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Martinek, Thomas; Ruiz, Luis Miguel  
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## Promoting Positive Youth Development through a Values-based Sport Program.

### Desarrollo de una juventud positiva a través de un programa deportivo basado en valores.

**Thomas Martinek**

Dpt Exercise and Sport Science.  
University of North Carolina at Greensboro

**Luis Miguel Ruiz**

Facultad de Ciencias del Deporte  
Universidad de Castilla La Mancha-Toledo

#### Abstract

**T**he increase in youth programming has been a response to societal concerns over the increase in school violence and juvenile drug abuse, incarceration, and prostitution. Since many of these problems have trickled into our schools teachers are found struggling to make sense of kids who are alienated to learning and disruptive in their classroom. Costs to the taxpayer to protect against the problems caused by "troubled youth" have further fueled the fires of public discontent. Some of these costs have supported the many "quick fixes" seen in our public schools (e.g., metal detectors, resource officers, stringent law enforcement, cameras in the hallways, zero tolerance policies, background checks). In essence these approaches have viewed youth as a nagging burden to the community.

Fortunately, programs that focus on the strengths of youth, rather than their weaknesses, have begun to grow. Many of these programs include sport learning experiences that teach responsible behavior and citizenship to children and youth. This article describes one such program, Project Effort, that teaches personal social responsibility to underserved youth. The genesis of the program is profiled along with a description of Project Effort's: a) sport clubs, b) mentoring program, c) teacher and parent involvement, and d) Youth Leader Corps. We also suggest some strategies that have helped us move the club members forward within each of Project Effort's programs.

**Key words:** Effort Project, underserved children, responsibility, sport



## Desarrollo de una juventud positiva a través de un programa deportivo basado en valores.

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#### Resumen

**E**l aumento de los programas sociales desarrollados para la juventud ha sido la respuesta de la sociedad al aumento de la violencia y abuso en el consumo de drogas, delincuencia, y prostitución. Desde el momento en que estos problemas se han ido manifestando progresivamente en nuestras escuelas, los profesores se han esforzado en dar sentido a las vidas de los escolares alienados del aprendizaje y evitar problemas en sus aulas. El coste que para el contribuyente supone protegerse de los problemas causados por esta "juventud problemática" han aumentado las llamas del descontento público. Algunos de estos costes se han manifestado en "soluciones rápidas" que pueden verse en la actualidad en nuestras escuelas (por ejemplo: detectores de metales, personal de refuerzo, endurecimiento de las leyes, cámaras en los pasillos, políticas de tolerancia cero, etc.).

En definitiva estas propuestas han contemplado a la juventud como una carga poco deseable para la comunidad. Afortunadamente, los programas que dirigen su atención a las fortalezas de los jóvenes más que a sus debilidades, han empezado a surgir. Muchos de estos programas incluyen experiencias de aprendizaje deportivo que favorecen la enseñanza de comportamientos responsables y ciudadanos a los niños y jóvenes. Este artículo describe uno de estos programas, el proyecto Esfuerzo que enseña la responsabilidad social y personal a jóvenes desfavorecidos. Tanto su origen como sus aspectos más característicos se describen en este artículo: a) Clubes deportivos, b) Programa de mentorización, c) Implicación de padres y profesores, y d) El cuerpo de jóvenes líderes. También presentamos algunas estrategias que nos han ayudado a avanzar a los miembros del Club a otros niveles del programa.

**Palabras clave:** Proyecto esfuerzo, desventaja social, responsabilidad, deporte

## Introduction

Eleven years ago, Deborah Jones, the principal at Hampton Elementary School in Greensboro, North Carolina, telephoned the first author (Tom) about starting an after-school sport program for some of the youngsters at her school. Deborah had just assumed the leadership role at Hampton Elementary School which had been on academic probation the previous two years. In addition to its academic difficulties the school had been plagued with high absenteeism, classroom violence, and frequent school suspensions. She was brought on board by central administration “to turn the school around.”

Hampton was located next to a public housing complex called Morningside Homes. The majority of children at Hampton lived in Morningside Homes which was notorious for its high crime rate, prostitution, and drug traffic. Many of the school’s students came from single parent families who lived from welfare check to welfare check. Poverty, both economic and spiritual, created a sense of hopelessness and societal abandonment for many of its residents. Remarkably many of the children appeared to be able to “rise above” the challenges of the neighborhood; they went to school, did their work, and maintained good grades. These “resilient students” had acquired the necessary social adaptation to adversity (Masten, 1994).

