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Towards a New Logic of Sport Practice for Children

A Case Study of a “Sport for All” School Programme in Sweden

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Abstract: The purpose of this article is to study children and engaged adults' experiences of participating in a Sport for All Programme in school (SAP). Fifteen individual interviews were conducted with one programme manager, three schoolteachers, two sport club leaders, and nine children (five girls and four boys aged 9-10). Bourdieu's (1990) as well as Lave and Wenger's (1991) theoretical models were used as the analytic tools to study the SAP. The analysis reveals that the organization and the practice of the activities are noticeably related to conventionally organized sport. The analysis also shows that the SAP is a new way of organizing and practicing children's sport – with its own logic. The absence of organized competition, the less intensive activities, the greater flexibility and variation in the SAP appear to challenge the conscious and unconscious idea of the meaning and function of competitive sport, especially in children's sport. Thus, the SAP concept calls for a new way of approaching children's sport, and new demands on those who organize and lead the activities.

Key words: Interviews, School sport, After-school care, Sport clubs, Extra-curricular physical activity

Introduction

According to the Swedish Sports Confederation (RF¹), the “Sport for All” concept “Sportis” offers a chance for physically inactive young people to find their own sport or sports. It is specially designed for children under the age of twelve. The purpose of the “Sport for All” policy is to give children an opportunity to try different sports, with a focus on play and motor learning rather than organized competition. The activities must be accessible and provided in the local environment, preferably within or close by the school facilities, according to RF’s published pamphlet “Sportis –idrottsskola med barn i centrum” [Child-Centered After-School Sports]. The Sport for All Programme, provided in and out of school hours, resembles what has been termed ‘Extra-curricular PE’. Penney and Harris (1997) define “Extra-curricular PE” as “the provision of activities outside of the formal PE curriculum most often after school and at lunch times, but also in some schools, at weekends and/or before school” (p. 42). De Martelaer and Theeboom (2006) define it as “a collective term for play, sport and movement not compulsory for pupils but offered within the institutional framework of school with or without other providers (sports clubs, municipalities, private organisations)” (p. 662). The information presented in this article is part of a larger ongoing research project on the sport activities offered to children through the implementation of the “Sport for All” initiative. The purpose of this article is to study children and engaged adults’ (teachers, sport leaders and management) experiences of participating in a Sport for All Programme in school (henceforth referred to as the SAP).

Young people’s physical activity in developed countries has become more institutionalized and occurs more in adult-controlled and organized schemes, instead of being informal, child-controlled activities (Coakley, 2009). In Sweden

¹ We use the Swedish abbreviation, RF (Riksidrottsförbundet) throughout the article

the sports movement attracts many children. Among children aged 10-12, two boys out of three and half of all girls are actively involved in organized sport (RF, 2011). The sporting movement is led by RF that organizes sport for the public. The objective of the sport movement in Sweden is to offer children and youth sport activities. RF declares in their policy that sport for children should focus on playing and learning based on children's rights, needs and abilities (RF, 2009). However, since the seventies, several critical issues concerning youth sport have been under debate in Sweden. Topics such as the children's rights, dropout, early specialisation, too much focus on competition, and parental pressure have been discussed (Augustsson, 2007; Davids, 2005; Engström, 2007; Peterson, 2008). Trondman (2005) argues that if the Swedish sport federation wants to grow, it cannot simply continue with a practice that merely benefits the logic of competitive sport. According to Stöckl, Strandbu, Solenes, Jørgensen, and Fransson (2010), RF points to the importance of new strategies. In order to continue to be an attractive leisure activity among young people, an extended role for the RF in the new millennium has been the development of partnerships between public day care institutions, schools, and sports clubs for creating more sport establishments. From a European perspective, Hardman (2008) discusses the need for a wider community-based partnership: "bridges and pathways to community provision need to be constructed, especially to stimulate young people to participate in physical activity during their leisure time" (p. 16). However, Hardman assumes that this work cannot be done exclusively by PE teachers without the collaboration of other professionals and volunteers. Not all volunteers, Hardman continues, have formal training for working with children and youth. Furthermore, MacDonald (2002) sees a risk in bringing sport club leaders to the educational setting, as they may be more interested in recruiting club members rather than providing sport activities to all pupils.

