Without the academic part, it wouldn't be squash": Youth development in an Urban Squash program

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Abstract:

Purpose: The purpose of this study was to examine youth development outcomes in an Urban Squash program. Method: A mixed method approach to was employed to address three research questions: 1) to what extent did the Urban Squash program exhibit features of a quality OST program?; 2) what aspects of the Urban Squash program were most valued by participants and stakeholders?; and 3) how were outcomes gained within urban squash transferred into the school day. The OST Observation Instrument was employed to provide a measure of fidelity related to the implementation of quality program structures. Youth participants (N = 21) and adults (N = 13) with knowledge of the program were interviewed in a semi-structured format. Qualitative inductive analysis and constant comparison methods were used to generate themes. Results: Systematic observations demonstrated that the program reflected a strong program design with activities that were sequenced, active, personally focused, and explicit. Within that context, four qualitative themes related to quality programming include 1) academic enrichment, 2) academic transfer, 3) relationships, and 4) personal and social responsibility. Conclusion: Urban Squash provided a quality program structure. Transfer from the program to the school was evident with academic enrichment and personal and social responsibility.

Keywords: teaching personal and social responsibility | transfer | out of school time | sport-based youth development

Article:

The hours immediately following the school day have been described as critical hours for school-aged youth, particularly those who are underserved and may be unsupervised during that time (Zill, Nord, & Loomis, 1995). Hence, a variety of after-school programs are provided in an attempt to promote academic, social, emotional, and physical development among youth (Miller,

2003). The growing field of positive youth development (PYD) attempts to provide positive experiences and safe environments through extracurricular programs (Catalano, Berglund, Ryan, Lonczak, & Hawkins, 2004). More specifically, sport-based PYD (also known as PYD through physical activity) provides a framework where youth are involved in an intrinsically motivating physical activity that is used as a link to broader organizational goals related to academic achievement, physical development, and personal and interpersonal development (Fraser-Thomas, Cote, & Deakin, 2005; Martinek & Hellison, 2009; Weiss & Wiese-Bjornstal, 2009). Holt (2008) suggests that the most important aspect of a PYD program is its ability to provide sustained positive relationship between youth and adults.

Though many definitions for PYD exist, all models of PYD emphasize the strengths that youth possess over their vulnerabilities (Weiss & Wiese-Bjornstal, 2009). An applied model of sport-based PYD suggests that youth can experience many developmental outcomes through sport participation including development of physical, social, emotional, and intellectual skills (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2005). The applied model asserts that it is the responsibility of policy makers, sport organizations, coaches/teachers, and parents to provide an environment that produces positive outcomes rather than negative ones. Benson's (1997) 40 internal and external developmental outcomes explain the potential for PYD, which are summarized in three areas including: protection from high-risk behaviors, enhancement of positive behaviors, and development of resiliency needed to overcome difficult situations. Given its broad definition, PYD can be employed in many different contexts. This paper considers the role of PYD in the context of sports.

Positive Youth Development Through Physical Activity and Sport

Scholars in physical education and related areas have long argued that physical activity can promote PYD (Weiss, 2008). Early papers in the Research Quarterly, for example, advocated for physical education curriculum designed to build character (e.g., McCloy, 1930; Blanchard, 1936). Since 2004, the National Standards for Physical Education have included an emphasis on responsible behavior and respect for self and others in physical activity settings (NASPE, 2004). Therefore, professionals in physical education may be well positioned as a leader in promoting PYD as it aims to promote development in all four domains (i.e., physical, intellectual, social, emotional; Hemphill, 2014). While notable critiques have been made (Gard & Wright, 2001), the health and wellness benefits of a physically active lifestyle are generally accepted (Janssen & LeBlanc, 2010). Furthermore, structured physical activity can help improve fitness and skill development (US DHHS, 2008). Recent research suggests that school-based or community-based physical activity programs can help promote academic achievement (DeMeulenaere, 2010; Centers for Disease Control, 2010; Sallis, Carlson, & Mignano, 2012). Finally, when structured appropriately, sports can provide a context to teach life skills and develop positive peer relationships (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2005).

Hellison's (2011) Teaching Personal and Social Responsibility (TPSR) Model is a physical activity-based instructional model that has been field tested for over 40 years. TPSR has been recognized as an exemplary model for promoting affective outcomes and provides an established instructional approach to sport-based PYD (Petitpas, Cornelius, Van Raalte, & Jones, 2005). Five goals guide the TPSR model, including 1) respect for self, others, and one's environment, 2) participation, effort, and self-motivation, 3) self-directed learning and goal setting, 4) leadership, caring, and helping others, and 5) transfer of the previous four goals into other settings (Hellison, 2011). Importantly, the ultimate goal of the TPSR model is that students apply the initial four goals in other settings such as home, school, and community settings.

Numerous qualitative studies indicate that TPSR is effective in helping youth take on leadership roles, set meaningful goals, and develop prosocial behaviors (Gordon, 2010; Hammond-Deidrich & Walsh, 2006; Wright & Burton, 2008). Teachers who have implemented TPSR in school physical education have reported increased on-task behavior and improved relationships among students (Hemphill, Templin, & Wright, 2013). Other qualitative interview studies report that youth perceived and reported behavior improvement outside of the program (Martinek, Schilling, & Johnson, 2001; Wright, Li, Ding, & Pickering, 2010). While transfer has been noted through some qualitative studies, it also appears to be one of the least examined outcomes in TPSR research (Lee & Martinek, 2013). There is, therefore, a need to triangulate youth reports of transfer (e.g., behavior improvements outside of the program) with other data from sources such as community members, parents, or school personnel (Martinek & Hellison, 2009; Wright, 2009).

