Original Article

The influence of a sports mentoring program on children's life skills development

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Abstract:

While many studies have examined the role of sports programs for children's life skills development, few have explored the potential of sport as a one-on-one mentoring opportunity. The purpose of this study was to examine the reasons for children's participation, the nature of the mentor-mentee relationship, and the influence of a sports mentoring program on children's life skills development. The participants included six mentees (4 boys, 2 girls) and their mentors (4 male, 2 female) who participated in a 9-month sports mentoring program. Data were collected via open-ended questionnaires, individual interviews, reflective journal entries by mentors, and observation of mentoring sessions. The data were analyzed using inductive analysis. The findings showed that the children were attracted to sports mentoring to establish a relationship with caring adults, to improve their sports skills, and to develop their life skills. These motives for participation were related to the nature of the mentor-mentee relationship. Participation in the sports mentoring program influenced the children's improvement in (a) physical activity and sports skills, (b) confidence and connectedness, and (c) self-management and growth skills. This study showed that one-on-one sports mentoring can serve as a unique context and tool for life skills development by capitalizing on both the sports content and the structure of a one-on-one relationship.

Key words: life skills, positive youth development, mentoring, sport

Introduction

Promoting the healthy and successful development of young people is a critical determinant of the future of a society. The research focus and practice of youth development has shifted from a deficit-reduction approach that aims to reduce targeted problem behavior to an asset-building approach that aims to strengthen the positive potential of youth. This paradigm shift, known as positive youth development (PYD), regards youth as a resource to be developed rather than a problem to be treated (Lerner, 2002). PYD is defined as "the deliberate processes of providing youth with the support, relationships, experience, resources, and opportunities needed to become successful and competent adults" (Bernat & Resnick 2006, p. 10).

Three approaches provide guidelines for the specific positive qualities that children should develop to become competent and successful adults. First, Lerner et al. (2005) proposed the Five Cs (i.e., competence, confidence, connection, character, and caring) as indicators of PYD, which youth program staff should focus on developing. In another approach, Benson (1997) identified 20 personal(internal assets) and 20 ecological characteristics (external assets) as building blocks to achieve the PYD outcomes. According to Benson (1997), PYD is a function of both individual characteristics and environmental contexts. Therefore, a youth program should focus on developing individual assets while providing external support from the home, school, or community.

Although both the Five Cs and the developmental asset approach provide general direction regarding the qualities to be cultivated for PYD, they do not specify how these qualities can be cultivated or the specific skills that youth should develop. The life skills development approach offers a more specific answer. Life skills are defined as physical, cognitive, or behavioral skills that enable youth to succeed in the different contexts in which they live. These skills are then transferable to other settings such as the school, home, or neighborhood (Danish & Nellen, 1997). Life skills can be developed through practice and taught through modeling, demonstration, and appropriate feedback. As this life skills approach provides guidance about specific skills and how to develop them, it is commonly adopted by researchers and practitioners (Gould & Carson, 2008).

In developing life skills, researchers have found that establishing a close relationship with caring adults is a critical factor for positive youth development (Perkins & Borden, 2003). This implies the importance of one-on-one mentoring for youth life skills development. Mentoring is defined as "a structured and trusting relationship that brings young people together with caring individuals who offer guidance, support, and

encouragement aimed at developing the competence and character of the mentee” (MENTOR/National Mentoring Partnership, 2003, p. 8). The literature shows that youth mentoring provides skill building opportunities and creates positive and supportive relationships for developing life skills, ultimately facilitating positive youth development (DuBois, Holloway, Valentine, & Cooper, 2002; Rhodes, Spencer, Keller, Liang, & Noam, 2006).