Given this background, previously conducted studies (e.g., Fahlén & Karp, 2010; Flintoff, 2008; Penney & Harris, 1997; Reid, 2009; Säfenbom, Røe, Söholt, & Kolle, 2009) have also discussed the tension between the conventional sport club practices and “Sport for All” initiatives. These studies argue that the concept of “Sport for All” activities attracts children who are already active in sport clubs. The same studies also show that the activities offered resemble conventional, organized sport. Skille (2004) explains these results as a clash of interests which occurs when organisations that primarily provide traditional organized competitive sport are required to provide activities for non-members with preferences different from those represented in the arena for competitive organized sport.

Nevertheless, studies of a Norwegian sport for all programme, managed by well-established sport organisations (Norwegian Olympic Committee and Confederation of Sports), Skille (2007) and Skille and Waddington (2006) found that Sport for all programmes have the potential to break down social barriers and display a different meaning and function than conventional organized sport do.

Even though some studies have been undertaken to map out sport for all activities, there is a lack of studies investigating the logic of the sport for all concept, especially investigations with a starting point in a child perspective. This article focuses on SAP, which is an organized “Sport for All” activity, offered in cooperation between Swedish schools and sport clubs, targeting children aged 7-12.

Theoretical framework

Flintoff (2003) points out that the implementation of new ways to organize children’s sports rely on how well individuals, at different levels, regulate and

adapt to policies in their specific contexts. One of many challenges within the context of Sport for All school programmes is to know how to plan, implement and reflect on how the practice should be presented. Therefore, the processes within the framework of the SAP context must be seen and interpreted as something other than the processes within the sport contexts entailed in PE-lessons or conventional organized sport (Light, 2011; Light & Nash, 2006; Rönholt, 2005). In childhood research the term “childing practices” is used (e.g., Alanen, 2001; Halldén, 2007), meaning that childhood is created in time and in different social practices by different agents. Such studies focus on how childhood is constructed both by actors in specific fields and by the children in these social practices. According to this perspective, studying the SAP as a unique “childing practice” makes it possible to identify the logic that is constructed in practice. In connection to this perspective, Lave and Wenger (1991) argue that the incorporation of knowledge and skills is a social process that occurs through participation in a specific context that they labeled “communities of practice” (e.g., a sport club).

Hence, a SAP can be seen as situated within the realm of children’s sport. In line with this view Bourdieu’s work can serve as an analytic tool. According to Bourdieu’s theoretical framework, a child’s position and orientation within the culture of sport (In Bourdieu’s terminology sport is seen as a social field) depends on how his or her resources (e.g., sport preferences and physical competence) are valued in that specific context. Bourdieu terms these resources ‘capital’. The organization and implementation of organized children and youth sport are largely governed by historical traditions of what type of symbolic capital that is recognized as valuable in social field of sport – a form of sport capital. In Bourdieu’s vocabulary the concept of “habitus” can be seen as embodied capital, for example, sport capital. Within this field of sport, children and youth sport constitute a subfield with its own discourse and set of beliefs. It

is the field's specific logic and practice that determines what is at stake and what kind of capital is required to participate in the game. This means that the position an agent takes in a field depends on the volume and structure of the capital she/he can mobilize.

Furthermore, fields are not only reproduced; agents can also use their capital to transform the field. For example, the transformation of sport practices is created through struggles about the legitimate way to practice sport. An example of this is the diverging opinions on whether children's sport should offer play and recreation or produce elite athletes. Bourdieu claims that the transformation of the sport field is a change of available activities in relation to the changes of potential athlete's expectations, interest and values (Bourdieu, 1990; 1991; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Broady, 1990).