Research suggests that PYD outcomes during out of school time (OST) are tied to intentional program structures. This body of literature indicates that high quality OST programs do not happen by chance, but occur when adults create instructional opportunities that are deliberately structured to elicit learning and mastery (Durlak & Weissberg, 2007). In regards to teaching personal and social skills, OST programs have identified "SAFE" learning features to represent quality indicators. The features are described as 1) having a sequenced set of activities to achieve objectives, 2) using active learning to promote skill development, 3) a focus on personal or social skills, and 4) targeting explicit personal or social goals (Durlak, Weissberg, & Pachan, 2010). Toward this end, the OST Observation Instrument is closely aligned with the SAFE features and measures the structure and content of OST programs in relation to: 1) the activities in which youth engage, 2) the structures that facilitate activities, and 3) the quality of the interactions among youth and adults who work with them.

Researchers who study TPSR (Wright, 2009) and after-school programs (Maynard et al., 2013) have discussed the need to report on how closely programs aligned with best practices. For example, previous research on TPSR has used the Tools for Assessing Responsibility-based Education to assess fidelity of TPSR implementation (Hemphill, Templin, & Wright, 2013; Pascual et al., 2011). The OST Observation Instrument (Pechman et al., 2007) provides a tool to assess fidelity of programs that seek to promote personal and social skills through SAFE learning features (Durlak, Weissberg, & Pachan, 2010). A meta analysis of after school program

evaluations reported that observation was under-represented as an evaluation technique (Scott-Little, Hamann, & Jurs, 2002). Hence, scholars who seek to examine such programs may consider including techniques such as observation to address implementation fidelity.

While sport-based PYD has broad support for promoting positive outcomes among youth, most of the programs are designed to integrate personal and social development within the context of sports participation rather than other nonphysical activity contexts. For example, The First Tee life skills program promotes life skills by providing youth lessons in golf. Research suggests that the program helps to promote PYD in the golf context and to transfer those skills to other domains (Weiss, Stuntz, Bhalla, Bolter, & Price, 2013). Alternatively, a model of PYD employed by the National Urban Squash and Education Association (NUSEA; www.nationalurbansquash.org) offers an extension to the sport-based PYD model. NUSEA requires its member organizations to provide structured physical activities through the sport of squash alongside structured academic enrichment. In addition, the programs provide a minimum of three days of programming per week and makes a long-term commitment to youth participants.

As scholars studying TPSR continue to examine transfer outside of physical activity settings, it may also be instructive to understand the transfer within a model that provides complementary academic programming alongside sports. Hence, the purpose of this study was to examine PYD outcomes in an Urban Squash program. Three areas of inquiry were considered: 1) to what extent did the Urban Squash program exhibit features of a quality OST program?; 2) what aspects of the Urban Squash program were most valued by participants and stakeholders?; and 3) how were outcomes gained within urban squash transferred into the school day.

Methods

The impact of an out-of-school time, sport-based PYD program was examined through the use of a mixed method approach to social inquiry. This approach includes the application of qualitative interviewing, observations, and systematic observations (Greene, 2007). With approval from the University Institutional Review Board, we notified all participants of the purpose of this study and obtained informed consent. The study was conducted over the course of one academic year. All adult participants were selected based on extensive involvement, including a two-year minimum for interacting with the program.

Overview of the Urban Squash Program

Urban Squash is a nonprofit organization that provides structured academic enrichment, sports, and community service opportunities through an OST program. The program features the sport of squash, which is a racquet sport played as singles and doubles in competition. Urban Squash includes a 12-member board of directors, two full time staff, a program advisor, and a cadre of volunteers from the Urban University. Youth participants (N = 24; 6th–8th grade) in Urban

Squash attend the Future Scholars School. Future Scholars is a part of the Federal Title I program with a total enrollment of about 600 students in grades Pre-K through eighth. Throughout the academic year, Urban Squash participants receive at least three days per week of after school enrichment, with the option for participating five days per week. The youth take a team bus about two miles to the Urban University, where all Urban Squash programming takes place. On the college campus, youth participate in 90 min of squash instruction and other physical activities followed by 90 min of academic enrichment in a nearby classroom. Each Saturday, students participate in a special squash practice, academic activity, or community service event. The program also features special opportunities for travel. For example, three students recently attended a summer squash camp at Princeton University. Other travel opportunities included squash competitions with other urban squash programs.

Several program structures are in place to promote PYD and the transfer of positive skills outside of the program, particularly to the school context. First, the program has established a formal relationship with the local school district and the Future Scholars School. Urban Squash partially utilizes the school's point-based reward system for expectations such as bus stop behavior and maintenance of school property (i.e., uniforms and equipment). Program staff periodically observes classes and meet with teachers to establish a presence in the school building. Second, the program sets high expectations for students. For example, all students are expected to maintain an average of 80% in all academic subjects. Students who fail to meet expectations are provided with extra support rather than face punitive action. Moreover, the expectations are designed to indicate that program leaders believe youth are capable of performing at a high level. The program provides one-to-one tutoring to help students meet academic goals. A "varsity" level is available to students achieving an average of 90%. Varsity level students can attend extra practices and are selected for travel opportunities. Third, the TPSR model serves as the framework for all programming in Urban Squash. A university faculty member with expertise in TPSR facilitates professional development through a previously published professional development approach to ensure appropriate implementation (Hemphill, Templin, & Wright, 2015). Fourth, a leadership council is available for students who achieve a high level of personal and social responsibility. Fifth, the staff establishes frequent, positive communication with family members through phone calls, texts, reports, and family events. Finally, youth are empowered to be leaders in the program through service to others and having voices and choices in program decisions.

Participants

Youth participants (N = 21) and adults (i.e., teachers, parents, and school and program staff; N = 13) with whom youth interacted with at school, home, and at the PYD program served as the participants in this study (see Table 1). Twenty-one of 24 youth participants were represented in the study, three youth did not participate due to incomplete consent forms. Four students were new participants in Urban Squash and all others had between one and four years of experience.