Unfortunately, there were still others who struggled considerably. Deborah felt these students were especially at risk of dropping out of school in the later years. They also had an inordinate amount of free time after school. During this time they were confronted with many choices with little or no adult guidance to help make them: whether “to do” drugs or “not do” drugs, whether to get into fights or not get into fights, whether to have sex or not have sex, or whether get into the cyber chat room or not get into the chat room. Hampton’s principal believed an after-school sport program would get her students off the streets and, at the same time, provide learning experiences that would enhance their ability to “bounce back.” Her view was aligned well with other researchers and practitioners who stress the importance of providing after-school programs that will help nurture self-confidence and resilience in youth (Benard, 1993; Benson, Leffert, Scales, & Blyth, 1998; Lerner, Taylor, & von Eye, 2002). They claim that the cumulative experiences in and connections to positive youth programs and adults can provide the necessary tools for at-risk youth to navigate through a socially and economically toxic environment.

Deborah also knew that Tom’s work at UNC Greensboro had begun to focus on program development. For much of his professional life at UNC Greensboro he studied the impact that low teacher and societal expectations had on kids who were struggling in the mainstream of schooling, especially those who lived in impoverished areas of Greensboro (see Martinek, 1997). Part of his research agenda included the examination of sport programs and their ability to foster a better sense of control in a youngster’s life. At the same time, he wanted started his own after-school sport program for underserved youngsters. In essence, he wanted to have his research impact on the lives of children and youth. The principal’s phone call was perfectly timed and so an after

school-sport program called, Project Effort, was created. This article describes the various components in Project Effort: a) the sport clubs, b) the mentoring program, c) teacher and parent involvement, and d) the Youth Leader Corps. We also provide some strategies that have helped move the club members forward within each of Project Effort's programs.

### **After-school Sport Clubs**

Both Tom and Deborah believed that early intervention during the elementary years was essential for helping youth to become better decision makers and positive members of their school. When Project Effort first started, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, and 5<sup>th</sup> grade teachers from Hampton recommended students to the program. The teachers were asked to recommend those students who were having difficulties in their class, behaviorally and/or academically. Each teacher was asked to provide the names of two to three students who they thought would benefit from the program. A meeting with the kids was then held. They were asked to join Project Effort's Sport Club. They were also told that they would be bussed weekly to UNCG's Health and Human Performance Building for physical activity instruction. The program was called a "sport club" so the participants would feel ownership in the program.

Because a long term commitment is essential to insure program impact, a middle school sport club was created during Project Effort's second year of operation. The middle school club would allow those students who were in the elementary club to continue their involvement in subsequent years. Since Project Effort's beginning both clubs have served approximately 40 students each year.

#### *Content of Sport Clubs*

Unlike most sport programs the primary purpose of the sport clubs was not recreation or sport skill development. Rather, they focused on teaching kids to take more responsibility for themselves (e.g., staying out of trouble & setting goals) and being more sensitive and responsive to others (e.g., helping classmates & negotiating conflict). Graduate and undergraduate students have received special training from the first author (Tom) for delivering of the various aspects of the physical activity program. The centerpiece for the sport clubs was Don Hellison's Personal and Social Responsibility Model (Hellison, 2003). The model's values are represented by five developmental levels: I) self control and respecting the rights and feelings of others, II) trying your best and not giving up, III) being self-directed, IV) helping and caring for others, and IV) applying the first four goals outside the gym. His model served to guide planning, teaching, and formal and informal evaluation of the clubs.

Throughout the years sport has proven to be an ideal medium for advancing youngsters along through levels of responsibility. There are three reasons for this. First, all kids love sport. It is a

natural “hook” for getting them involved with an after-school program. In extensive evaluations of effective youth programs (McLaughlin, Irby, & Langman, 1994; Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003) researchers have shown that programs that show high attendance and sustained participation by youth are those that have sport as part of their content.

A second reason is because sport is part of the American and European culture. Sport sociologist, Jay Coakley, notes that, in many ways, it is a metaphor for what we do, how we think, and how we feel (Coakley, 2003). Thus, including sport in youth programs interfaces well with our “way of life.”

Finally, sport is a moral activity. Being highly interactive, easily observable, and bounded by rules, sport often reveals behavior that gives testimony to one’s own values. It then becomes an excellent vehicle for teaching moral decision making and promoting self examination (Miller, Bredemeier, & Shields, 1997). Fair play, leadership, safety, and teamwork are important concepts grounded in sport. These become the principles that youth program leaders can teach to others.