The effect of youth mentoring on life skills development can be influenced by the activities and the mentoring context. Sport and physical activity are frequently used as the context and medium of life skills development. Programs such as The First Tee (Weiss, Stuntz, Bhalla, Bolter, & Price, 2012), Play It Smart (Petipas, Van Raalte, Cornelius, & Presbrey, 2004), Project Effort (Lee & Martinek, 2009), and Career Club (Walsh, 2008) are examples that use sport as a tool for life skills development. These programs prioritize the development of life skills such as goal setting and problem solving, rather than winning at all costs. A common factor in the success of these programs is the establishment of trusting relationships with caring adults. In these programs, the coach takes the role of both mentor and coach by establishing caring relationships, being a role model, and using intentional strategies to facilitate life skills development.

Few studies, however, have examined the process and effect of one-on-one sports mentoring as an independent program. Given the prevalence of mentoring programs in community and school settings and the proven potential of sport as a context for life skills development, the influence of one-on-one sports mentoring programs on life skills development requires research. To understand the role of one-on-one sports mentoring on youth development, research should focus on what attracts young people to the program, what kinds of social processes they experience, and how the mentoring influences their life skills development. The current study designed and implemented a sports-based mentoring program and explored the process and influence of the program. The specific research questions guiding this study were: (a) How were the children attracted to the sports mentoring program? (b) What was the nature of the relationship between mentor and mentee in this program? and (c) What influence did the sports mentoring have on their life skills development?

Contexts

The Sports Mentoring for Success program

Sports Mentoring for Success (SMS) was developed and implemented in collaboration with a university and the youth welfare division of a community center in Seoul, Korea. The purpose of the program was to develop youth life skills such as personal skills (e.g., goal setting, life style management) and interpersonal skills (e.g., communication, social skills, conflict resolution) through one-on-one sports mentoring. The 30 sessions of the program included 3 sessions of sports day events with all mentors and mentees together. Each program session developed the four program components: relationship building, physical activity, guided life skills development, and setting goals for applying the life skills to the mentees' daily lives.

During relationship building, mentor and mentee got together for an informal talk and a weekly update on their lives. By the end of the relationship building process, the mentor set the tone of the mentoring session by using sports narratives such as poems about sport or stories of exemplary athletes. During the physical activity time, the mentor introduced the sports skills of the day, such as badminton, table tennis, or soccer, and they played together. Then, the mentor and mentee sat down together and moved on to life skills development. To connect the sports experience with life skills development, the mentor was required to use the real-life experiences that arose during the skills practice, quotes from the sports literature, and occasional short video clips of exemplary sportsmanship behavior via a smartphone. After talking about the life skills, both mentor and mentee did a brief self-assessment and the mentee set a goal to apply a life skill learned in the mentoring to his or her daily life.

Methods

Participants

The participants were 6 mentees (4 boys, 2 girls) and their mentors (4 male, 2 female) who participated in a 9-month sports mentoring program. Mentees were selected based on an attendance rate higher than 80% during the 30-session mentoring program and an ability to articulate their thoughts and feelings. The researchers then contacted the mentors of the selected candidates, all of whom agreed to participate in the study. Background information on the mentees and mentors is presented in Table 1.

Data sources

Data were collected from an open-ended questionnaire administered to mentees' parents and mentors, individual interviews with mentors and mentees, reflective journal entries by mentors, and observation of mentoring sessions. The questionnaires were used to obtain background information on the mentees and mentors.

Mentees were interviewed for approximately 60 minutes after completion of the SMS program about their experience and its perceived influence on their life skills development. These interviews were recorded on digital voice recorder. Questions included: (a) What made you to decide to participate in this sports mentoring program? (b) How would you explain sports mentoring to your friends? (c) How would you describe your relationship with your mentor? and (d) What did you learn in the SMS program?