The demographics of youth participants mirror that of Future Scholars School, where 98% of the students are African American and qualify for the free/reduced lunch program. From the school, two school counselors and a math teacher participated and were selected because of their in depth knowledge of the PYD program and its youth participants. Seven parents participated in the study, representing parents of male and female students and across all grade levels. From the PYD program, two staff and three undergraduate volunteers were participants.

Table 1 Participant Information

Youth Participants With Parent Participants in this Study

MJ, eighth grade	
Sasha, sixth grade	Martin, father
	Essence, mother
Amari, sixth grade	Patricia, mother
Corey, seventh grade	Myra, mother
Blane, eighth grade	Cassandra, mother
Ebony, eighth grade	I'esha, mother
Jermaine, eighth grade	Rose, mother

Youth Participants categorized by grade

sixth grade: Sophia; Quentin

seventh grade: Jamal; Tre; Jasmine; Sierra; Taresa; Royce; Nate

eighth grade: James, Julian, Harrison, Blane, Ebony

Participants from Future Scholars School

Ms. Eliot: teaches sixth—eighth grade math; has taught all participants in urban squash; occasionally attends Urban Squash practices and assists in the classroom.

Mr. Holder: a school counselor who manages academic and behavior issues at the school; serves as the liaison between the school and Urban Squash; recommends students to the Urban Squash program.

Mr. Carter: a school counselor who focuses on relationships between the school and families; has interacted with all Urban Squash participants and their families.

Urban Squash Staff Participants

Coach John, Executive Director of Urban Squash

Coach Shannon, Urban Squash Program Director

Coach Jordan, Part-time Squash Coach

Undergraduate Participants from Urban University

Tara, Charlotte, and Margaret: Served as mentors to Urban Squash Students for two years

Research Procedures and Data Collection

Individual Interviews. Representatives from each group of participants (i.e., youth, school personnel, program staff, parents, and undergraduate students) participated in one individual interview. Individual interviews (N = 21) with youth were conducted during the fall semester and

lasted between 20–30 min. All other individual interviews were conducted in the spring. Interview questions focused on the participant's perceived strengths and weaknesses of the program, youth development, personal and interpersonal development, academic development and the transfer of PYD outcomes outside of the program.

Academic Averages. At the end of each academic quarter, the program collects academic report cards. This information is used to help plan the academic enrichment portion of the program. Academic averages for the year 2013–2014 are included in the results.

Focus Group Interviews. All youth participated in focus group interviews (N = 8). Focus group interviews included three to four youth participants and two researchers including the first author and an undergraduate research assistant. Hellison's (2011) TPSR framework guided the interview, with questions focused on the first four goals (i.e., respect, effort, self-direction, and leadership) and an emphasis on the fifth level, transfer. For example, parents were asked a series of semi-structured questions about "self-direction." First, they were asked to about their child's ability to be a self-directed learner. Second, they were asked if participation in Urban Squash helps their child develop self-direction. Finally, they were asked if they see selfdirection being applied, or transferred, in school. Follow up questions were then generated to understand how the program helps (or potentially can help) to develop that particular asset.

Out-of-School Time Observation Instrument. OST Observation Instrument (Pechman, Mielke, Russell, White, & Cooc, 2008) is a validated systematic observation protocol that is grounded in indices of high-quality after-school programs (Eccles & Gootman, 2002; McLaughlin, 2000; Vandell et al., 2006). The quantitative component of the OST Observation Instrument includes 28 questions that are divided into five sections which ask the observer to evaluate the presence of key indicators of OST programming using a seven-point, Likert-type scale ranging from exemplar is not evidence (1) to exemplar is highly evident and consistent (7). These indicators are divided into the following domains that allow the observer to evaluate the quality of youth interactions, the quality of youth participation, relationships among youth and staff, staff instructional strategies, and activity content and structure. In addition to the Likert-scale response questions, the instrument includes space for the observer to make more holistic, qualitative comments related to an OST program.

The authors chose to use the OST Observation instrument because it had some alignment with TPSR model (see Table 2) and it allowed observers to consider student behaviors and staff behaviors in both a classroom and physical activity setting. In line with recommendations for observer training (Pechman et al., 2008), three observers practiced coding with the OST Observation instrument before the inception of data collection. Toward this end, the three observers visited the same sessions of the Urban Squash program, coded using the instrument, and then met to compare interpretations and ratings. Meetings were also used to help the observers come to a common understanding of the theoretical framework and terminology.

Following several rounds of observations and follow-up meetings, the observers reached consensus on the interpretation of the instrument's items. Then, the observers completed a total of 24 independent observations of Urban Squash program sessions to confirm that the degree to which the program aligns with best practices in OST programming. Care was taken to observe both the physical activity and classroom sections of the program.

While several factor structures have been proposed for the OST items, the one which was chosen for this study is grounded in the work of Durlak and Weissberg (2007), whose meta-analysis indicated that OST programs which have achieved positive youth outcomes employed sequenced, active, focused, and explicit (SAFE) learning strategies. The SAFE factor structure of the OST Observation Instrument includes four subscales to measure each of sequenced (7 items), active (8 items), focused (8 items), and explicit (5 items). The SAFE factor structure has been validated in prior research (Pechman et al., 2008), and internal consistency has been found to range from adequate to excellence for the four subscales (Cronbach's α from .76 to .91). In the current study, internal consistency was good for all four subscales (Cronbach's α from .80 to .86).