Bourdieu emphasizes, as do Lave & Wenger (1991), that meaning is created in practice and in the encounter between the individual and the environment. However, Bourdieu suggests more strongly that meaning is influenced by the individual's previously acquired assets. The same phenomena could have completely different meanings and functions depending on the assets of capital (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Broady, 1990; Light, 2011). The SAP can be seen as a "community of practice" in the field of sport where children's sport and the sport for all concept are subfields within the field of sport. In the present study, Bourdieu's, as well as Lave and Wenger's, theoretical models are used as analytical tools, with a focus on the participants' agency in relation to the context of the logic of practice in the SAP

Method

The present study follows a case study design. This approach supports the formulation of ideas and questions in matters relating to new phenomena where

there is no clear structure or model (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009; Silverman, 2010; Yin, 2009). One SAP implemented in Sweden was selected for detailed study on the basis of the following criteria: (a) the programme should be well-established, (b) the programme should be founded by the “Sport Lift” and/or the “Handshake” projects to run a Sport for all – school programme, and (c) the activities were to be provided in an extra-curricular context.

In total, fifteen individual interviews were conducted with: the programme manager, three school teachers, two sport club leaders and nine children (five girls and four boys aged 9-10). The programme manager and three schoolteachers were selected on the grounds that they regularly worked with the programme. The nine children and the two sport leaders were randomly selected from a list of names. All the steps in the methodological design were carried out in accordance with the Swedish Research Council (Vetenskapsrådet, 2011), securing ethical issues, anonymity and the subjects’ understanding of the agreement.

The interviews took place at a private setting. They were conducted face-to-face at each participant’s workplace. The children were interviewed at school. An interview guide was used with open questions related to the domains connected to the informants’ different roles in the SAP. The interview questions were developed through a pilot study. The interviewer has been working for many years in child sport related project and is well versed in interviewing informants in similar settings. The broad areas of inquiry, which provided the structure for the interviews, were interpretations of the SAP concept, content and experiences of the activities.

All interviews were audio recorded and the interviewer was taking notes during the sessions. The analysis process was concurrent with the interviews, which led

to some minor adjustments of the interview guide. The programme manager and the school teacher were interviewed first, and then the sport leaders, and finally the children. In order to analyse and conclude when saturation was reached the child interviews were also analysed concurrently. Saturation was reached after nine child interviews.

The interviews were then listened to, transcribed into a text format and lastly reread by the interviewer and two other researchers. The transcription was then read and re-read several times with a view to identifying the concepts and ideas of central importance to the respondents' experiences of the SAP (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009; Silverman, 2010) The next step involved grouping the units with similar meanings into themes, on the principle that the ideas in each theme are similar but distinct from the other themes of the data.. The analysis further involved finding a linkage between the themes. The four themes chosen here are: *the content*, *who is SAP for?*, *finding a sport*, and *leadership*. When nothing else is stated, the quotes in the result section are examples of perceptions shared by several informants.

Setting up the context

The selected SAP started in 2003, in a small town located in the western part of Sweden and is still running at the time of writing. The SAP sport activities are offered after school in conjunction with the after-school care services. Participation is on a voluntary basis, which means that the activities are not compulsory for all pupils (extra-curricular programme). Furthermore, it is possible to join the SAP even if a pupil is not registered in the after-school care service. The design of the activities involves inviting different sports clubs to present their respective sport to the children. Each participating club visits the SAP four times during a term. The activities take place in the school facilities.

However, some sports (e.g., sailing and alpine skiing) require transportation to different locations and in these cases the SAP arranges the transportation by bus.

The SAP is organized through a School Sport Club. The School Sport Club is governed by the School Sports Federation (SSF) and is a specialized sports federation for children's and youth sports in secondary and upper secondary schools. The SSF is part of RF and therefore eligible for funding from The "Sport Lift". The role of the teacher is to organize the SAP together with the manager and also to support the sport club leaders who are in charge of the sport activities.