### *Club Sessions*

All club sessions have begun an unstructured period of social or self-directed sport activity (Level III). Shooting around, practicing volleyball bumps and sets, or dribbling a soccer ball are examples of things done during this time. Giving time to wind down has always been valuable for the club members who have just come from a full school day. A group meeting is then held where the staff and the club members sit together in a circle. They discuss the goal that the club members will be working on that day. Also, the club members may be asked about their present level of commitment for working on that goal. Sometimes the club members are queried about applying the responsibility values outside of Project Effort. Self control and respect for the rights and feelings of others (Level I) are also emphasized at all times so that it possible to work on the other goals.

Next, the students engage in various activities, usually lead by the program director. The club members work individually or with a partner or in a small group (Level II). Quite often they are asked to choose a skill that they have been working on in the past (Level III). This choice helps to centralize their ownership in the learning process. Guidance by the staff is always available, but the participants are always encouraged to work on their own. Knowing when and when not to help is important to enhance their capabilities of working independently.

Another approach that has been used during activity time is peer teaching (Level IV). The opportunity to teach others is used to empower the club members to take responsibility for the welfare and learning of others. An example of how this works would be to have a child teach another child the jump shot in basketball. However, some clear and simple guidance is needed and should precede the one-on-one peer teaching experience. By providing certain cues (e.g., balanced position, eye on basket, and follow through) help is given to the peer teacher. Peer teaching is an excellent starting point for getting kids to be responsible for someone else and getting them ready for more advanced levels of leadership (Schilling, Martinek, & Tan, 2001). The middle school participants,

for example, are further along in their readiness for assuming more advanced leadership roles. Some are not only ready to teach skills, but also to assume responsibility to run a team practice, organize and run a game, and even foster good moral judgment along the way.

At the conclusion of each club session is *group reflection*. Reflection becomes a mainstay in getting the club members to understand and generalize the values taught. It also helps to secure their intent in pursuing future action. This is done with the club members and staff sitting in a circle and making some honest evaluations about what went on that day. All reflection sessions begin with the director asking the club members how things went for them and the club in general. Evaluation is usually done by gesture (e.g., thumbs up, thumbs down, thumbs sideways), writing in a journal, or discussion. The leader responds to the members' comments by clarifying, adding to, and affirming the issues that were raised during the reflection session.

### *Mentoring Program*

A persistent challenge for the program leaders has been to get club members to apply the values and goals of the club, once learned, to their school setting. This challenge has been created by the disparate cultures of the sport club and classroom settings. Okseon Lee's recent study (Lee, 2005) highlights the barriers that exist between the sport club and classroom cultures. These barriers make the transfer issue especially salient (Phelan & Davison, 1993). For instance, Lee reported that club members felt that the lack of choices, emphasis on test performance, boredom, and concerns for safety prevailed in their school. Many of the sport club members indicated that these barriers were nonexistent in the sport club. Consequently, visualizing how the values would be practiced back at school was extremely difficult for them.

One-on-one mentoring was used to help youngsters navigate through these barriers and to transfer the values acquired in the clubs to the classroom and home setting (Levels III & V). To do this, graduate and undergraduate students spend an additional two hours each week with one of the club members at the school site. All mentors have taken a mentoring class at UNCG for which they receive academic credit. The class runs an entire academic semester and prepares them in areas of cross cultural competence, youth sport development programs, goals setting, and communication. The mentor works with the same child for the entire school year using Hellison's levels as a guide for the goal-setting sessions (e.g., working on a task without bothering someone or helping a classmate out).

Tied to goal setting were efforts to help kids gain a sense of control over the successes and failures in their school and social life. Many of the kids in Project Effort have become helpless within the mainstream of schooling (Martinek & Hellison, 1997; Seligman, 1990). Mentors continually reinforce the importance of trying hard in the face of challenges (Level II). Monitoring and encouragement are important roles played by the mentors during the goal-setting process. The idea is

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1 For a more complete discussion of the mentoring program and its evaluation the reader should read T. Martinek, T. Schilling, & D. Johnson's 2001 *Urban Review* article and T. Martinek & D. Hellison's 1997 article in the *Journal of Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance*.

to make the child believe if he or she tried hard they can achieve. This includes providing alternative strategies for approaching learning tasks or behavioral difficulties in the classroom and gymnasium.