Data Analysis

Out-of-School Time SAFE Framework. Analysis of the quantitative data derived from the OST Observation Instrument was conducted to verify that the Urban Squash program aligned with best practices in OST programming as captured through Durlak and Weissberg's (2007) SAFE framework. This process began with standard procedures for data screening as advocated by Tabachnick and Fidell (2007). Once the data were found to be appropriate for analysis, descriptive statistics were computed and compared with recommendation set by Pechman and colleagues (2008). Bivariate correlations among the SAFE subscales were also examined.

Qualitative Data Analysis and Trustworthiness. A multiphase approach was employed for qualitative data analysis. An initial analysis of a subset of all qualitative data sources was conducted using open and axial coding (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). A two-person research team coded multiple sources individually and created memos that identified emergent patterns. The memos were discussed between the researchers. Following the memoing process, coding categories were developed into a codebook. The next phase of analysis employed inductive analysis and constant comparison (Patton, 2002). The researchers independently coded the data set and then met to discuss each coded quotation individually until a consensus was met.

To promote the trustworthiness of the findings presented in this study several methodological strategies were employed. First, multiple sources of data are used to allow for triangulation of themes. Second, the first author collaborated with the second author to ensure that two independent analyses of the data were conducted. Third, the first author was closely engaged with all aspects of PYD program for two years when this study began. This

prolonged engagement helped the researcher develop an appropriate research design and to gain the trust of all participants in this study (Patton, 2002). Fourth, emergent themes were discussed with participants in the program to confirm researcher interpretations and ensure that no important findings were missing. Finally, audit trails were provided by both researchers, which maintained a chain of evidence to support the findings.

Results

Results indicated that all participants had a positive perception of Urban Squash. Parents felt thankful for the opportunities being provided to their children, they trusted program staff, and hoped that their children would remain with the program. Youth participants reported developing skills, building relationships with peers and college students, and improving their academic performance in school. Data from individual interviews and focus group interviews are reported equally throughout the findings. School faculty described Urban Squash as an asset to Future Scholars and perceived youth participants to be leaders in the school building. Staff participants communicated a deep appreciation for the partnership with the Urban University, recognized academic and life skill development among youth participants, and benefited from long-term engagement with undergraduate students. Finally, undergraduate students perceived their engagement with Urban Squash to be among the most beneficial experiences during their time as a student. Themes derived from qualitative data analysis are presented and supported using participant quotations (pseudonyms used). Before overviewing themes, the fidelity of the program, in relation to quality indicators for OST programs that promote personal and social skills, is discussed using results from the OST observation instrument.

SAFE Analysis of Program Quality

Descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations among the SAFE subscales of the OST Observation Instrument are overviewed in Table 3. On the seven-point scale, mean values for the four subscales ranged from 3.73 to 4.52. Mean values for sequenced, active, and focus were higher in this study than those that were reported in previous research using the SAFE framework, and the explicit subscale was comparable (Kim, Miller, Reisner, & Walking Eagle, 2006; Russell, Mielke, & Reisner, 2008). Pechman and colleagues (2008) note that variance is common as not all elements of effective OST programming are expected to be seen in every program session. Therefore, values near the midpoint on the scale are expected. All of the subscales correlated positively and significantly with one another indicating the interconnectedness of the SAFE framework domains. The weakest correlation was between active and explicit ($n = 24$, $r = .48$, $p = .02$), and the strongest correlations were between focus and explicit ($n = 24$, $r = .87$, $p < .001$). Taken together these determine that the Urban Squash program compares favorably to the indices of positive OST programming and that the SAFE

domains related positively to one another. Additional qualitative data were derived from the OST Observation Instrument and is included in the themes below.

Table 2 Alignment Between SAFE Framework and TPSR Model with Descriptive Statistics.

OST Observation Scale Categories Mean (Standard Deviation) N = 24 Observations; 7-point Likert-type scale	TPSR-related Teaching Strategies and Student Behaviors
Sequenced • Involves the progression of skills 4.0(1.41) • Requires analytic thinking 4.23(1.38) • Challenges students intellectually, creatively, developmentally, and/or physically 4.27(1.52) • Staff employ varied teaching strategies 3.29(1.71) • Staff challenges youth to move beyond their current level of competency 3.54(1.38) • Staff assists youth without taking control 4.04(1.95) • Staff verbally recognizes youth efforts and accomplishments 4.17(1.95)	**Teaching Strategies** Modeling respect Setting expectations Providing opportunities for success
Active • Youth are collaborative 4.13(1.42) • Youth take on leadership responsibilities and roles 3.17(1.79) • Youth have opportunities to make meaningful choices 3.88(1.42) • Youth assist one another 3.75(1.62) • Youth contribute opinions, ideas, and concerns to discussions 3.63(1.76) • Staff plan for and ask youth to work together 4.25(1.62) • Staff encourages youth to share their ideas, opinions, and concerns 3.67(1.95) • Staff ask youth to expand on their answers and ideas 3.38(1.56)	**Teaching Strategies** Setting expectations Fostering social interaction Giving voices and choices Promoting leadership **Student Behaviors** Participating Engaging Encouraging others Helping others Leading Asking for help Expressing voice
Focused • Youth show positive affect to staff 4.42(1.28) • Youth are friendly and relaxed with one another 5.13(0.90) • Youth respect one another 4.38(1.01) • Staff shows positive affect toward youth 5.29(0.69) • Staff engage personally with youth 3.88(1.48) • Staff guides for positive peer interaction 4.21(1.35) • Staff uses positive behavior management techniques 4.0(1.5)	**Teaching Strategies** Modeling respect Fostering social interaction **Student Behaviors** Showing respect
Explicit • Activity is well organized 4.18(1.40) • Youth are on task 4.17(1.2) • Youth listen, actively and attentively to peers and staff 4.13(1.26) • Staff communicates goals, purposes, and expectations 3.96(1.55) • Staff attentively listens to and/or observes youth 4.71(1.23)	**Teaching Strategies** Modeling respect Setting expectations **Student Behaviors** Participating Engaging Cooperating