Table 1. Background information on mentors and mentees

Mentee name	Age/ Gender	Grade	Reasons for participation	Mentor name	Age/ Gender	Reasons for participation
Sunghan	11/ Boy	5	Playing sport, improving self-confidence and cooperation	Janghee	23/ Male	Transmitting positive sports experience to youth
Chajun	10/ Boy	4	Finding someone to play with, being more physically active, learning self-discipline, improving sports skills	Earl	26/ Male	Providing educational service to youth as a former student athlete
Tackwon	10/ Boy	4	Learning sports systematically	Kangwoo	29/ Male	Transmitting positive sports experience to youth, teaching life skills through sport
Danbee	11/ Girl	5	Improving self-confidence, sports skills, the learning challenge	Suyeon	21/ Female	Providing service to at-risk youth
Raein	12/ Girl	6	Learning new sports, improving sports skills	Mina	28/ Female	Transmitting positive sports experience to youth, helping youth be more healthy
Junsuh	11/ Boy	5	Improving sports skills	Yusang	25/ Male	Transmitting positive sports experience to youth, teaching life skills through sport

In addition, one-hour interviews were conducted with each mentor about their SMS program experience and its effect on their mentee's behavior and attitude. Questions included: (a) Were there any changes in your expectations of sports mentoring from the beginning to the end? (b) How would you describe your relationship with your mentee? (c) Have you perceived any change in the behavior or attitude of your mentee throughout the mentoring program?

The mentors also wrote a reflective journal after each mentoring session, including a brief explanation of the mentoring activity, reflection on their relationship with their mentee, and the content of goal setting with their mentee. In addition, each mentor–mentee dyad was observed four times to obtain a contextual understanding of the mentoring in practice, and the observers took field notes and conducted an informal interview after each observation regarding the intentions of the behavior observed during the session.

Data analysis

The data were analyzed inductively (Patton, 2002). The researchers repeatedly reread the questionnaire responses, interview transcripts, and field notes while making margin notes. After establishing an initial understanding of the data, the researcher coded the data for recurring words and phrase that appeared relevant to the research questions. For each mentor–mentee dyad, the researchers then made a case summary of reasons for participation, the nature and content of the mentor–mentee relationship, and the effect of the program on the mentee's life skills development.

The researchers then identified patterns or themes across the mentor–mentee dyads, categorized them as higher-order themes, and then developed an explanation based on the relationships between higher-order themes. The trustworthiness of the data was ensured by data source triangulation and member checks (Creswell, 2009). The use of multiple data sources provided corroborating evidence and enabled crosschecking for theme consistency across the multiple data sources. For member checks, the researchers shared their transcripts and initial data interpretation with the participants and inquired whether these interpretations were contradictory or distorted.

Results

The results of this study are presented according to the three research questions: reasons for mentee participation in the program, the nature of the relationships in the mentoring dyads, and the influence of the program on youth life skills development.

Reasons for participation in the sports mentoring program

Establishing a relationship with a caring adult

Both the mentees and their parents expressed their need to establish relationships with caring adults during discretionary time such as after school or on weekends. A 5th grade boy, Sunghan, said, "I like to play sport but I don't have anyone to play with because most of my friends go to private tutoring after school. Here I can find someone to play and talk with me." Given that 81.8% of Korean elementary students participate in at

least one after-school private tutoring program (Statistics Korea, 2014), the SMS program was expected to provide children who cannot afford private tutoring a context for meeting and playing with caring adults.

In addition, parents expressed the need for a role model for their children. For example, Danbee's mother said in the questionnaire, "I want her to have a good female role model and appropriate attention from her mentor when needed. I cannot spend a lot of time with her because I work all day." Although the mentees reported the need for someone to play and talk with, parental expectations were centered on the educational value of mentoring, such as contact with a role model and appropriate attention from the mentor.

Playing sport and developing skills

Sport was a critical reason for participation in the SMS program for both the mentees and their parents. The mentees reported joining the program because they love playing sport and wanted to have fun. Parents expressed similar expectations that the program would provide a safe environment for their children to play sport and ultimately reduce time playing computer games or watching TV alone after school.