The goal setting process also has created opportunities for discussion. When goals are not achieved, it may have been due to lack of effort as much as poor goal-setting strategies. The children are more apt to set grand or vague goals, what we call “big goals.” They are encouraged to think about “little goals” or more specific short-term goals to help them achieve their big goals. For example, rather than “trying to get an A on a math test,” they could study for 30 minutes for three days leading up to the test. This approach also utilizes Levels II and III where the student works on improvement and the development of a *personal plan* to do it. Setting positive goals are also encouraged so they can focus on what they want to happen, not on what they don’t want to happen.

Mentors are asked to fill out a *Mentor Journal Sheet* following each weekly goal-setting session. The entries describe the types of goal(s) set (if any were set), the strategies that were used to reach the goal(s) (e.g., self talk, self imaging, reward attainment), how they did on the previous goal(s), and general impressions of how the mentor sessions were going. The journal entries have helped to monitor the progress of the mentoring sessions and also served as important points of discussion during the mentoring classes.

#### *Parent and Teacher Involvement*

A third component of the sport clubs has been to assist teachers and parents to work more effectively with these students in the classroom and home. Workshops for the classroom teachers are provided throughout the year to assist them in integrating the concepts taught in the physical activity program into their classroom activities. Mentors are available to assist the teachers when needed. A poster showing the responsibility goals is given to each teacher. They are asked to display the poster in their classroom to make the students mindful of the responsibility goals.

Parents are encouraged to reinforce the goals of Project Effort in their home. Two “parent-child nights” (Fall and Spring) bring the parents to the school cafeteria to learn what their child has been doing in the sport club. They are also offered strategies for reinforcing the responsibilities in the home. The club members run a “mini club session” with the parents as participants. This gives a chance for the students to shine and also to have the parents gain an idea of what goes on at the sport clubs. Each night is concluded with a dinner which gives an opportunity for staff and parents to eat and dialogue together.

#### *Youth Leader Corps*

When the clubs started their fifth year of operation, many of the club members were entering high school. The concern rested with providing opportunities for the sport club members to continue with the program and encourage them stay in school. Van Linden and Fertman (1998) suggest that this is



accomplished by creating helping roles that adolescents can choose to fill, such as being a teaching assistant, a peer coach, or someone who assists the club staff in inducting younger students into routines of the program.

The *Youth Leader Corps* extended this idea of leadership so that the rising high school students had an opportunity to run their own sports club and teach younger children the responsibility values of the sport clubs. It was felt that by participating in the sport clubs over the years, the adolescent youth were ready to assume roles that put them “in charge” of others. Ten to twelve veteran Project Effort participants essentially teach sport skills and responsibility values to 25-30 younger children.

The Youth Leader Corps has become the capstone experience for our veteran club members. There are two phases to the Youth Leader Corps program. The first occurs in the summer where teaching apprenticeships are offered to former club members who have just finished middle school and will be attending their first year in high school in the fall term. The summer phase serves two main purposes. First, it allows middle school students to gain leadership skills and a greater sense of responsibility for the welfare of others. These opportunities are provided in a familiar and supportive environment. Second, it provides a service to the Boys and Girls Clubs of Greensboro. Approximately, 27 youngsters from a local club participate in a basketball camp at no cost.

In preparation for the camp, the camp leaders attend two training seminars organized by Project Effort staff members. They are asked to take responsibility for planning and conducting 12 one-hour sessions designed according to Hellison’s five levels of personal and social responsibility. In addition, they lead reflection sessions after the lessons. These “apprentice teachers” are paired with a Project Effort staff member who helps them throughout the daily lessons and makes suggestions regarding the development of their leadership and teaching skills.

In an effort to “stay with” these youngsters and build upon their summer apprenticeship experiences, we offer a second phase of leadership opportunity. The second phase is similar to the summer program but runs throughout the school year. The youth leaders are those who are freshman students as well as those who have been the Youth Leader Corps the previous year. They plan and teach basketball lessons to 25 to 30 youngsters one day a week. The format of the club is patterned after previous Sports Clubs. In the past these children have come from a local Boys and Girls Club, Head Start preschool program, and AmeriCorps immigrant youth service program. The youth leaders and staff members remain after the completion of the Sports Club to discuss how the day went, plan the next week’s lesson, and eat dinner together in the university dining facilities.

The Youth Leader Corps has just finished its 5<sup>th</sup> year. During that time we have evaluated the efficacy of the program from various data sources. Formal interviews (focus & individual), written reflections, self-evaluations, field notes, and informal interactions between leaders and staff constitute the various data sources. These data have shown how leadership develops through various stages and suggest that adolescents do not all of a sudden become leaders (Martinek

& Schilling, 2003; Martinek, Schilling, & Hellison, In press). Jerome Burns (1978) calls it a *transformational process* requiring a delicate interplay between the needs and values of adolescents and their sensitivity to the needs and values of others. These stages are: 1) needs-based leadership, 2) focusing on planning and teaching, 3) reflective leadership, and 4) compassionate leadership.