Theme One: Academic Enrichment

Program participants, their parents, and school officials perceived that the program generated quality academic enrichment that helped the students perform better at school. Multiple quotes from youth participants describe the academic enrichment part of Urban Squash as being "very

helpful" and "fun." Others suggested that they learned "study skills," "it helped me to focus," and "improved my communication skills." Observation data reported a focus on homework completion and work in small groups. One observer reported that "opportunities for constructive interaction among youth are provided" and another reported that the classroom was "designed to encourage inter-student interaction." Specific programs that were mentioned as being valuable included vocabulary words, debates, speaking to a college class, and tutoring. Essence explained, "The tutoring in squash is very helpful" and suggested that the program helped her son "be more outspoken." Another parent, Tasha, recognized the importance of academic enrichment for her son:

> Remember, when they have practice, they have academics right after. It did help academically because it wasn't all about squash. It was about squash and still learning. I've seen him bring papers home where he had to turn then in to, you know, squash. They don't focus so much on the sport, letting you know that you still need your education to get somewhere. So having academics and sports is a real good thing together.

Among the academic programs offered, homework help stands out as the most valued by all parties. Sophia explained, "they help us with our homework. Every time we need help, they be there to help us. Like if we don't understand it, they like put it in a fun way so that we can understand it." For Blane, homework help was a deciding factor in choosing which sport to pursue:

> They give us time to do our homework. I had a choice my first year to play basketball or squash and that's why I picked squash. Because basketball, they only study sometimes. At squash, every day we come here and after practice we go do our homework. They encourage us and if we need extra help they help us. And if we need them to come to school and get us some extra work, they'll do it.

Faculty of Future Scholars also recognized the importance of homework completion, particularly because the problem of incomplete homework has been "completely eliminated" (Mr. Holder) for Urban Squash participants. The role of undergraduate students from the Urban University clearly enhanced the academic enrichment program. One teacher explained that:

> Having regular interactions with college students is great for them academically. You know, Julian is looking through their textbooks. I guess there is one kid who is teaching him trigonometry or something. That kind of positive thing helps. I've been there when they do the SAT vocabulary words. That is helpful, they do the math drills, that is helpful as well (Ms. Elliot).

Patricia recognized that the undergraduate students were "very diligent working with them…I know they were there to help them if it was needed with any subject in school, there was a tutor there to assist them." The availability of staff and undergraduate students was important to youth participants because they did not always receive adequate attention at school. Ebony explained, "[teachers] pay attention to us but most of the time our teachers are at the board. Most of the time at squash, [staff/volunteers] walk around and make sure that we know what we are doing and they help us."

The emphasis on academic enrichment was so engrained in Urban Squash that parents and students viewed the classroom aspect as an integral part of the sport program. For example, Amari commented that "without the academic part, squash just wouldn't be squash." One parent, Myra, commented that,

> They remind the kids that you don't get to come here and just play and do exercises. You have other responsibilities and we will help you with those responsibilities. We don't have a problem sitting down and helping you do a project or homework. And so in that way, it's well-rounded.

All youth reported that academic enrichment helped them in some way. Several comments indicated that the students learned things that they were unable to learn in school. For example, Taresa described that:

> Some of these words are my spelling words and the tutors help me with that. I don't know them when I come to squash, and they show me them, I get better at them. Like, I didn't know how to do multiplication table tricks and one of the tutors taught me how.

Taken together, the interview data from multiple perspectives describe an engaging academic enrichment program with an emphasis on homework completion and a secondary emphasis on special projects.

Theme Two: Academic Transfer

An important consideration for this study was whether the learning within Urban Squash transferred to the school environment. Quotes from students and parents indicated that homework completion improved student performance because "I don't be doing my homework at home if I don't have squash," as Tre' explained. Rose agreed with that perspective, "what they don't get in homework at squash, they are not going to do at home." Academic progress reports also demonstrated adequate performance at school. Returning players (N = 18) maintained an overall average of 89.19 across all subjects while new players (N = 6) averaged 83.7. The average for returning players remained the same over the year while the average for new players

increased by 2.5 points. Overall, academic scores were available for English Language Arts (92.27 average), History (87), Social Studies (85.57), and Math (85.75).

Table 3 Descriptive Statistics and Bivariate Correlations for the SAFE Subscales of the Out-of-School Time Observation Instrument

Subscale	Sequenced	Active	Focus	Explicit
Sequenced	1.00			
Active	.64**	1.00		
Focus	.50*	.51*	1.00	
Explicit	.60**	.48*	.87**	1.00
M	3.93	3.73	4.52	4.25
SD	1.02	1.14	.88	.99
Minimum	1.71	1.5	2.88	1.80
Maximum	5.29	6.13	5.63	5.75
Skewness	-.85	-.05	-.57	-.96
Coefficient α	.82	.84	.86	.80

Note. $N = 24$ observations, all variables measured on a seven-point, Likert-type scale, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

Urban Squash staff emphasized the importance of improving the grades of students. Evidence suggests that the program has achieved that to some extent. "Ever since MJ joined the program he has become a better student… he stays more focused on school work," according to MJ's mom, Essence. Martin indicated that "his [son's] grades are coming up, they were a little poor before but being a part of squash helps to maintain his grades." Cassandra explained with pride that,

> If you ever go to Future Scholars and go to one of their award programs, you'll see the squash team clean up! I mean those kids clean up on those awards … [standardized] test, math, A-B honor roll … so that let's you know the program has some kind of impact on them. That's something to be proud of because its all working together – the school working with the squash program, the squash program working with the school. Maybe its not a coincidence that those are your top kids.

