



3/15/2020

PLAYER AND PARTICIPANT DEVELOPMENT MODELS

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Assignment*



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A critical evaluation of player and participant development models for application in the golf talent development environment in a country in Europe where golf is emerging.

INTRODUCTION

Youth sports culture has changed significantly over the past 40 years. Nowadays, it is far less common to see children who simply gather to play sport without interference of adults. Instead, for sport activities children and adolescents are being organised by parents and coaches. An increased pressure to participate on competitive level (even in multiple sports), is a reality despite evidence that increased pressure often leads to injuries, burnouts and overtraining. (Brenner, 2016). Talking about the influencers on talent identification and development, primary stakeholders are parents, coaches and National Governing Body, but their perception and understanding of critical processes (e.g. selection, development, specialisation, success) are context-specific and often questionable (Pankhurst, Collins and Macnamara, 2013).

Golf is attracting those with a higher socioeconomic status, and the cost is often a barrier for participation, as well as the accessibility of the courses. (Bailey *et al.*, 2019) As Bailey and colleagues further state in their Delphi study on engaging young people in golf, it is important how “approachable” the clubs within reach appear to young people who might engage. The social aspect has been studied in a golf context, studies by Zevenbergen (2002), Kitching (2010), Henriksen Larsen and Christensen (2014) should be noted, which discussed social experiences of young people in golf club cultures, and difficulties associated with establishing an effective talent development environment. This essay will focus on issues of *linear* versus *multidimensional* models of player development along the wide youth development pathway. Instead of challenges in changing existing programmes in place, the importance of the social side of the development will be explored from the perspective of a sports environment where golf is still emerging.

DISCUSSION

Long Term Athlete Development model (LTAD)

LTAD model based on ideas of Istvan Balyi (Balyi and Hamilton, 2003), is prescriptive, unidimensional and focused primarily on biological and psychological domains of development as concluded in the review of LTAD by Ford *et al.* (2011). It distinguishes an *early* and *late specialisation* in sport and “windows of opportunity” as opening/closing opportunities for the development of different components of fitness. Nevertheless, it is not peer-reviewed and is widely critiqued. (Ford *et al.*, 2011; Bailey *et al.*, 2010; Collins and Bailey, 2013) As stated in review by Bailey *et al.* (2010), LTAD has been widely accepted among organisations and communities worldwide, in Canada (GolfCanada.ca, 2015), the UK, USA (PGA.coach, 2020), and is promoted for golf development by golf coaches associated with governing organisations as such. As advised by Ford *et al.* (2011), although LTAD has advanced coached and programmes worldwide in understating biological development, due to an array of unexplained questions and lack of empirical evidence as discussed by Collins and Bailey (2013), appropriate scientific investigations for better understanding of developmental issues is essential before applying principles and ideas underpinning LTAD.

In smaller communities and emerging sport environments, initial junior acquisition attempts may result in groups of juniors being diverse in age and gender. Issues of LTAD with its prescriptiveness, categorisation (late starters are not acknowledged, “windows of trainability” lacks empirical support) as acknowledged by Ford *et al.*, (2011), and may lead to a fail in establishing successful pathway if social side of the development is not considered adequately. To address physiological side of development, *The Youth Physical Development model (YPD)* by Lloyd and Oliver (2012) or broader *The Composite Youth Development (CYD)* by Lloyd *et al.* (2015) which attempts to offer a more comprehensive view including elements of *Model of Talent Development (MTD)* by Bloom and Sosniak (1985) might be more appropriate. Both models emphasise the importance of individualisation of programmes and embrace that throughout childhood, almost all fitness components are trainable.

Development Model of Sports Participation (DMSP)

The DMSP model by Côté, although extensively researched over the last two decades, is focused predominantly on the psychological area of development of children and adolescents. It identifies three stages of development: Sampling phase (age 6-12), Specializing phase (age 13-15), Investment phase (age 16+). (Côté and Vierimaa, 2014). Importantly, it also acknowledges critical events leading to transition (around age 13 - end of primary school, around age 16 – once significant development in most areas has been reached), but also acknowledges a *drop-out*. Through its postulates, it describes potential pathways for young people participating in sport and embraces concepts of *Early diversification*, *Deliberate practice* and *Deliberate play* by Bloom and Sosniak (1985).

A body of research exists in a golf context exploring this model, like in the thesis by Cafaro (2013) based on a retrospective analysis of PGA professionals. Cafaro found that golfers’ practice through their DMSP phases, was influenced by facilities and tools available and by individual practice preferences. Cafaro further noted that the methods of “deliberate” practice might range from hitting balls on the range, playing on the course, working on a specific technique or a tour management skill. Although Cafaro’s work is supporting the application of DMSP ideas and concepts, the work is based on a sample of only seven professional golfers from the UK. Challenges of youth golfers in emerging environments may be unique and different, in such environments, a lack of competitions in the areas or having only a single golf course within an easy reach could lead to poor development of adaptation skills.