During the first stage leaders are more *concerned for their own personal needs*. Being with friends, being on a university campus, having dinner at the university cafeteria, and rubbing shoulders with university students become prime motives for coming to the youth leader corps. Attending to the responsibilities of planning and teaching other children become secondary. New leaders often begin here and will advance with guidance. But there are those whose needs are too great; they find the leadership experience too overwhelming and eventually drop out.

Leaders who advance to the second stage begin to see the importance of their leadership role. They begin to *plan and even make adjustments* to their lessons so that their students have a positive learning experience. Maximizing activity time, getting behavior management issues under control, modifying tasks, and giving clear directions/demonstrations become focal points for the leaders who operate at this stage.

Next is the third stage where leaders begin to be more reflective about their role as a leader and what it means to be able to help others. *Reciprocal learning* takes place in this stage. That is, youth leaders begin to see what it truly means to be a leader—both in the club and outside. Formed by past successes and failures in teaching others, they begin to learn more about themselves and what they can do beyond just their teaching prowess (Martinek, Schilling, Hellison, In press).

We have found that some leaders are able to proceed from the third stage to the most advanced level of leadership. At the fourth stage they begin to exhibit the ability to be *compassionate and caring leaders*. Personal concerns are set aside for the welfare of the individual and group. Leaders demonstrate caring and compassionate leadership in three ways. One way is to *teach compassion* to others. For example, during a basketball or soccer game a leader may require each youngster to be sensitive to the needs of others. For example, “soft defense” might be reinforced by a leader so a more skilled player will “back off” from guarding less skilled player.

A second way is teaching with compassion. For example, a leader will recognize and respond to a child’s distress. A “hand around the shoulder” and a few consoling words are not uncommon for the compassionate leader. Giving choices, having open dialogue, and being attentive to their students’ needs are other indicators of compassionate and caring teaching.

### *Strategies for Leadership Development*

We are reminded that moving youth leaders forward often requires the use of certain strategies. One strategy is *gentle nudging*. Our biggest challenge is learning when to accept or not to accept a

leader's actions. This requires us to accept them where they are and knowing when and how hard to push. What they bring into the gym will certainly impact their disposition. Self-confidence will also be a factor and vary from leader to leader.

Another strategy is *reinforcing expectations* for adolescents as leaders. This means having some idea of what to expect: what the leaders will be doing, with whom will they be working, what will be the activities, and what must be accomplished. Planning becomes an integral part of reinforcement efforts. For example, each leader in the Greensboro program has a note book in which they write their lesson plan. They also do a self-evaluation of each lesson which is shared with the program director and the assistant.

A third strategy is *giving choices*. We are reminded that choices must be authentic and important for each leader. For instance, one of our leaders, Rayshawn, was much more comfortable teaching basketball skills than anything else. His commitment to planning and teaching was greatly bolstered by giving him this choice. Travonda, on the other hand, enjoyed the opportunity to teaching volleyball skills. She frequently reminded the program leader that she was a much better leader when she could teach something at which she was good. Leaders were also given the option of working with elementary or pre-school children. In either case, youth leaders are likely to move to more advance levels of leadership when they are comfortable with the kids and the content.

A fourth strategy is the use of *reflection*. Structured opportunities for the leaders are given to think, talk, and write about what they did and saw during their lessons (Cutforth & Martinek, 2000). One way is to have a time designated for reflection at the end of each session. This should become part of "the routine" where the leaders and staff have a group meeting to discuss how their lesson went and how leaders contributed to its quality. A second way is to have the leaders write in their notebook about how the lesson went and what adjustments must be made for the upcoming one. A third and less formal way to promote reflection is to have impromptu discussions with the leaders about their leadership experiences before and after their lessons.

A final strategy is *recognition*. It is important that the leaders receive recognition for their accomplishments. Both programs have end-of-the-year dinner events for the leaders and staff. Personal thanks by the program director and a letter of recognition are given to the leaders at these events. Leaders are also asked to provide their insights about the leadership experience to university classes and, occasionally, at professional meetings. Other ways of recognizing the leaders have been through the local news media and the university paper and alumni magazine.

