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“Keep trying, it took me a while to get that too!” The effects of peer feedback on relation-inferred self-efficacy (RISE), self-efficacy, and motivation in youth sport

Project Summary

Peer influences are among the strongest social influences of children’s attitudes and behaviours at early ages. Yet, despite the potential for peer influences to change behaviour, few studies have investigated the role of peer influences on children’s thoughts about their physical capabilities or sport participation. Beliefs in our own abilities, or self-efficacy, guide what tasks we choose to do and the degree to which we persist at those tasks. Self-efficacy beliefs arise, in part, through our interactions with others, and are influenced by the perceptions we have about what others perceive our abilities to be. Our perceptions of another person’s confidence in our abilities are called relation-inferred self-efficacy beliefs (RISE). RISE is thought to play an instrumental role in the development of self-efficacy as well as motivation.

Many children drop out of sport after just a short period of time because they are “not having fun” anymore or doubt their abilities to improve or be successful. Children often rely on feedback from coaches and instructors to influence their perceptions of their sporting abilities as they often lack the experience and knowledge necessary to gauge how well they are doing when they are learning sport skills. However, in many sport environments there are usually only one or two coaches instructing several participants, which may limit opportunities for children to receive performance feedback or encouragement. In comparison to limited contact with coaches, there are usually many peers or teammates who can provide positive encouragement or feedback.

Here, we were interested in children’s perceptions about what their peers believe about their abilities and how these RISE perceptions might affect how children feel about themselves and their sport experiences.

Research methods

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 30 children aged 8-12. Children responded to a series of questions and provided examples as well as contextual information regarding their sport experiences when they received feedback from their peers that informed their self-efficacy and RISE.

Research results

Results showed that children are cognizant of self-efficacy and RISE within sport settings and often use verbal and nonverbal feedback from peers to inform these perceptions. Examples from study participants include:

- Efficacy-building Statements
“They encourage me to make me feel more confident. They say things like “Come on, you can do it, you got that swing going!” I like playing [baseball] more because I am not getting bullied in it. It makes me feel happy on the inside and it makes me just want to play more.”

“In hockey I don’t really shoot and I am shy buy when my friends say “you can do it” I shoot more and I feel like I can really do it because they think I can”

- Task Instruction

“I was batting and I was holding my hands like this [demonstrated] and my friend showed me how to hold it like this [demonstrated] and then I did it like that and it worked. I hit it straight so I do it like that all the time. [What’s special about that?] When they show me tips and then say “I know you can do it now” it makes me feel like I will be able to do it and do it right.

- Challenging/Special Opportunities

“When they put me in important positions I know they believe in me. [Can you tell me a story about when this happened?] One time we were playing football and my friend wasn’t throwing that good and he wanted me to play quarterback instead because he knew I could do it better. It made me feel special and I knew I would do a good job”

- Conclusions: We found that children can identify specific communication cues from peers that can increase their RISE as well as self-reported confidence, motivation, and sport participation. Although all of the participants were easily able to provide specific examples, caution should be exercised when interpreting the findings as the participants’ sporting experience ranged from recreational to competitive environments and we are uncertain whether feedback from peers may be more or less influential in these different environments.

Policy implications

Engaging positive interpersonal experiences between children and their peers is an important aspect of building confidence and encouraging motivation for sport participation. Coaches and instructors should be aware of the potential positive impact that children can have on each other in sporting environments and are encouraged to utilize athletes to provide feedback to each other (e.g., demonstration of a skill followed by an efficacy-building statement).

Next steps

Future research is needed to investigate when to encourage children to use RISE-enriched feedback with their peers, what types of feedback may be the most influential for certain sporting situations, whether the skill of the athlete determines if this feedback is more or less influential, and ultimately if systematic use of RISE-enriched feedback has an enduring impact on continued sport participation.

Key stakeholders and benefits

- Recreational Sport Camps
- Community Sport Programs (e.g., Minor League Soccer, Baseball, Hockey)
- Coaches Association of Ontario
- Coaching Association of Canada
- Provincial/territorial teaching organizations (e.g., Ontario Teachers’ Federation)

Although research investigating the positive impact that peers can have in youth sporting environments is still in its infancy, coaches, sport instructors, and teachers are encouraged to be aware of the potential impact that children can have on their peers when providing RISE-enriched feedback. As well as, the possibility of using

children to provide RISE-enriched performance feedback to each other when they may be otherwise unavailable to do so themselves.