In the study by Bloom and Sosniak (1985) on the influence of family on golf players, a journey of becoming an "expert" or "elite" involved sustained support by family and coaches, covering financing, coaching, motivation and encouragement. Bridge and Toms (2013) supported (in the golf context) that *early specialisation* (children participating in only one sport from an early age) is not determinantal for high performance at the age of 18. Nevertheless, in emerging environments availability of high-quality coaching programmes may be dependable of availability of coaches (and other resources) in the area at the particular timeframe. Therefore, *windows of opportunity* for young golfers to specialise may occur, but also disappear.

Bio-Psych-Social approach

A Bio-Psych-Social approach is multidimensional in nature, and it recognises how *biological*, *psychological* and *social* domains may play different roles in different stages of development. Although new in a *sports science* context, bio-psych-social approaches to development are more serious attempts to acknowledge a diversity of influences to sports development and the idea that development cannot be approached in mono-disciplinary fashion. As further proposed by Collins and MacNamara (2017:12), reducing development on an only single area (e.g. biological or psychological) might be an oversimplified approach, so dynamic interactions between verity of factors (e.g. interaction between sporting and educational systems) may be entirely missed. (Collins *et al.*, 2012). As DMSP and YPD may be considered as more specific and "prescriptive" frameworks addressing biological and psychological aspects of development, a social side may also be addressed considering research on talent development environments (TDE).

Social factors such as school, parents, coaches, infrastructure, club culture affect participation and are a prerequisite for designing development environment, as no model can be applied if there is no sustainable TDE with a programme in place. Henriksen, Larsen and Christensen (2014) in their *case study*, assessed an environment and tested the application of a holistic approach on a struggling TDE in Denmark. Considering characteristics of successful *versus* struggling TDE, they identified potential weaknesses and recommended obvious actions; to improve communication, to separate *elite* from a *recreational* golfer, to set *vision* and *values*. Zevenbergen, Edwards and Skinner (2002) noticed in their seminal paper on experiences of juniors within a golf club environment that golf clubs are often not inclusionary environments for young people and those who do not adapt to existing culture often are gradually marginalised in status, power and influence. Evidence for this may be generalised to a country where golf is still emerging, which has only several golf courses and practice facilities in different parts of the country, where the overall perception of golf may depend entirely on *culture* and *image* which a particular golf club is projecting.

"The Three Worlds Continuum"

When designing a development programme from scratch, a complete development pathway should be considered. A pathway not solely orientated towards *elite* sports performance. The "Three Worlds Continuum" by Collins *et al.* (2012), aims to stimulate debate over the systems and models which are based on linear principles, that sports development starts with recreational participation and develops toward more selective phases and *elite* and competitive performance. To debate these principles which are the foundation of most sports' development models, it proposes three different reasons for participation: *Elite Referenced Excellence* (ERE), *Personal Referenced Excellence* (PRE), *Participation for Personal Well-being* (PPW). Throughout a lifespan of a sports participant, reasons for involvement and importance of Bio-Psych-Social factors vary and therefore need to be emphasised accordingly to accommodate the change. However, more importantly, it should be embraced that excellence in sport is not necessarily associated with *elite* competitive performance at the end of a sports development

cycle. Instead, a lifelong sport development should be promoted for whether reason participants are participating for - ERE, PRE or PPW.

CONCLUSION

The fact that proper *research and development* of programmes can be costly, in a desire to "act" on issues, a questionable model may be adopted and promoted. Critical assessment and evaluations of development models before an application is critical, to identify appropriate models which should be applied to a specific context. Although elements of LTAD based YDM are valuable in understanding biological development and may be appealing in its prescriptiveness from a structural (and organisational) point of view, issues of emerging golf environments (such as small, diverse groups of children) can be addressed only by fully embracing social aspects of development. As a challenge, it may be considered that Bio-Psych-Social approaches and multidisciplinary models as DMSP are based on principles and are likely descriptive, as such are more prone to interpretations in different contexts. There is a danger that novice coaches in emerging sport environments who seek for a "prescriptive" framework for establishing a pathway and organising effective programmes may find them too broad to lean on. Nevertheless, from the "Three Worlds Continuum" it should be embraced that development is a complex process which should be approached inter-disciplinary. Finally, instead of seeking a prescriptive framework, case studies such as the one on TDE in Denmark may form a body of evidence on which the social side of new bio-psycho-social development programmes may be based.