Results

Drawing on the key features of Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1990; 1991; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Broady, 1990) and Lave and Wenger (1991), mentioned in the theoretical section above, we present part of the interview data collected. The interview data are analysed and discussed below in integrated sections. Again, the four themes discussed here are: *the content, who is SAP for?, finding a sport, and leadership.*

The content

The first theme discussed is the activities. In the interview the manager pointed out that the SAP was designed to give children an opportunity to try different sports with an emphasis on play. He said:

Primarily, we want to make the children physically active and make them familiar with different types of sports. And also to give them the opportunity to move and feel good, in a fun and playful way.

However, he also mentioned that sometimes there was a gap in the communication with the invited sports clubs regarding this matter and on these occasions the activities were presented as conventional competitive sports. According to the manager, this easily happens if the sports club leaders only get information to present “their” sport. The risk is, he said, that “there can be too much competition”. This example shows that some sport leaders have resources highly valued in competitive sport. However, these resources, sport capital (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992), are not always compatible with the SAP. As Flintoff (2003) suggests, the implementation of sport for all programmes relies on the specific micro-milieu in every specific context, that is, where and how the actors meet and practice the sport. Flintoff further emphasises, that it is crucial that sport providers on every level are aware of the pedagogy the activities should be based on.

According to the interviewed children, however, the SAP can and does offer opportunities to try different sports with a focus on play, and the activities in the SAP differ from how sport is undertaken in conventionally organized sport. This was particularly expressed by children who were participating in both conventionally organized sports and the SAP. One boy, aged 9, said:

In the SAP, we get to try more new sports, we have different activities. In my football club, we just train and play matches.

Another informant, a girl aged 10, agreed and said that conventionally organized sport has more focus on competition, which means more deliberate and advanced training. In her words:

In the floorball club there is more competition and we have to do more complicated floorball practices in preparation for matches. In the SAP it is easier and more playful.

This suggests that when invited to assist in the SAP, the sports clubs seem to practice a different logic compared to their ordinary settings and practice in organized conventional sport. This is probably a result of the fact that club leaders in the SAP do not have to put emphasis on sport capital such as competition and results. Thus, sport for all activities does not necessarily offer “more of the same” as indicated by earlier research (e.g., Fahlén & Karp, 2010; Flintoff, 2008; Penney & Harris, 1997).

SAP – who is it for?

Another theme that emerged from the interviews was about which children the SAP management wishes to reach through this programme and as well as the group of children that actually participate in the SAP.

The managements’ intention with the SAP was to offer sport activities to children who do not participate in conventionally organized sport. Even though, a few participants were involved in both the SAP and in conventionally organized sport, the teachers claimed that the SAP attracts the group of young people not active in organized conventional sport. As a teacher expressed it:

We seem to have reached those that have no physical activity during their leisure time. And many of them return, so several have the SAP as their only activity for some years.

This indicates that children in possession of little or no conventionally organized sport capital found it valuable to join the programme.

Furthermore, in the interviews the manager and the teachers reflected on the need of the programme in areas where many families with low socioeconomic status live. The manager and the teachers argue that these groups of people lack both sport capital and economic capital. One teacher said:

In this area it is impossible for most children [to get to sports clubs]. And there are hardly any clubs here. And most families do not have a car. So it is absolutely necessary to provide activities in the area nearby.

By providing SAP activities in these areas, the teachers claim that they have attracted the children living there.

Also, interviews with the management and teachers revealed that the SAP has low significance in areas with high socioeconomic status. They implied that most children are already participating in conventionally organized sports in these areas. A teacher pointed out that “for a majority in areas with high socioeconomic status the SAP is only one activity among many others”. The programme manager agreed with this view, and he plans to target the resources in such a way that it gives most effect. This view supports the notion of the SAP as a “catalyst” for generating members to organized sport. But, in honouring the overall purpose of the SAP as a unique practice with other values and outcomes than conventionally organized sport (RF, n.d.), it can be important to give a broader group of children the opportunity to participate in the SAP.

