Evaluation research in sport for peace initiatives: A personal reflection and proposed methodology

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Sport has been viewed in many developed countries as a panacea for a range of social problems; such as crime, economic disadvantage, poor health, low education attainment and conflict. This has led to considerable public and private investment in initiatives that use sport to address these issues. However, funders, policy makers and academics are increasingly asking questions about some of the claims made about the wider role of sport in society. This has highlighted considerable difficulties in measuring the effectiveness of programmes that use sport to address social issues.[1] Nonetheless, delivery organisations and their staff continue to evangelise about the wider social role of sport and root their programmes in ambiguous objectives that make evaluation difficult.[2] This paper is informed by existing 'critical' research to outline the somewhat muddied context for local Peace III initiatives set for 2012 and 2013. Following a brief review of research on sport for development, from which the sport and peace literature has emerged, I review previous fieldwork and propose a reflexive ethnographic, active-member approach[3] to the study of a sport for peace project. From this it is hoped that we can gain a greater understanding of the conditions by which evaluators find themselves embedded within when measuring programme effectiveness.

Introduction

In 2000 sport and physical activity were included as tools to help address the Millennium Development Goals. This inclusion has created many opportunities for Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) to use sport programmes to address a number of social ills. Linked to this explosion has been a dramatic increase in the range of evaluative studies and commentaries that have sought to investigate the utility of sport-for-development (SFD) programmes. This paper serves as a self-reflective review and critique of my own previous involvement with Peace III programmes that have used sport as a tool to develop peace, reconciliation and foster good relations. In order to

avoid academic navel gazing I have arranged the discussion into a series of parts that ideally should have been carried out before my initial engagement in the field. Nevertheless by undertaking this self-reflection at the current time I aim to provide a way of satisfying the professional requirements of my evaluator role while possibly contributing to the literature base on SFD and sport for peace and development (SFPD). I will use four sections to achieve this goal. Part one will provide a brief overview of the SFD/SFPD literature and highlight a number of concerns. These issues can be categorised into two areas: one covering broader, macro-level themes including the socio-political issues of SFD and the second covering more micro-level management and operational issues. As operations are of greater relevance to the current project, this latter aspect will be of primary importance. Following this I will review my previous engagement with SFPD through the Peace III programme. My previous experiences in the field could be seen as an overtly functional response to satisfying 'donor-required' tasks for the monitoring and evaluation of the programmes. As these experiences strengthened my understanding of the area, they also provided me with a body of work that upon reflection has developed a nascent, critical awareness of the area. Hence it is this experience that provides the justification for adopting a more reflexive, ethnographic and participatory approach than what has gone previous. The penultimate section is an overview of a proposed methodology that I will seek to employ that will enable me to report on my functional requirements; to evaluate programme outcomes and record best practice; while positioning the study through interpretive methods to contribute to the SFPD literature. Finally I will look to provide a summary of these thoughts and draw some conclusions from the discussion.

Sport-for-Development (SFD)

Sport-for-development covers any intervention that seeks to address inequality or disadvantage in society. SFD draws upon perceived assumptions about the attractiveness of sport to engage many 'disadvantaged' target groups. Both internationally and locally, considerable public and private investment in initiatives that use sport to address these issues is being made. However, funders, policy makers and academics are increasingly asking questions about some of the claims made about the wider role of sport in society. This has highlighted considerable difficulties in measuring the effectiveness of programmes that use sport to address social issues as varied as personal and community development, educational attainment, health and well-being, managing at-risk youth and contributing to reconciliation and peace efforts.[4] It is with this latter focus that we are interested in.

Despite historical complexities of the association between sport and war[5] sports' general level of attractiveness has seen its increasing use as a tool for working towards peace and reconciliation. The sport-for-peace and development movement[6] is a subsector of the wider sport-for-development field. The failure to demonstrate substantial impacts by those using sport in development missions has led some academics like Levermore[7] to question the semantic positioning of sport as a tool for development. This lack of substance has resulted in the movement not benefitting from mainstream development agencies. Regardless it is bolstered by support from the United Nations, UNICEF, the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the International Labour Organization. Despite this support, Kidd found the SFPD area to be "woefully underfunded, completely unregulated, poorly planned and coordinated and largely isolated from mainstream development efforts."[8]

While it is not the aim of this paper to provide an extensive review of the SFD/SFPD literature, generally the body of work is influenced by two perspectives; the first can be categorised as the more functional, NGO-initiated work,[9] while the second covers the more interpretive and/or critical contributions of academics.[10] These two broad categories do not serve as a comprehensive taxonomy, nor do they operate as a continuum with consultant and academic at opposite ends of the spectrum. Nevertheless there are some distinct differences in their collective evaluation of SFD. Recently reviews have been undertaken of the literature base by academics working through consultancy roles.[11] The results have suggested that there are a number of concerns about this work. These concerns will be separated into macro and micro level issues that impact on the ability of programme managers to demonstrate possible outcomes. At a macro level there are issues with the influence of values, assumptions and theoretical claims of many SFD/SDP programmes, while at the micro-level there are a number of issues regarding the management and operation of said programmes.