Exposure to novelty and skills improvement were other reasons for participation in the program. Raein, a 6th grade girl, said, "I have been in academic mentoring for a year, but it was all about studying and improving grades. Sports mentoring will be different because it will teach me a lot of new sports I've never played." Raein's comment shows that the sports component of the mentoring has a unique value that can be differentiated from academic mentoring. As Taekwon's mother also stated in the questionnaire, "I think this will be a good opportunity to expose him to a variety of sports. I'd like him to learn new sports skills systematically." These comments show that sports can make a youth mentoring program attractive by providing a context for learning a diverse range of sports, having fun, and also improving sports skills.

Developing life skills

Besides meeting people and learning sports skills, the mentees expressed a desire to obtain positive qualities such as self-confidence, leadership, and stress management skills through the program. For example, a 5th grade girl, Danbee, said, "I want to learn how to be healthy, not only physically but also mentally, like learning how to release stress through sports mentoring." In addition, the mentees expected to learn cooperation and fair play and to make friends through playing sports. Their expectations show their openness to learning positive values and skills beyond sports skills in a sports mentoring program.

Although parents expected their children to gain positive values and psychological outcomes, they were more interested in distal outcomes such as academic achievement. Describing her initial expectation of the program, Sunghan's mother said, "I want him to learn to face difficult issues and improve his confidence. Ultimately, I'd like him to have a better attitude toward school and improve his academic achievement." Compared with the youths' expectations of life skills such as fair play or cooperation, which are more directly related to sport, their parents were more focused on indirect outcomes such as grades and school engagement.

The nature of the mentoring relationships

The participants' experience of sports mentoring was examined in terms of the mentor-mentee relationship. Three categories of relationship orientation emerged: befriending, coaching of sports skills, and development of life skills.

Befriending

Befriending was a major orientation, focused on establishing a close mentor-mentee relationship through enjoyable activities rather than the systematic development of skills and competency. Among the diverse goals of mentoring, befriending orientation dominated the initial stage of the SMS implementation. For example, when asked about the goal of mentoring during the initial stage, mentor Janghee said, "Rather than teaching something systematically, I think I should have fun and play with my mentee for 2 hours to make him feel more comfortable and close to me." The mentees also described their mentors as "brother/sister" or "friend." The 4th grade boy, Taekwon, in describing his mentor, said, "my mentor is different from a school teacher. He is more like a friend, and I can talk to him easily."

The befriending orientation was facilitated by playing sports and the one-on-one mentoring structure. The mentees reported that playing table tennis or badminton with their mentors strengthened their emotional bonding, while the one-on-one structure allowed them the full attention of their mentors. When asked what made her keep returning to the program, Raein said, "I get full attention here. My mentor is always ready to listen to me because I am the only one learning from her and talking to her here."

Although befriending facilitated the establishment of a relationship, it impeded the intended implementation of the SMS program when mentors lacked sufficient skills and confidence. Reflecting on the trade-off between implementation of the intended program and befriending, Mina expressed the following concerns.

Today Raein just wanted to sit and talk rather than play badminton. Reflecting on my mentoring today, I am not sure I did right thing, because I could not cover the program content I was supposed to. Finding the appropriate balance between being a close friend and a real mentor is still difficult for me because I am not confident dealing with this issue. (Mina, reflective journal)

Coaching of sports skills

As playing sport was a major attraction that motivated participation in the program, coaching and improving sports skills was another important activity orientation. This orientation was strengthened when

mentors with intensive sports experience were matched with children who were highly motivated to improve their sports skills. The mentors focused on teaching sports skills by explaining, demonstrating, and providing feedback for skills improvement, and they modified tasks to suit the mentee's level of skills and understanding.

