE 3
EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE QUOTES**

Quote	Interviewee
I think I can make someone else’s E-Tank go up if I play with them, and if I teach them the rules and treat them how I wanna be treated. And I make their E-Tank go down by saying mean things to them and treating them how I don’t wanna be treated.	After-school participant
Because like some of your friends could help get your E-Tank up if it’s low. Like if you’re crying, some of your friends could help you get the E-Tank more up, so you could feel better.	After-school participant

And they were being nice to each other, and they were using what we had taught them, and they were saying good things to each other. And they were filling up the E-Tank, so that was good.	High school athlete
That half hour, that hour that we spent learning something, all we have to do is say “Hey; who wants to fill my E-Tank?” And they all know what it is, and they all know exactly what they can do to fill somebody’s E-Tank.	Professional Staff

Finding #3: Mentorship

All youth participants gained a mentor, and high school athletes had a better understanding of the importance of a mentor. This program formed a strong relationship between the athletes and the youth, as 96 percent of youth stated that they felt they had a relationship/friendship with one or more of the athletes, and 100 percent of athletes stated that they felt they had a relationship/friendship with one or more of the youth. In forming relationships, the youth felt more accountable and responsible for their actions, changing their behavior to best reflect what the athletes had demonstrated and taught them. Concomitantly, the athletes took greater ownership of their actions and reflected on how they acted, ensuring that they stayed authentic and acted in ways that they would want to model. These findings reinforce the research by Karcher (2018) about cross-age mentoring. See Table 4 for participant quotes concerning the ideals of mentorship.

**TABLE 4
MENTORSHIP QUOTES**

Quote	Interviewee
They taught us how to be nice, how to play really fun games, and how to play new games. They taught us a lot a stuff. They taught us new things; they even made our E-Tank go up by playing with us.	After-school participant
I believe my personal goal as a mentor was to pass everything on that I’ve learned, not just about baseball, but just about, you know, the right way to life in general.	High school athlete
So, ultimately, having the baseball team come out, mentor to them about the importance of teamwork and everybody working together towards a common goal, like I said man, I seen a great deal of behavioral changes with the kids. They were working together. Instead of seeing their opponents as an enemy, they see them as a team. And it was a lot a team building. It was very, very, very impactful.	Professional Staff
I think it gives them the experience. Ultimately, some of them may not have had the foundation of having someone behind them pushing them to do their best. So, having them come in and mentor to the kids, it was very fitting. They got an opportunity to mentor to the kids, and be a role model, which is very, very important for our youth.	Professional Staff

It is no doubt that athletics and play have a role in many of our youths’ lives. The SMOs aimed to make that role more intentional in ensuring that our youth were more cognizant of the lessons that sports teach us and how we can apply those skills to lives outside of sports, all while providing the youth with a mentor. This study examined the level of impact that the SMOs had on both the community and the individuals involved. We found that these organizations created positive one-to-one and one-to-many relationships between the mentors and youth. We also found that these organizations helped solidify a foundation for both the mentors and youth to build upon in understanding the life lessons they have learned through sport, such as teamwork and EQ. These organizations were successful in leaving an impact on the centers and students involved and creating a program to bring the community together through sport.

DISCUSSION

The primary researcher's personal connection to the SMO motivated an exploration of the benefits and impact of the SMOs on the parties involved. Youth sport participation reaps many benefits for those involved, including physical, psychological, and social benefits. The goal of the SMOs was to have a strong positive impact on the lives of children in the community even when resources are limited and the children are unable to commit to the consistent participation required in youth sports.

Through the interviews after-school participants, high school mentors, and professional staffers gave insight as to what the SMOs provided. A typical SMO event would consist of an introduction, an activity, a discussion, and "free play" centered around a particular value (i.e., teamwork, E-Tank, effort). During this time, the high school student-athletes served as mentors to the younger after-school participants, facilitating and teaching them about sports and life in general. Both the youth and high school mentors gained a better understanding of the values of sports, play and how these values can be translated into our everyday life. The data characterizes the level of impact in examining three areas that the parties involved identified as important lessons learned through their experiences: teamwork, EQ, and mentorship.

The positive impact of sports and active play on children's emotional, academic, and physical well-being is well-documented. Therefore, any efforts that encourage participation and enrich these programs are welcomed. Enhancements often must occur under conditions of limited resources. The SMO program piloted with PCA fits this bill. It utilizes high school students to mentor students who participate in community recreation programs; it was very low cost.

Students are an ideal untapped source of mentors. Not only are they plentiful, but the mentoring process has positive benefits for students who participate as mentors. It is worth noting that most of the programs that utilize student athletes in elementary schools during the academic year are designed so that athletes are helping children with their classroom studies (Wallot, 2013). Because sports and play has been proven to be a powerful means of developing life skills such as discipline, perseverance, and teamwork, we argue that more student-athlete mentoring programs should be designed around sports. Moreover, we advocate strongly for an E-tank (Positive Coaching Alliance) approach. Based on our interviews with individuals at all levels of the program, with just a few hours of training, student-athletes became effective at emphasizing the EQ skills that have been directly linked to personal and professional success.

Our research also addresses gaps; the majority of prior research has been focused on peer-to-peer mentoring (e.g., Raabe et al., 2019). While there are a number of programs in the U.S. in which high school students are paired with elementary school students, the research on cross-age mentoring has focused mainly on college students rather than high school students as mentors (e.g., Rahill et al., 2017). Our grounded theory research is the first step to demonstrating the efficacy of high school student-athletes as mentors in sports and play programs. This type of program looks promising and low cost.

CONCLUSIONS AND LIMITATIONS

The present study contributes to the literature on mentoring youth with high school students. Our study plays a crucial role in understanding the phenomena of ways of keeping younger children engaged and participating in sports. This study provides evidence that mentoring programs, which bring together high school students and elementary students, actually benefit both groups. Organizations such as after-school programs and community centers should design programs that bring these groups together and provide opportunities for learning and fun. This program was easy to implement and has a low cost for the efficacy.

Our sample was limited to the participants who have been impacted by the SMOs that are in existence. Our methodological approach required interviewees to recall past experiences, some that may have occurred more than two months prior and may have been hard for students to remember off hand. As previously mentioned, there are only two SMOs, both of which are located in the Southern region of the U.S. Due to this limitation, our research did not analyze the variations in geography or environment and how that impacts the success of the SMO and the impact it had on the community. During this process, we focused on the program, not external factors for each individual.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Our work has implications for both future research and practice. Our results, highlighting the importance of mentorship and relationship building in sports and play, suggest that organizations such as the SMO are positive influencers in the promotion and retention of youth participating in sports. This research supports the expansion of the SMOs to more local high schools and recreation centers and replicating the SMOs in other areas. Organizations like our SMOs would benefit the students on both sides, the mentored and the mentees. More research with other mentoring organizations would further examine benefits to the younger students.

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