Macro issues: conceptual issues concerning programme establishment
The values of SFD programmes are strongly influenced by the wider development agenda. Although many NGOs may be relatively young, they possess institutionalised belief systems. Kidd[12] discussed the role of the leader in these organisations as an individual whose personal beliefs heavily influences the culture. In certain cases for SFD organisations this may be a former high-profile athlete whose personal beliefs hold great influence over the strategic management of the NGO. This leader can act consciously or unconsciously to impose their values on both the organisation and the work it carries out. Nevertheless there are issues with this role:

> The single-minded purpose and confidence that sport instils in
> champions, a commendable attribute when transferred to many other
> settings, militates against inter-cultural sensitivity and needs-based
> programming in development.[13]

A number of authors have observed that many SFD organisations are
infused with strong beliefs which could be vaguely (and deliberately so)
termed the 'power of sport.' Kay suggests that this is a recurring theme when
attempting to evidence the social impact of sport.[14] This 'power of sport'
mantra is relevant as it can be ingrained into the belief systems of the
organisations and the individuals who work within them. Akin to holding a
religious belief, comparisons ensue that SFD is guided by evangelism and
promoted with missionary zeal.[15]

These values and belief systems make it difficult for members within these
institutions to critically consider the implications of their work on their target
groups. This has given rise to concerns regarding the neo-colonial importation
of Western ideologies on diverse target groups.[16] The delivery of top-down
sporting programmes influenced by these values is similar to the development
of historical sporting forms influenced by muscular Christianity, or more
recently Western neoliberalism which makes it difficult for target groups to
develop local solutions to local issues.

A third issue is the difficulty in the measurement of SFPD interventions.
Although this impacts on micro-level issues, the over-arching, theoretical
underpinnings of how interventions – both sport and non-sport - can work to
achieve outcomes are unclear. Considerable difficulties exist in separating the
rhetoric of wider SFD policy and measuring the effectiveness of SFPD
programmes.[17] Levermore noted how certain SFPD programmes have aimed
simply to alleviate tensions that have arisen through conflict.[18] Coalter
suggests that essentially these programmes are concerned more with
individual and community development rather than peace *per se.* He suggests
that these programmes do not examine the power structures that are at work to
keep these individuals and communities in-need.[19]

In addition to these macro-issues there are concerns that arise from the
operational management of SFPD programmes. In the sport for peace project
at the heart of this paper my role as its evaluator begins only once the objective
setting and programme design phases are complete. In addition to this
secondary involvement all evaluators are required to adopt the *Aid for Peace*
evaluation method. These, ultimately are considerations that should
demonstrate that micro-level issues are more relevant in this case.

Micro issues: programme management and operations

A number of operational issues have been observed emanating from SFD work. Coalter believes that the root of these problems is either ambiguous objectives or vague programme designs that make evaluation difficult.[20] Evaluation is important to demonstrate the objectives are achieved and that actuality[21] can be attributed to the SFPD work. In her review of the SFD literature Cronin[22] produced a selection of ingredients that were required. She suggested nine principles should be addressed (see table 1). Clearly these issues include more than just objective setting and monitoring and evaluation. Nevertheless the role of the evaluator should be able, in theory to influence these choices. However in my personal practice this is yet to be the case.

Table 1: Cronin's suggested ingredients for effective SFD design

Style of delivery	Delivery should be based on needs of target groups using outreach services
Wider development programme	Sport should be a building block in a wider programme of engagement with pathways progressing toward mainstream sport and non-sport activities
Target group	Programmes should avoid bias towards any one group, gender, ethnicity etc.
Participation	All participants should be involved in programme design, implementation and review
Values	Appropriate values must be replicated in the management and operation of the programme
Relationships	Leaders should be from local areas to assist in relationship building. Positive social skills are more important than sport skills
Partnerships Long-term	Partnerships and goals should exist at all levels Long term solutions that consider the level and frequency of engagement are important
Monitoring and evaluation	Mixed methods approaches that focus on attributionor 'plausible association' should be built into the programme

Adapted from Cronin (n.d.)

