



Development and initial validation of the Life Skills Scale for Sport



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ABSTRACT

Objectives: The aim of this research was to develop a measure of life skills development through sport.

Method: Four studies were conducted to develop the Life Skills Scale for Sport (LSSS). Study 1 developed items for the scale and included 39 reviewers' assessment of content validity. Study 2 included 338 youth sport participants and used exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and descriptive statistics to reduce the number of items in the scale and explore the factor structure of each subscale and the whole scale. Study 3 included 223 youth sport participants and assessed the factor structure of the scale using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), exploratory structural equation modeling (ESEM) and bifactor modeling. Study 4 investigated the test-retest reliability of the scale over a two-week period with 37 youth sport participants.

Results: Study 1 resulted in the development of the initial 144-item LSSS and provided content validity evidence for all items. Study 2 refined the scale to 47 items and provided preliminary evidence for the unidimensional factor structure of each subscale. Study 3 supported the factorial validity of the scale, with ESEM solutions providing the best fit and resulting in more differentiated factors. Study 4 provided evidence for the test-retest reliability of the scale.

Conclusions: Collectively, these studies provided initial evidence for the validity and reliability of the LSSS; a measure which can be used by researchers and practitioners to assess participants' perceived life skills development through sport.

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To succeed in our competitive and ever-changing global economy young people must develop an abundance of life skills (Gould & Carson, 2010). Such life skills are defined as the skills required to deal with the demands and challenges of everyday life (Hodge & Danish, 1999). In line with the definitions of several researchers (e.g., Cashmore, 2008; Danish, Forneris, & Wallace, 2005), we view skills as behavioral, cognitive, interpersonal, or intrapersonal competencies that can be learned, developed, and refined. Examples of life skills include teamwork, goal setting, interpersonal communication, and leadership. These 'life' skills can be applied to various aspects of a person's life (e.g., schoolwork, a part time job, friendships, sport). Additionally, the World Health Organization (1999) has suggested that such life skills are important for preparing adolescents for the future and ensuring their healthy development. But where do young people develop their life skills? Research suggests that young people develop their life skills

through extracurricular activities such as music, drama, and sport (Larson, 2000). According to Marsh (1992), sport has the greatest number of positive effects of any extracurricular activity. In particular, it has been proposed that the interactive, emotional, and social aspects of sport make it a promising setting for young peoples' development (Danish, Forneris, Hodge, & Heke, 2004; Fraser-Thomas, Côté, & Deakin, 2005; Hellison, Martinek, & Walsh, 2008). As such, the development of life skills forms a key aspect of positive youth development through sport (Jones, Dunn, Holt, Sullivan, & Bloom, 2011). Positive youth development (PYD) is a general term which refers to strength-based and asset-building approaches to developmental research in which young people are viewed as 'resources to be developed' rather than 'problems to be solved' (Holt, Sehn, Spence, Newton, & Ball, 2012). Qualities and competencies such as participants' health and well-being (King et al., 2005; Park, 2004) and their life skills development (Jones et al., 2011) are proposed to indicate or enhance PYD.

Several frameworks, models and theories have recently been applied to the area of PYD through sport. Examples include Benson and Saito's (2001) conceptual framework for youth development

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theory and research (Cronin & Allen, 2015), Bronfenbrenner's (1999) bioecological model of human development (Strachan, Côté, & Deakin, 2009), Bass's (1999) transformational leadership theory (Vella, Oades, & Crowe, 2013), and Ryan and Deci's (2000) self-determination theory (Inoue, Wegner, Jordan, & Funk, 2015). Common among these frameworks, models, and theories is that they include young peoples' development as an outcome variable. Furthermore, they all highlight that researchers should investigate how key aspects of the youth sport environment (e.g., the coaching climate, peer relationships) can impact young peoples' development. In particular, self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000) seems a promising theory for investigating the mechanisms by which young people develop their life skills through sport. Self-determination theory suggests that autonomy support, satisfaction of the three basic needs (autonomy, competence, and relatedness), and self-determined motivation all relate to a person's development and well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Aspects of this causal sequence have been investigated extensively in relation to well-being (e.g., Smith, Ntoumanis, & Duda, 2007; Standage & Gillison, 2007) but much less attention has been given to the mechanisms of personal development. According to Hodge, Danish, and Martin's (2012) conceptual framework for life skills interventions, the basic needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness are the underlying psychological mechanisms that contribute to personal development within all life skills programs. Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that life skills need to be intentionally taught (Theokas, Danish, Hodge, Heke, & Forneris, 2008) in order for the development of life skills to actually occur. To further our understanding of young people's development and explore the mechanisms that lead to PYD, a critical step is to establish valid and reliable tools to assess indicators of PYD (i.e., life skills).