### **Final Thoughts**

Project Effort is not a "magic bullet" that will take away the daily challenges facing underserved youth. Their struggles will no doubt continue to meet them along their journey to adulthood. Neither

Tom Martinek or Luis Ruiz or our programs can eliminate the poor health care system these kids face daily. Nor can we wipe away racism and bigotry that are tightly interwoven into the social fabric of our communities. Nor will we be able to eradicate the economic and social indifference toward schooling of children and youth living in poverty. Jail incarceration and juvenile law enforcement will undoubtedly persist as the *modus operandi* for taking care of these nagging problems. What we can do, however, is provide positive learning experience that plant the necessary seeds for engendering problem solving ability, social competency, and hope. For this to happen, adult leadership will have to come from those who view youth as assets not as societal problems.

Fortunately, there are many others who fervently believe that youth have something to contribute. For these programs to flourish tireless work will be required and must remain steadfast. An even more important requirement is for leaders to be willing to empower kids. If the moral elements of the sport experience are to emerge, promoting an empowering learning environment must be in place. This is often difficult for program leaders who feel they must have total control over the program. Will I be able to achieve balance of a give and take environment? Do my values allow me to empower kids in a positive way? Will the youth participants accept an empowering approach to learning? These are questions that will undoubtedly come up when teaching a values-based sport program.

Several factors that contribute to the empowerment of youth come into play. One factor is believing that youth are capable of making good decisions. For many youth, adult guidance comes into play here and not all youth have proper guidance to make the right decisions. Many teachers (and coaches) feel that programs must be conducted with a “ruling hand.” Some kids, those who are most skilled, will survive (even thrive) from such an approach. However, we have found that our club members falter considerably. Strictly controlled learning situations do not allow them to explore and try out their own ideas. This sets them up for failure in the future. Central to our program and Hellison’s Model is the notion of empowerment. Being able to make choices, provide input, and make suggestions are some ways in which members are empowered and given ownership in their club.

We feel it is extremely important that program leaders view the benefits of allowing youth to make authentic decisions and believe that youth are capable of making these decisions. Valuing their decisions will validate their ability to be independent thinkers and doers. Young people are great “crap detectors” and can see through to the true intentions and values of adults (Michie, 1999). The most important thing we can do as leaders is to listen to our club members concerns, accept their ideas, and allow them to go after a personally meaningful learning experience.

Another factor is to respect the individuality of the youth participants. This does not mean that all club members have to be treated *equally*. They should, however, be treated *fairly*. Rather, it means recognizing and meeting the needs of each member. Acknowledging who they are and what they can do, accepting their values, and valuing their choices conveys a feeling of respect for them (Olive

2005). Most of our club members have learned to survive within the “street culture.” Egocentrism creeps into the mindset of many. Consequently, we cannot expect them to embrace our values the same way. For example, in recent discussion among club members and staff the issue of “respect” was brought up. Of course, I told the group that respecting someone means that you should care and show compassion for others. One of club member, Jasmine, quickly reminded me that respect in her neighborhood meant something else. For her (and others) respect meant not backing down when you are challenged. “...you won’t survive in my neighborhood if you don’t stick up for yourself. Besides my mom told me to always fight back if you have to.” Jasmine’s comment is a poignant reminder of the gap that exists between our expectations and the values and their realities. Creating opportunities to hear voices of our club members place us in a better position to guide them in positive ways. By taking their views seriously, being fair and flexible, and believing in them, a trusting relationship can be established.

In sum, societal concerns over troubled will persist for years to come. And there is little doubt that the taxpayer will continue to shoulder the costs for building more jails as well as placing more resource officers, metal detectors, and surveillance cameras in our schools. Most of us would agree, however, that alternatives to these “quick fixes” must be made. Hopefully programs that give kids a vision of a brighter future will be viewed as a viable response by all. By creating effective and sustainable pathways, appropriately scaled for a given context, healthy and productive young people will assuredly be developed. Therefore, empowering youth to become fully engaged and active citizens needs to part of the agenda of those planning and leading youth development programs. We hope that Project Effort will be viewed as one such program and will serve as a prototype for other professionals to emulate.

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As such, promoting sport participation might be a way to increase life prospects, especially for socially vulnerable youth because they are less physically active than their peers. However, the evidence for the causal effect of sport participation on these outcomes is still limited and little is known about factors that play a role in this possible effect. The aim of this study is four-fold. Other studies report on sports-based interventions that aim to overcome specific deficits in children. From a positive youth development perspective, self-regulation skills can be considered an internal asset that can help young people to get prepared for a healthy and productive adulthood.