To perform the practical component of both monitoring and evaluating the current programme I am required to adopt the Aid for Peace framework. The benefit of this model is that it provides capacity for the inclusion of participatory methods to engage stakeholders in all elements of the evaluation.[23] In addition to the obligations of this model I propose to adopt a methodology that allows me to think more critically about the role of evaluation research in SFPD.   From within my own field (the management of sport) there is a growing interest in designing measurement and evaluation models for SFD work. Within this niche literature Schulenkorf[24] has stressed the importance of local change agents within the SFD process to facilitate relationship building.   He has also devised a series of event management procedures which act to ensure programme aims and objectives are achieved. Additionally Lyras and Welty-Peachy[25] have attempted to provide a theoretical model for the management of SFD.   This model [Sport for Peace and Development Theory (SPDT)] is a mixed methods approach grounded in Lyras'[26] doctoral research on inter-community conflict in Cyprus. Designed to address the programme design issues mentioned above the model is built upon five theoretical tenets: an impacts assessment, organisational considerations, a sport/physical activity component, and educational and cultural enrichment components. Despite not being involved in objective setting and programme design this approach will still permit me to evaluate the programme outcomes and review the programme processes; from the rationale for the project, its tender, and to how the programme was designed and implemented. To do this I draw upon my previous experience in Peace III sport projects and a version of my PhD methodology.

My previous experience with Peace III

Between October 2009 and May 2011 I was involved in three projects for the Ulster Sports Academy: the Sport and Community Integration & Education programmes run in conjunction with the CAN Partnership (Carrickfergus, Antrim, Newtownabbey); the Investing in Our Youth project in the Southern Peace Partnership and the Indigenous and Ethnic Minority Sport and Leisure Sharing for Peace Building Programme of the North-East Peace Partnership. Without reviewing each programme the outputs included two research reports, two school workbooks and one legacy training workbook was produced across these programmes. Rudimentary academic analysis was applied to the data where it was content analysed and mostly accepted at face value. While much of this work was functional, the learning that came from the process was of greater importance. The findings from the projects have developed a more critical understanding of the aforementioned macro and micro issues of using sport as a tool for reconciliation and community cohesion. In table 2 I outline some general issues formed from observations

of the work undertaken. These are not 'ground-breaking' as many of these have been covered in the literature, however they demonstrate the literature has relevance for local conditions in Northern Ireland.

Table 2: Observed issues in the management of Peace III Sport Programmes

Programme Design	Programmes are designed by the successful contractor and then delivered with community partners. Sugden (2006) warned against this for fear of relegating local delivery agents to minor roles. Feedback received on the second project suggested that some perceive the Peace III programmes to be designed for consultants rather than community groups - with the major financial benefits flowing to the former. Additionally the short timeframes given for the projects gave primacy to programmes with shallow engagement across a broad range of target groups.
Objective Setting	Objectives were established 'top-down' through the tendering process hence they were adopted by the successful contractor. Additionally there are issues regarding the precise nature of the goals established at the Partnership management level.
Isolation of sport in cultural programmes	Sport is isolated from other cultural activities. This also exists for arts projects across the Partnerships. Where links between sport and other issues are built into programme design they follow Coalter's (2007) *plus*-sport framework potentially limiting effectiveness.
Selection of arget groups	The requirements to partner with community groups within the time-scale of the studies favoured self-selected target groups that were already members of some sport or community organization. This acted to exclude those from outside these connections becoming engaged in the programme.
Barriers to participation	Some participants felt that the overt focus on peace and reconciliation as barriers to community integration ignored other social and structural barriers, such as the availability of transport or the location of facilities. These also prevented involvement in any community activities (cross-community or not) but were not addressed by the Peace III projects.
Conceptual ambiguity	From these experiences so far there exists a lack of clarity at grassroots levels regarding programme rationales and key concepts. On one project there was an inability to differentiate between good relations and community relations. While these are arguably semantic differences it could risk allowing programmes to be simply branded sport and "insert initiative here", which would encourage strategic donor-driven funding.