While the anecdotal evidence of grades improving is encouraging, interview questions sought more specific examples. Mr. Holder, who had knowledge of the academic standing of all squash players, indicated that

> [standardized test]-wise, they're always scoring pretty well. I see the correlation between that tutoring session, getting them that extra help; I see it through their [standardized test] scores. They do exceptionally well.

Multiple students reported, "I get better grades because of squash." Asked to explain further, Julian replied, "when you have responsibility to study for a test, and, well at squash we study for our test and it helps us with the test at school the next day." Others described that when they struggle at school on a particular assignment, they take that with them to squash, practice it more and then "get better at it at school the next day." Patricia explained that, "I've found that not every student that started Urban Squash were good with their grades," which she understood through her involvement with various school and community programs. She explained further that:

> Maybe they were good at sports but I'm certain because I've met them through different programs, they have improved drastically. Because not only do they like what they do, but there is someone outside of their normal scale saying 'you can do this, let me help you.'

Sasha remembered that she had never made the A-B Honor Roll but "since I started squash, I've been on the A-B Honor Roll." Sierra agreed, as she explained, "I'm not going to say my grades were bad, but when I got to squash they started getting better." Quentin recalled improvement in standardized test scores: "on the test, I usually got 220, but after squash I got 243 and then I got 'exemplary' on three of the tests."

The squash program was helpful to some extent because it provided additional instruction beyond that provided during the school day. For example, Jasmine explained that,

> I didn't know about Algebra because in our class they didn't teach us that. So then on the [standardized] test we had a question about Algebra and I was like 'Oh yea, I know that, coach taught us that.' I think I got that question right!

According to program observations, the program often employed strategies to integrate academic enrichment into the program in ways that could immediately transfer to school. For example, during the spring semester the staff planned a writing activity to help prepare students for a standardized test focused on writing. According to the observer, "the writing activity was well-sequenced and led to the development of a coherent sentence that transfers to the next day's test assignment. Youth had a clear writing goal and demonstrated that at the end of the class."

Interviews from all participants provided evidence to suggest that academic enrichment activities that take place during Urban Squash transfer into the school and are evident through increased learning and improved grades and test scores. The transfer outcomes were intentionally targeted by the program and recognized by school officials. This seemed to create a strong partnership between the program and the school.

Theme Three: Relationships

It was clear that the program invests a lot of time and resources in activities that build strong relationships, including relationships between youth and staff and among youth participants. This seems critical particularly because of the program's desire to retain youth participants for several years. Some participants even expressed appreciation for board members who work behind the scenes because "I don't see [them] that much but they be helping us get to go on trips and stuff like that" (MJ). All children expressed respect and appreciation for program staff that they referred to as "Coaches." The relationships between the youth and any coach were forged through the sport first. For example, Jermaine explained, "I don't like" Coach Jordan and was critical of the coach's leadership. Later in the year, he explained "he got much better, he be helping me with my backhand and stuff." Partly because youth enter Urban Squash without any knowledge or skills in the sport of squash, they often described, "wanting to quit" but continued to explain that the "coach will work with you, eventually you will get better at it" (Julian). Coaches often facilitated relationship building through assigning leadership. Program observations reported veteran players being assigned to assist with coaching younger players during each squash practice. For example, during one practice the observer reported that "James was coaching lower level players and the youth seemed to be engaged in learning new skills." Other observations reported that youth routinely led the daily warm-up routine, help set up classroom and squash activities, officiated "challenge matches" between youth, and taught mentors and youth participants about squash skills and strategies.

A second component of relationship building was the unique relationships between certain youth participants and their mentors, who were undergraduate students at the Urban University. At least four examples were provided of youth participants working closely with an undergraduate student for approximately two years. Tara, an undergraduate student, explained her first day in the classroom with a youth participant. After what seemed to be an unproductive hour, Harrison raised his hand to announce to the class, "I want to thank my tutor for nothing because she didn't help me today." For whatever reason, Tara came back and worked with Harrison for over three years and now she describes him as "one of my best friends." Importantly, the undergraduate students saw these relationships as being mutually beneficial. Charlotte described a similar experience,

> I remember coming in on the first day and no one really talked to me … no one wanted to come sit by me and work on their homework with me. But over time they would come

ask me specific questions. Jasmine, she wouldn't speak but I was always there and you kind of have to push your way into their lives so they're comfortable.

When asked to describe ways they built positive relationships with youth, undergraduate students went on to explain working with youth participants on academic enrichment projects, participating with youth in local charitable 5k races, and helping out at community service events.

The long-term commitment and extensive involvement with the youth generated trust from families and appreciation from the youth. When asked about the strengths of the program Patricia replied that, "they show that they care … they show concern about the student regardless of whether they're playing squash or when it comes to school." Essence replied, "they really make the kids feel wanted. They take a lot of time out with them. So I think squash gives them that secureness." Julian says he likes "just being around people who actually care." When asked to elaborate, he explained, "I'm not saying [teachers] don't care, I'm just saying there are too many people in the classroom to be around every single one." When asked what she liked about the program Taresa explained that,

> The tutors and the coaches…they bring us up and they don't just make us feel bad and just bring our self-esteem down. I have supportive people on my team and I have people that don't care about me. But [coaches] make us feel that they care about me where I don't have to get worried that they aren't going to do stuff for me. Like today, coach had a pep talk that brought everybody's spirit up before they started squash.

Finally, Amari explained that,

> Urban Squash keeps it real. They don't just tell you fake stuff and they don't mind doing stuff for you. And it does keep you company when you're low. When you need some support, they'll come straight over to you.

It is clear that positive relationships among and between youth are the foundation of the Urban Squash program. Furthermore, these relationships are facilitated over time and are recognized by school faculty, undergraduate students, parents, and the youth participants.