Finding a sport

“Finding a sport” was a common theme in the informants’ discussions about the SAP. This theme occurred both when the management described the aim of the SAP and when the children talked about why they choose to participate in the

SAP. There was consensus among the interviewed children that the SAP is an occasion for them to try different sports. The children claimed that they have learned several new sports in the SAP. Furthermore, for some of the children the SAP created an interest in taking up organized sport among non-sport participants. One boy, aged 9, made the following remark:

I started in the SAP because I wanted to learn more sports. I've learned sports like karate and dance and I'm considering starting in athletics.

For this group of children, the SAP evidently contributed to children getting in touch with different sports. This was also an outspoken and conscious strategy from the SAP management. A teacher described the concept of the SAP in the following way:

Yes, the concept has from the very beginning appealed to me. That clubs come and introduce their activities. Some sports you only have the opportunity to try on occasions like these. It has been odd sports like curling, sailing and alpine skiing, which are hard to be involved in if you don't have very dedicated parents.

Different views about the meaning of "finding a sport" were described in the interviews. Mainly two ideal types were highlighted: Should it be an occasion for testing different sports and having fun for the moment or should it lead into the sports clubs' ordinary activities? This result is interesting in relation to the core purpose of the SAP, which is in line with the first ideal type mentioned above (RF, n.d.).

Further, the analysis of the interviews showed that children and their families had problems in separating the SAP from school. This can be seen as a consequence of the fact that the SAP is strongly related to the school context

(Lave & Wenger, 1991). According to a teacher, the programme is more like an interesting activity within after-school care. She says:

There are some [children] that participate because it is fun for the moment. It is like an ordinary activity in after-school care or a physical education class. I don't think they understand the idea with the programme, nor their families, what a great opportunity it is.

Even though this seems to be a problem for the SAP management and the sport clubs, this was not an issue among the interviewed children. One sport club leader agreed with the description that the children mixed the different aims between the SAP and regular school activities. As a sport leader, he thought that it can be difficult to recruit new members because of this:

My experience is that the children don't come because they want to try a particular sport, but more because the programme is a fun element in the after-school care context.

Again, this is merely a problem for the sport clubs and still not an issue among the children. In this context and according to James and James (2003), children have their own agency, which means that they interpret and take their own decision in different contexts. To some extent, the SAP becomes what children want the SAP to be. And some children take part in the SAP just to learn different sports, and they do not have any interest in taking up a conventionally organized sport. In line with Bourdieu's concept of sport capital (Broady, 1990; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992), children's orientations in the SAP can be governed by the structure and volume of their sport capital. An interviewed teacher said that it can help if the children have friends in a sport and if they know how to take up a sport, but much hinges on the child's own interest. This

motivation may take many forms. A boy aged 9, who wanted to start playing basketball, gave the following response to the question if the programme had inspired him: “No”, he said. “It was because I am tall”.

Furthermore, transferring children from the SAP to conventionally organized sport requires a consciousness that the two are different contexts. What is perceived as meaningful practice in the SAP does not necessarily apply to conventionally organized sport (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Bourdieu, 1990; 1991). A girl in the study liked to play different ball sports in the SAP, but not in conventionally organized sport, and had no plan to join a sports club. Because someone likes to participate in the SAP, it does not signify that he or she automatically likes to participate in conventionally organized sports.

Leadership

Another theme frequently mentioned in the interviews was leadership. According to the programme manager, it is important that the sport club leaders are competent and conscious about the aims of the SAP. He said:

Club leaders that are invited have an extremely important role, and therefore an incompetent person cannot be in charge. It is supposed to be quality, with a child perspective and an understanding of the concept.

Managing the activities in the SAP as a coach calls for a certain types of skills. The coaches meet a different context than the ones they are used to, and find that aspects valued as “high skills” in conventionally organized sport do not necessarily mean “high skills” in the programme context. In Bourdieu’s words, a different capital is valued and requested in the programme compared to conventionally organized sport.