Upon reflection I feel I should be more aware of the possibilities of the programme to develop relationships and the creation of social webs.[27] Although these are not explicitly outcomes of the programmes they have clearly been formed during the previous projects I have examined. From this we can extrapolate evidence to suggest how the development of these social networks can add to a larger reconciliation, reconstruction and rehabilitation framework.[28]

A proposed methodology

Organisational context and author's role

Due to the myriad partners and reporting relationships establishing the organisational context for this work is quite a complex process. The *Sport & Peace Building Programme* is managed by the Ulster Sports Academy (*the Academy*) at the University of Ulster. It was launched in response to a tender application for a sport and peace programme to be delivered across the North-East Peace III Partnership. At the micro level the project is managed by *the Academy* in conjunction with multiple community delivery-partners, including an outreach team of *the Academy* itself. The wider project is managed by the North-East Peace cluster. This cluster is a partnership of 24 representatives[29]. Peace III is the European Union's Programme for Peace and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland and the Border Region of Ireland. The programme covers the period 2007-2013 and is built upon Peace I (1995-1999) and Peace II (2000-2006). Although there are many partners in the programme there is a considerable amount of autonomy given to *the Academy* and their community partners. The Sport & Peace Building programme (which is incidentally inspired by London 2012[30]) consists of three broad project areas: a school project engaging primary schools across the region; a young people's project focusing on secondary schools and older teenagers; and a community leaders' project focusing on fifteen different elements as outlined in the original tender process. The author's role in this process is to monitor and evaluate the programme using the Aid for Peace Framework [drawing on a guide to the Peace and Conflict Impact Assessment (PCIA)][31] and to create a best practice guide for future programme initiatives to build-upon. In addition to these requirements for the author's involvement I feel it is pertinent to use this opportunity to contribute to the literature base on SFPD. A more thorough examination of the assumptions and operational management of the programme to achieve its goals can be made.

Research Strategy

To deliver this endeavour an appropriate methodological approach needs to firstly position the researcher inside the programme and enable the collection of data from numerous sources. Kay suggested qualitative methods as suitable for improving the quality of research on the social impact of sport and for SFD work in particular.[32] By drawing both on the lived experiences of those within, and a structural analysis of the sport-for-development context, a greater depth of understanding can be achieved that more quantitative approaches cannot achieve.

> "They allow us to use a wide lens, reaching beyond the sports programme to broader social context of family and community."[33]

Secondly it needs to consider the taken-for-granted assumptions about the 'power of sport' to contribute to complex social aims such as peace. Many organisations that deliver sport for good causes have "an implicit assumption or explicit affirmation that such sport has inherent developmental properties for participants".[34] Research on SFD has been developed using both functional and interpretive methodologies that have drawn upon formal interviews, document analysis and questionnaires to illuminate phenomena. An approach that can therefore examine the programme from a critical, yet constructive internal position is well suited particularly when looking for evidence of relationship building. The master concepts of Bourdieu's practice theory (habitus, field and capital) will form a theoretical construct to examine the *Sport & Peace Building Programme*.[35] The *field* provides the setting for where the programme is staged. In this instance the field is defined within the boundaries of the North-East Peace Partnership and the organisations that comprise the partnership. *Capital* are the stakes that partners and participants strive to earn. This capital can be developed through increased education (*cultural*), *economic* benefit through funding for extra capacity, and the inter-personal and inter-organisational relationships that develop through the work (social capital). Finally the research will seek to understand the worldview (habitus) of the myriad partners and their conceptualisations of what is required to achieve the programme aims. There are however a number of limitations to this approach. The first is that case studies in one context lack generalisability for the wider field of SFD work. While this is a common criticism of case analysis we can increase our understanding of broader themes at work in this increasingly prevalent SFD academic strand by simply increasing the number of cases studied.

Fieldwork

As access to the programme is assured through my role of evaluator the fieldwork phase will be conducted from April 2012 until December 2013. An 'active-member role'[36] will be adopted for the study. The ability of an active member, participant observation approach has been found useful for previous research with community sport organisations.[37] Another limitation of this approach is the power relationships that exist between research and participants. Hopefully the participative approach taken to the implementation of the Aid for Peace system will demonstrate more of a facilitator role that could lessen this distinction. However my involvement will not be solely research-related duties. Crabbe found that getting involved in the operations of the programmes was essential for researchers.[38] By carrying out tasks such as minute taking and delivering elements of training the barriers between the researcher and the participants can be reduced. The data collection strategy will consist primarily of observations from the active member approach combined with a series of formal and informal interviews with staff and adult participants in order to fulfil the Aid for Peace function.

Reflexivity is a hallmark of ethnographic accounts and to ensure credibility while reducing subjectivity, a process of researcher reflexivity will be followed[39]. Aull-Davies suggests that this will help "to problematize the theoretical categories that initially orient research in ways that inform and advance analysis".[40] In this study reflexivity will be established through the following considerations;

1. In an attempt to make my role explicit I will outline the dual purposes of my study to the members of the partnership and its participants.

2. A reflective journal will be maintained throughout the fieldwork phase to permit critical reflections on my role in the research process and its impact on partners.