The mentees also perceived playing sport as a critical component of the SMS program. When asked to describe the program to an imaginary friend, Sunghan said, "It is a sports program. You play sport with a mentor and get better at the sport when you don't miss it." When the activity orientation centered on coaching and learning sports skills, the mentees avoided engaging in goal-setting activities or learning life lessons because this reduced their time playing sport. Although the program was designed to integrate life skills into sports skills teaching, the mentors neglected the life skills component because they were too focused on teaching sports skills. Reflecting on the limitations of the coaching orientation, Kangwoo reported as follows:

At first, I thought the goal of sports mentoring was to help him play sports better and improve his sports skills. Now I recognize that I lost sight of the mentoring aspect. I need to work more to integrate sports and life skills. (Kangwoo, reflective journal)

Although the SMS program had both sports and life skills components, this mentor implemented an abbreviated version of the SMS by focusing only on sports skills improvement. The selective implementation of the SMS program shows that the mentor's background and the mentee's motivation influence the nature of the relationship in a sports mentoring program.

Development of life skills

The developmental orientation focused on developing life skills that could be used beyond a sports setting. It focused on three different ways of teaching life skills: by integrating them into the sports instruction, by using sports narratives, and through games nights or community exploration activities. First, the mentor focused on mentoring life skills while teaching sports skills. Yusang, for example, taught etiquette: how to greet people before a game, fair play, and respecting one's opponent while playing badminton; he also encouraged his mentee to apply these skills wherever he played the game.

Second, the mentor used indirect sports experiences such as the stories of athletes, sports cartoons, or movies depicting exemplary sportsmanship. The SMS program provided a list of books, stories, proverbs, and cartoons related to table tennis, badminton, and soccer. The use of sports narratives made the mentees perceive their mentor as a storyteller rather than someone who admonished them, which made them more responsive to the life skills mentoring. Sunghan commented as follows.

My mentor was a good storyteller who told me stories based on books such as "Pingpong." I learned how to overcome bullying or get out of trouble by playing table tennis. It was more persuasive than preaching about what I should or should not do. (Sunghan, interview)

Third, the mentors perceived that community-based activities such as going out to watch a sporting event, going skating, and fetching and returning the mentees helped them learn to apply the life skills in real-life situations. Because the application of life skills requires the identification of transferable skills and consistent encouragement in real-life situations, the unique strength of one-on-one mentoring is the individualized bridge it provides for youth to transfer these skills via community-based activities.

Influence of sports mentoring on youth life skills development

Participation in the SMS program influenced the youths' improvement in (a) physical activity and sports skills, (b) self-confidence and connectedness, and (c) self-management and growth skills.

Improved physical activity and sports skills

As the SMS program incorporated physical activities and sports, the mentees reported improvement in their physical activity and sports skills. When asked about the benefit of the SMS program, a 4th grade boy, Chajun, replied, "I became more physically active and lost some weight here. It really made me feel good about myself." In addition, the improvement in sporting skills made it possible for the mentees to play and enjoy sport after school or during physical education classes. In addition, a 5th grade boy, Junsuh, reported that he had joined a school sports club to play badminton because he discovered that badminton was fun and it suited him. These comments show that the SMS program provided opportunities for the mentees to learn new activities and improve their skills, and ultimately helped them transfer their sports skills beyond the mentoring context. The one-on-one sports mentoring provided them with a psychologically safe context in which to learn skills with individualized feedback and motivational strategies. Chajun commented on this.

My friends used to criticize me a lot because I could not play soccer well. But I improved my soccer skills a lot here because my mentor taught me well. I felt safe here because nobody blamed me for not playing well. It was only me and my mentor, and he always encouraged me to keep trying, even though I was not good at it. (Chajun, interview)

The improvement in physical and sports skills were direct outcome of the SMS program because sport was a major content and attraction of the program in which the mentors took the role of coach. They used strategies such as modifying tasks to allow their mentees to experience success, providing positive encouragement, and making activities enjoyable. These strategies were similar to those of effective coaches, who use sport for skills and character development (Flett, Gould, Griffes & Lauer, 2013).