Theme Four: Personal and Social Responsibility

Interview data from all sources suggests that youth who participate in Urban Squash developed personal and social responsibility skills. Importantly, interview participants also suggest that the responsibility transfers into the school environment. All participants discussed the notion of respect and self-control. Parents noticed that "it seems like they're getting a lot of respect through squash" (Martin), while students commented that "I'm learning how to control myself"

(Quentin) through squash. The youth most often attributed developing emotional regulation skills to playing squash. Several youth made comments like, "I just put my stress into the ball," "I can let my anger out by hitting the ball repeatedly," and "squash helps me get over and anger and problems…I take all the anger out on the court." Taresa noted, "coach told me she lets her stress out on the court and I learned how to do that."

Parents and youth also noted that basic responsibilities, such as being on time, dressing appropriately, and taking care of equipment enhanced their personal responsibility. For example, youth were responsible for "making sure you have your glasses…your racquet, and your shoes," (Sophia) in addition to having a clean uniform. Without this, they explained, "you can't get points" (Jamal) that are tied to a reward system. Perhaps this finding is not surprising since staff describe personal responsibility as "the number one expectation" (Coach Shannon).

Parents seemed to appreciate opportunities for their children to have new experiences and opportunities most. These experiences ranged from being on a college campus to traveling out of town for special events. According to the parents, the exposure led youth to "think more outside the box a little about life and stuff like that" (Myra). A school faculty member expressed a similar sentiment when discussing out-of-town traveling, "I've heard a few Urban Squash guys and girls, believe it or not, they say things like, 'oh yea, when I graduate high school, I'm going to be a Valedictorian'" (Mr. Carter). Parents and school faculty were pleased to see the students express ambitious long-term goals.

However, one shortcoming identified by youth, parents, and school faculty was the youth's inability to place their long-term thinking into a short-term context. When asked about steps they would need to take to get into college or to become a Valedictorian, the youth were unable to express stepping-stones toward their long-term vision. Ms. Elliot explained:

> They have these ideas. They know where they want to go. They know what they want to do, but that lack that in between part…that is the one thing I think that as a while—as I think about every squash student – I think that they really have to work on their short-term goals.

She also suggested that Urban Squash was in a position to address this need,

> The thing that we all like to do as educators is that one-on-one coaching … but I have to teach a whole class. I can say, 'here are the steps we need to do to be put into the college arena', they can't do that for themselves. They just see this big goal and think they are going to do it … its one-on-one coaching that we need.

Tasha, parent of an 8th grade student, expressed a similar perception,

If that kid wants to be an engineer, let them attend an Urban University class that deals with Physics and Mathematics…let them see in advance, its not that you can't be an engineer, but there are things that you're going to need to do before you get to this level…you've got to learn calculus before you even think about that part.

In program observations, only one observer reported a focus on developing personal goals. This suggests that goal setting was not a particular focus of the program and may be an area for improvement related to teaching personal responsibility skills.

Within Urban Squash, there was ample evidence of students showing leadership, helping teammates, and caring for others. According to youth and parents, those opportunities have helped "show teamwork," "change attitudes," and "be a good role model." Essence reflected that "every since MJ got involved in the program he's become a better person." Rose explained that her son Kareem "took on helping out with the other kids trying to get them trained up … that's one thing he's learned, to help." Sophia, a 6th grade student in her second year of Urban Squash, described her leadership development, "I learned that wherever you go you can be in leadership, you can be a leader. Don't follow the wrong people and you don't always have to be independent just stick with the right people." Jamal (7th grade, 2nd year in Urban Squash) elaborated by saying "when you are a leader you know you have to give other people chances." According to parents, youth, and school faculty, leadership was learned intentionally through a variety or program structures that aimed to develop leadership. For example, James described that "Coach John has respect for you and he will trust you to lead the group in activities…then it will build up more responsibility and he'll think you've earned more responsibility." Program observations often triangulated the interviews that found youth to exhibit personal and social responsibility skills. However, in a few cases, irresponsible behavior was observed. For example, it was noted that "students who finish homework early seemed to distract those who were still working" and that "students seemed hesitant to ask a mentor for help when needed."

While it is encouraging to find development of personal and social responsibility within Urban Squash, an important goal is to transfer those positive behaviors into other settings. In this case, it was clear that transfer to the school occurs. For example, Tasha reflected that "through squash they're gaining that responsibility… then they take that mentality back to school." She thought the responsibility skills "empowers [youth] to do better in school." Ms. Elliot was asked if responsibility in Urban Squash is transferred to the school. She explained that:

Those students don't typically get involved with in conflict. I really think squash has helped those students continue to hone those social skills in a sense that they are never involved in gossip, they are never involved in drama ... I've seen each one of those students grow more as leaders … it kind of sets them apart … they're always above the fray.

Ms. Elliot was asked if he was referring to certain students in particular and replied, "its pretty uniform." Mr. Holder echoed similar sentiments,

> I think like teamwork, communication skills, organization are things that they learn in Urban Squash that routinely turn over … I think that Urban Squash gives them leadership opportunities and that routinely turns over [to the school]. For example, if you put them in a group, they are not just going to be sitting back, they are going to be very active … the Urban Squash kids are going to be talking, they are going to be directing, they are going to be debating.

Youth were asked about the transfer of responsibility, Amari replied "sharing is caring, I usually take that to school. If two people are fighting over a pencil or some tape or some glue, you know, simple things, I'm like 'dude, its simple, sharing is caring. Share these and I'll give you a pencil later.'" This transfer seems to be facilitated intentionally, as Randall explained "You've got to be responsible in school because if you like get a referral you might miss two or three practices.'"