Analysis of the data will be guided by Cushion and Jones' three overlapping levels approach.[41] The first level will draw on the field notes to create a collection of themes that represent SFD in practice. A second level will be created to ensure a descriptive account of how these practices sought to satisfy the SFPD objectives established by the North-East Partnership. In order to examine the inter-subjectivity of the SFD environment and potential issues it raises the data will be situated within Bourdieu's practice theory. One strategy to highlighting how the process of reflexivity is ensured will be to link the ethnographic data collection methods to Bourdieu's theoretical devices.

Aull-Davies believes that this ensures that the results will be opened to "informed scrutiny, questioning and subsequent modification in the ways that enhance their authority, utility and validity".[42] Given the arguments for and against the utility of sport in development work it is imperative that findings can be examined in an open fashion, possibly enhancing the generalisability of the work.

During the proposed analysis phase other limitations of the ethnographic approach will be accounted. A common criticism of ethnographies is that they are not a perfect description (a full rendering) of the realities they attempt to describe.[43] However being embedded within the programme it should permit me to triangulate observational data through field note, interview and research diary. While I would not claim that the rendering would be complete this process of triangulation will reinforce the dependability of the data collection.[44]

Where to from here….

In this paper I have aimed to highlight some wider issues with sport interventions into reconciliation and peace development work. I have briefly positioned the current project within the growing literature base and attempted to highlight the local relevance of that literature's concerns regarding programme values and project implementation methods. By reviewing my previous efforts in this area, I have attempted to show how a more prepared and considered approach to these tasks can hopefully achieve wider benefits. In attempting to move from the 'can-do' of functionalism to the 'must-we-do' of interpretive and critical approaches a proposed methodology outlined how I will fit in the practical requirements of the task within a wider research project. An outline of this method is given; while it will be refined as the project is implemented it will hopefully serve in intermediate stages as a point for discussion and development.

Notes

1   See Coalter, F., 2007.

2   See Coalter, F., 2010.

3   Adler, P.A., & Adler, P., 1987; Bourdieu, P. & Wacquant, L.J.D., 1992.

4   See Coalter, F., 2007 and Coalter, F., 2010.

5   See Kidd, B. & MacDonnell, M., 2007

6   See Kidd, B., 2008

7   See Levermore, R., 2008.

8   Kidd, B., 2008, p376.

9   See Beutler, I., 2008; United Nations, 2006.

10 See Darnell, S.C., 2010; Jarvie, G., 2011; Kay, T. 2009; Kidd, B., 2008; Levermore, R. 2008

11 See Cronin, O., n.d.; Coalter, F., 2010; Kidd, B. and MacDonnell, M., 2007.

12 See Kidd, B. 2008.

13 See Kidd, B., 2008, p. 377

14 See Kay, T., 2009.

15 See Coalter, F., 2010; Giullianotti, R. 2004; Kidd, B., 2008.

16 See Darnell, S.C., 2010; Giullianotti, R. & Armstrong, G., 2011.

17 See Coalter, F., 2010; Kay, T., 2009.

18 See Levermore, R., 2008.

19 See Coulter, K., 2010.

20 See Coulter, K., 2010.

21 See Kay, T., 2009.

22 See Cronin, O., n.d.

23 See Bush, K., 2009.

24 See Schulenkorf, N., 2012.

25 See Lyras, A. & Welty-Peachy, J., 2011.

26 See Lyras, A., 2007, 2009.

27 See Lederach, J.P., 2005.

28 See Kidd & MacDonnell, 2007.

29 Consisting of 2 representatives from across each of the 6 councils and 12 social partners from across the region; the region covers the northernmost council areas of Northern Ireland from Limavady in the west to Larne in the east.

30 "The London 2012 Inspire programme enables non-commercial organisations across the UK to link their events and projects to the London 2012 Games." (LOCOG, 2012)

31 See Bush, K., 2009.

32 See Kay, T., 2009.

33 Kay, T. 2009, p. 1180.

34 Coalter, F., 2010, p. 298.

35 See Bourdieu, P., 1977.

36 See Adler, P.A., & Adler, P., 1987.

37 See Misener, K., and Doherty, A.J., 2009.

38 See Crabbe, T., 2006.

39 See Bourdieu, P. & Wacquant, L.J.D., 1992; Skinner, J. & Edwards, A., 2005.

40 Aull-Davies, C., 2008, p. 237.

41 See Cushion, C. & Jones, R.L., 2006.

42 Aull-Davies, C., 2008, p. 238.

43 Erickson, F., 2006.

44 Lincoln, Y.S. & Guba, E.G., 1985.

Acknowledgements

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