Enhancing self-confidence and connectedness

The mentees reported that their improvement in sports skills improved their status with peer and enhanced their self-confidence. Taekwon addressed the issue as follows.

I learned badminton here and used it in my PE class. We had badminton in the Happy School program, and I made 10 out of 10 in a service test. I felt good about myself because my friends told me I was really good and asked me to play with them. I learned that I can improve as long as I keep trying and don't give up. (Taekwon, interview)

The sports mentoring program also facilitated mentees' connections with others and the community. The mentees reported that by learning to play sports they had gained a tool to connect with family members and friends. Regarding his mentee's change in networking and social interaction with others, Kangwoo said, "One day Taekwon came to me and said he had played table tennis with his dad at home and with friends at school. I think he gained a tool to help him connect with others." The mentors also served as a bridge to extend their mentees' connection with other adults beyond sports. Establishing an appropriate and close relationship with a mentor provided a safe middle ground for the mentees to practice how to connect with other people. Regarding how mentoring helped him connecting with others, Sunghan said, "I can now easily make friends with people who are older or younger than me. I don't have to worry about how to talk to people because I learned how to meet and get along with adults during the mentoring."

The mentees also reported having a greater sense of connection and belonging in the community. Given that the sports mentoring activities used neighborhood sports facilities, they helped familiarize the mentees with their community setting.

I didn't know there was a bike trail in my neighborhood until I went there with my mentor to ride a bike. It is a very nice place and I want to go there more often with my friends. I also went skating at General Kang's Park. It is good to know that there is a skating rink near home. I think I now know more about my neighborhood and I like it more. (Junsuh, interview)

The findings showed that the sports mentoring program provided an opportunity to explore their community as a context for playing sport and physical activity. As the community is an important developmental context for youth to acquire and test new skills and values, providing them with opportunities to explore and be connected with their community is essential to promoting positive development.

Improving self-management and growth skills

The sports mentoring program helped the mentees to learn self-management skills such as time and lifestyle management. For example, Janghee reported on his mentee's improved time management skills as follows:

I told him that if he wanted to play badminton well he should know about home preparation. As with his life, he should always plan and prepare for his tasks. I think he is getting better because he is no longer late for his mentoring sessions. (Janghee, interview)

Although life skills can be learned implicitly without a pre-structured program, the comments from Janghee indicate that the structured program content was useful to mentors by providing appropriate metaphors to connect sports with life skills.

As all of the mentors were college students, the mentees had frequent opportunities to visit the university campus for mentoring, which helped to familiarize them with the university setting. Through this frequent exposure, they came to aspire to attending college. The aspiration for higher education made them more respectful of their mentors and more focused on learning. By capitalizing on community resources, the sports mentoring program provided an opportunity for youth to access resources beyond their reach and expand their horizons to explore future possibilities.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine why the youths participated in the program, the nature of the mentoring relationship, and the influence of the one-on-one sports mentoring on their life skills development. First, the program appeared to have appeal because of the use sport as a medium, the provision of a caring relationship for youths, and the expectation of positive synergy between sport and life skills development. The findings of this study confirm the contention of the literature that sport is a strong hook to attract youth and a viable context and tool for youth development programs (Fuller et al., 2013; Lee & Martinek, 2009). In addition, the parents expected the sports program to close the guidance gap (Hellison, 1985) by providing structured mentoring for their children who lacked sufficient guidance.

Although both the mentees and their parents expected the program to develop life skills that went beyond sports skills, parents expected broader and more general life skills that would enhance academic achievement and concentration, while the youth expected to learn sportsmanship and fair play while making friends with others. Similar outcomes were found by Forneris, Camire, and Trudel (2012), who showed that parents overestimated the value of sport for life skills development, while the youth focused on direct outcomes such as having fun and learning skills and sportsmanship. However, the parental expectations in the present study may have resulted from the SMS program being a mentoring program rather than a mere sports program. It

appears that the program's appeal was its utilization of sport as the content with the addition of relationship-based mentoring and the expecting synergy between these two components.