As the most popular leisure activity for young people (Hansen & Larson, 2007), sport has been proposed as an ideal setting for the development of life skills. Research suggests that through sport young people develop: teamwork (Holt, 2007), goal setting (Holt, Tink, Mandigo, & Fox, 2008), time management (Fraser-Thomas & Côté, 2009), emotional skills (Brunelle, Danish, & Forneris, 2007), communication (Gould, Collins, Lauer, & Chung, 2007), social skills (Gould, Flett, & Lauer, 2012), leadership (Camiré, Trudel, & Forneris, 2009), and problem solving and decision making (Strachan, Côté, & Deakin, 2011). The majority of these studies relied on qualitative research methods (e.g., interviews) to investigate sports participants' life skills development. In fact, only two of the eight life skills listed above (goal setting and social skills) can presently be assessed using a suitable sport-specific measure – the Youth Experiences Survey for Sport (YES-S; MacDonald, Côté, Eys, & Deakin, 2012). Without the availability of alternative measures to comprehensively assess the range of life skills young people are purported to develop through sport, researchers are unable to test and refine the theories, frameworks, and models which describe, explain, and predict youth development. Furthermore, programme development and evaluation that is theoretically grounded remains limited.

Despite calls for new measures to be developed (Gould & Carson, 2008), only one sport-specific measure is currently available to assess life skills development through sport (i.e., the YES-S; MacDonald et al., 2012). This survey is an adaptation of the Youth Experience Survey 2.0 (Hansen & Larson, 2005) and measures personal and social skills, cognitive skills, goal setting, initiative, and negative experiences. Several recent studies have used the YES-S when investigating life skills development through sport (e.g., Bruner, Eys, Wilson, & Côté, 2014; Cronin & Allen, 2015; Vella et al., 2013). Nonetheless, these studies have only provided evidence for the internal consistency reliability of each subscale, with evidence

of other forms of reliability and validity yet to be established. Despite the YES-S being a promising measure, there are several other life skills that young people are purported to develop through sport.

Using content analysis, Johnston, Harwood, and Minniti (2013) identified the key assets or what others would term life skills (e.g., Danish, Petitpas, & Hale, 1992; Gould & Carson, 2008) that young people develop through sport. These life skills were: teamwork, goal setting, time management, emotional skills, interpersonal communication, social skills, leadership, and problem solving and decision making. Johnston et al. (2013) analyzed 34 papers on PYD through sport and showed that these eight life skills were cited a total of 95 times across these publications. These particular life skills are important as they are related to a range of positive outcomes including: workplace productivity and success (Locke & Latham, 1984; Rubin & Morreale, 1996), academic achievement (Britton & Tesser, 1991; Humphrey et al., 2011), sport and exercise performance (Burton, Naylor, & Holliday, 2001), overall health (Claessens, van Eerde, Rutte, & Roe, 2007), and psychological well-being (Brackett & Mayer, 2003; Judge, Bono, Erez, & Locke, 2005). However, there is presently no suitable measure to comprehensively assess the development of these key life skills within sport. Therefore, our aim in developing the LSSS was to provide a much needed measure to comprehensively assess the eight key life skills that young people are purported to develop through sport.

Developing such a measure would allow researchers and practitioners to further investigate whether young people are developing these life skills through sport and pave the way for theory-based research concerned with the antecedents and consequences of life skills development. As youth development is best studied longitudinally (García-Bengochea & Johnson, 2001), the scale would allow researchers and practitioners to track young peoples' development of these life skills over time and determine the mechanisms of development. Finally, this scale would help researchers to investigate the efficacy of existing programs designed to teach young people life skills through sport (e.g., Sport United to Promote Education and Recreation, SUPER; Danish, 2002) and further promote the development of theory-led life skills interventions.

Overall, the purpose of the present research was to develop a scale which could assess the extent to which young people perceived they were developing the eight life skills through sport. In line with previous research on PYD and life skills development through sport, this survey was developed for youth sport participants in the 11–21 years age range (Holt, 2008). In total, a series of four studies were conducted to develop and provide initial validity (i.e., content, factorial, convergent, and discriminant validity) and reliability (i.e., internal consistency and test-retest reliability) evidence for the LSSS.

1. Study 1 – Initial development of the scale

The aim of this study was to create a scale to measure participants' perceived development of the eight life skills within sport. This involved defining the life skills, selecting components which best represented each life skill, and developing items to assess the life skills. After developing the initial item pool, academics with expertise in one individual life skill reviewed items related to that particular life skill. Based on experts' ratings, items were selected for the initial version of the scale. A thorough approach to developing the scale was important because several researchers have highlighted content validity as an area which has been neglected when developing measures for sport psychology (Gunnell et al., 2014; Zhu, 2012).

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