One of the teachers emphasized that it requires a special competence to be a leader in SAP. He elaborated on the difficulty in leading SAP activities as many sport club leaders do not want to lead the activities alone without support from parents or teachers. This was also pointed out by the sport leaders. One leader said:

It has been fun to participate in the SAP, but it would have been helpful if there had been other adults present during the activities, especially adults who are familiar with the children, for example, a teacher. Without support from other adults, we need to put a lot of time taking care of different kinds of disturbance among the children. It would be better if we could get the opportunity to focus more on the sport activities.

According to a sport club leader, another kind of leadership and a different pedagogy is required from coaches in the SAP. She pointed out that it is an interesting learning process to be part of the SAP because it differs from conventional sport activities. She described the sport club and the SAP as two different “communities of practice” (Lave & Wenger, 1991). For her the SAP is an unfamiliar environment and she feels uncomfortable. She added that without a prior pedagogical education in child development, the task of coaching in the SAP is more difficult. She said:

If I hadn't been studying education at the university, I probably would have felt a little lost and would not have known how to meet the children's interest and organize sport in a different way from a child perspective.

What she implies is that children's intentions and interests must be taken into account because they are significant in the construction of practice within the SAP. As Bourdieu (1991) suggests, change in sport practice is a relation between what sport activities are offered and potential practitioner's

expectations and interests. The Programme manager emphasized that he has an advantage because he is a PE-teacher and has knowledge of pedagogy and child development. This knowledge, he stated, is often lacking in coaches engaged in conventionally organized sport.

Concluding remarks

The concept of the SAP advocates a change of the established logic of practicing children's sport, i.e. organized conventional sport. The purpose of this paper was to study childrens' and engaged adults' experiences of participating in a SAP. The result showed that the organization and practice are still closely related to conventionally organized sport. Further, it also proved to be a new way of organizing and practicing children's sport – with its own logic. The history of the field of sport has contributed to a conscious and unconscious idea of the meaning and function of competitive sport. The absence of organized competition, less intensive activities, more flexibility and variation in the SAP, challenge this dominant hegemony, especially in the subfield of children's sport. When the adjusted and developed "Sport for All" initiatives are implemented, sport will be offered in a new context with other meanings and functions compared to conventionally organized sport (Bourdieu, 1991; 1990; Redelius, 2002; Skille, 2004; 2007). Consequently, the SAP concept calls for a new way of approaching children's sport, and new demands on those who organize and lead the activities.

If the logic of children's sport is changing, which the present study indicates, the conditions of leading, teaching and coaching children's sport must also change. The result shows that it can be problematic for the sport club leaders to manage the activities in the SAP. The children's intentions and interests in combination with the structure of the SAP have an impact on the logic of practice, and will

also challenge the sport leaders' coaching style (Alanen, 2001; Bourdieu, 1990, 1991; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; James & James, 2003).

Historically, sport club leaders' competence is imbued with what is considered valuable for organizing and practicing children's sport – they have a “sense of the game” (Bourdieu, 1990; Säfvenbom, 2009). The sport club leaders' sport habitus is formed on the basis of their experience of conventionally organized children's sport. They have a position in the field of sport that requires a different capital compared to the SAP. Hence, in line with the results of our study, they have a sport habitus, which is suitable for conventionally organized sport but is less appropriate to the SAP practice.

Furthermore, the construction of the SAP makes it difficult for the leaders to incorporate knowledge and skills concerning how to act, teach and coach children in the SAP. In contrast to the leaders, the children and the teachers attend the activities more regularly. This gives them a better opportunity to learn the practice that is recognized in the SAP context. Moreover, the children and the teachers share the same community of practice every day in the regular work at school. However, the sport club leaders are unfamiliar in the context of the SAP, and have few chances to become familiar with the context (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Our results show that the implementation of the SAP can contribute to a process of changing the predominant ideas in conventionally organized sport. In line with Hardman (2008), we argue that knowledge of, skills in and dedication for a traditional sport are not enough; it is also important to be aware of ethics and morals in relation to children's rights and development.

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