Second, the study revealed three orientations in the sports mentoring relationship, namely befriending, the coaching of sports skills, and the development of life skills. As a close relationship with the coach or mentor strongly influences the commitment of youths to a program (Schilling, 2001), befriending may be a prerequisite for other mentoring activities. However, the efforts of mentors should not be limited to relationship building; they should also recognize the developmental needs of youth and focus on developing competence and character (Hamilton & Hamilton, 1992). Thus, mentor training is critical to equip mentors with the skills and knowledge to maintain a balance between the horizontal relationship and vertical guidance (Keller & Pryce, 2012).

The mentees' attraction to sport and the mentors' sports experience enhanced their compatibility and facilitated the coaching orientation. The mentees influenced their coaching by asking their mentors to maximize time for skills learning while avoiding mentoring activities such as goal setting. These findings support the literature in that the mentees' responsiveness influenced the focus of the mentoring relationship, whether through active participation or disengaging behavior (Rhodes 2002).

The developmental orientation focused on life skills by capitalizing on the mentor-mentee relationship and sport. The mentors demonstrated behavior similar to that of effective life skills coaches, including setting clear expectations and boundaries, intentionally emphasizing life skills, and identifying teachable moments while teaching sports skills (Flett et al., 2013). In addition, this study demonstrated the possibility of using sports narratives as a medium for sports mentoring. Combined with direct sports experience such as playing games or skills practice, the indirect experience of sports narratives involving life lessons facilitated greater verbal sharing of moral values and life skills between mentor and mentee (Hochstetler, 2006). Sports narratives served as a tool to promote relational activities between them while providing direction for the development of character and life skills.

Finally, participation in the sports mentoring program enhanced the mentees' sports skills, their confidence and sense of connectedness, and their self-management and growth skills. Their perception of improved sports skills was a proximal outcome, which mediated enhanced self-confidence and connection with others by capitalizing on sports skills as assets to gain status in the peer group or extend relationships with others. These findings highlight the importance of skill building opportunities during youth mentoring, using specific goals and a structured approach rather than merely providing relational opportunities (DuBois et al., 2002).

In addition, the mentor-mentee relationship played a critical role in enhancing the mentees' connections with others and their community. The experience of building a relationship with an adult mentor was transferred to connections with other people, as the mentor provided a safe middle ground to practice connecting with adults. Furthermore, the mentees envisioned themselves as college students and gained aspirations for their future through exposure to the social capital of their mentors, such as their sports experience, community knowledge, and background as college students. This finding supports the literature on mentor-mentee relationships as providers of information and resources beyond the reach of the youth, ultimately increasing their social capital by serving as a bridge for the transfer of resources (Grossman & Bulle, 2006).

The findings of this study also show that sports mentoring can be a unique context and tool for developing self-management and growth skills. The life skills outcomes such as a healthier life style, future aspirations, and respect for learning are similar to those of other sports-based youth development programs (Fuller et al., 2013; Lee & Martinek 2009). The self-management and growth skills, however, centered mainly on the personal dimension rather than the cultivation of teamwork or leadership skills. This appears to have resulted from the one-on-one structure of this mentoring program, which provided few opportunities to practice in group or team settings. Therefore, the gradual inclusion of small groups or team-based activities could maximize the potential of sport to develop leadership and teamwork skills.

Conclusions

This study contributes to our understanding of the potential of one-on-one sport mentoring for youth's life skills development in the following ways. First, this study added evidence that sport can be a great hook for youth development program, and it can be a great vehicle for positive youth development. Second, as the effects of a sport mentoring program can be influenced by the interplay between the sports content, the mentoring structure, and the nature of the relationship between mentor and mentee, these characteristics should be considered for designing and implementation of sport-based mentoring program.

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