Martin, a father of two youth participants, recognized that students who once had behavior problems "don't get into trouble any more," which was confirmed by Mr. Holder, the school counselor, "if you went down the list of squash students, I would say probably 90% of them are not in trouble. Their behavior, maybe they have a little mess up here and there, but they're not the trouble makers." This, Mr. Holder described, led to students being "role models" and "leading by example" in the school building.

Discussion

This study found that participants in Urban Squash and its key stakeholders (i.e., parents, school officials, staff, and volunteers) valued the program and reported positive outcomes. Three specific aims were addressed. First, program observations indicated that Urban Squash provided a strong program design with SAFE learning features. These learning features are central to quality out-of-school time programs (Durlak & Weissberg, 2007) and programs that teach personal and social skills (Durlak, Weissberg, & Pachan, 2010). Moreover, the program observations help to address the question of fidelity in TPSR studies and introduces a new observation instrument to TPSRrelated research (Wright, 2009). Second, participants reported receiving academic enrichment opportunities that enhanced their academic instruction provided by the school. Academic progress reports confirmed that youth participants were in good academic standing throughout the time of this study. Parents and school officials reported the academic enrichment as one reason the youth performed well at school. Finally, students developed personal and social responsibility skills in the program that transferred into the school day. One negative case, however, was found related to self-directed goal setting. Overall, the

transfer of personal and social responsibility to the school may support the academic enrichment reported by students, their parents, and school officials.

Related to the TPSR model, various studies have indicated the potential for physical activity to serve as a means to engage youth in developing life skills (Hellison & Martinek, 2006). This work adds an example of one unique sport, squash, serving as the means to engage youth paired with a structured academic program. Walsh (2008) provides an intentional framework for helping youth envision possible futures, including short- and long-term goals. The framework for envisioning possible futures offers programs such as Urban Squash a strategy to help youth improve this aspect of personal responsibility. While many programmatic aspects, such as homework completion, were intentionally designed, other aspects related to self-direction were not provided. Therefore, the findings have practical application for program providers and empirical relevance for research on TPSR. Alternatively, leadership was an aspect of the program that school officials reported "routinely turns over," or transfers, into the school.

This study suggests that an afterschool sport-based youth development program can promote the transfer of learning to school. Previous research suggests that program staff who hope to promote transfer should discuss transfer with program participants early and often during programming (Walsh, Ozaeta, & Wright, 2010). Program observations and interviews suggested that there was a particular focus on homework completion, academic enrichment programs, and responsibility skills such as leadership during Urban Squash. Consistent with prior research, these were the areas of programming that seemed to transfer to the school day. As discussed by Gordon and Doyle (2015), TPSR transfer can be viewed through the lens of near and far transfer. Far transfer involves higher order thinking skills such as self-direction and near transfer involves more simple and obvious applications. In this study, Urban Squash participants provided several examples of near transfer to the school environment including homework completion, academic enrichment, and leadership skills. There was no evidence of far transfer in the data. The connection to school provided a space in which youth could be challenged to transfer skills. Further research may consider ways that programs can promote far transfer, which seems to be a central goal of TPSR.

It was the perspective of the research participants that Urban Squash had a positive impact on school performance. Parents described that the program was "not all about squash" but also included an academic program to ensure that students were prepared to succeed in school. This provides an example of an intentional programmatic structure where sport participation can potentially enhance school performance. The structure includes providing academic enrichment time as a component of sports programming. This extends other models of sportbased PYD that often teach life skills through a particular sport. In the example provided, youth reported life skill development through squash while all partners valued the academic component intentionally linked to the squash program. Future work should consider ways that sport programs can provide academic enrichment components and how this can impact youth development. Furthermore, models for such programs might be similar to that of Urban Squash or follow a different model including partnerships with relevant organizations.

Positive outcomes associated with Urban Squash were linked to several program design features. First, the staff and volunteers provided opportunities for frequent interaction between youth and adults. This led some youth to feel they received more support than they could get at school and allowed for more personalized support. Second, the sport of squash provided a fun activity for students where they developed relationships with staff and peers. In this way, squash became the central component of the program even though the academic outcomes were more prominently discussed. Third, a close partnership with the school created the opportunity to address transfer of TPSR to the school day. One student reported that staff will "check with our teachers" about school progress, illustrating the connectivity between the program and school. This was supported by high academic expectations through an incentive system not focused solely on sport performance. Fourth, the program did not operate on a sport-centered schedule but was offered throughout the academic year to student. This provided a youth-centered approach where the program is designed to meet the needs of students rather than the needs of a particular sport. Finally, the TPSR model provided a framework to promote life skills within the program and transfer to school.

While the findings related to TPSR and transfer contributes to the existing literature, more work is needed on this topic. This paper only addresses transfer to the school environment using a qualitative approach. This work could be enhanced through the use of quantitative surveys to address transfer of life skills (Weiss, Bolter, & Kipp, 2014). Furthermore, studies that examine best practices for TPSR transfer and professional development should provide strategies to extend this work to other OST programs. Hellison (2011, p. 25) describes transfer as the "ultimate goal in teaching kids to take personal and social responsibility," therefore this may need to become the ultimate goal in studying the model. While transfer can include multiple settings (e.g., school, community, home), research may consider transfer from one setting to another to develop our understanding of the concept. This study will have implications for those sport providers who are interested in impacting youth performance in school.

As OST programs continue to grow, sport-providers may have increasing opportunities to leverage sport participation against life skill development and academic performance. This is particularly useful to youth who attend Title 1 schools where there is a need for programs that enhance PYD. To thrive in this OST environment, sport providers must demonstrate their potential for holistic development, which goes beyond the physical development commonly associated with sports. This study suggests that the sport program can impact the intellectual development of youth through its academic enrichment program, provide positive adult role models and peer relationships, and promote personal and social responsibility skills that will help youth navigate their school environment.

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