Sports as a Veritable Tools for Leadership Quality in Early Childhood Curriculum

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Abstract

Understanding of leadership within sports context has significantly developed for a long time and has moved from the application of global leadership models to the development and implementation specific models and approaches. Both sports and team activities provide opportunities to the childhood sports to come up with strategies of winning. Leaders always have specific goal in mind. They come up with policies that will ensure that the work being done is effective and efficient. This paper looks at the role of sports as far as the veritable tools for good leadership skill in gained from Childhood education in Nigeria in context. There is a detailed introduction of the concept of sports and how it significantly plays a role in developing leadership skills. It went on to have an overview of a series of processes which a leader in sport has to design and realized. The necessity of leadership presence (guidance) in sport can be found in the dynamic polyvalent and multidisciplinary development of contemporary human society, with the added note that management is more closely related to efficiency, and leadership with effectiveness and change, when introduced into the childhood education curriculum. And some recommendation were also looked into.

Key- Words:- Sports, Tools, Leadership, Early Childhood Education Curriculum

Introduction

Sport has the unique power to bring people of diverse backgrounds, religions, interests, cultures, etc together, especially the early childhood and yet until recently, the

tremendous potential of sport to achieve leadership, educational and development targets among the early childhood has more or less been largely overlooked in Nigeria. By its very nature, sport encourages universal participation bridging national, ethnic, social and religious divides. It is precisely for this reason that sport, when effectively used as a tool for good leadership development, can serve as a catalyst for general social development.

Sport is a powerful tool which can be used to empower children as young as toddlers and the youth with life skills. It facilitates the rehabilitation & re-integration of the marginalised e.g. street children, the disabled, etc into mainstream society. Sport activities by their very nature demand perseverance, teamwork, discipline and leadership, which in turn nurture confidence and motivation for self-development. Early engagement in sports also benefits children and youth by identifying their talents physical or non-physical and motivating and guiding them to pursue it as career. Sport enhances participation, integration and cohesion into various communities whether at school, church, mosque or clubs (Coakely, 2015).

Sport can be used to mobilise and empower young women and girls who typically are more likely to be discouraged from going into sports or the disabled, for better inclusive development. Sport is a key service for young men, women and vulnerable groups, who are often exposed to negative influences. It is possible that the sporting fields and arenas could serve as a venue for experience-based learning of leadership skills, several of the key elements necessary for learning are not present. Thomas & Cheese (2005) outline three key phases of experience-based learning: (1) preparing, (2) developing, and (3) preserving. Proper preparation requires assessment of strengths and weaknesses, personal values, and learning style. Developing involves the continued practice of the skills, while preserving involves feedback and revision of learning objectives to reinforce learning and performance.

Leadership is widely recognized as an essential driver of organizational performance and improvement, but little is known about its role in improving the quality of early childhood care and education settings or outcomes for staff and children. Due to the array of theories within leadership, it is impossible to have a universal definition of the term. In a general sense, however, leadership can be defined as "a type of social influence through which one successfully garners the help and support of others to achieve a common goal" (Murphy & Johnson, 2011, p. 461). A leader is able to inspire a passion, drive, and motivation within others in order to move them to make a vision reality. Acording to Bennis (1988), a pioneer of leadership studies, stated, "Leadership is the capacity to translate vision to reality". These definitions can very much be related to transformational leadership, one of the most popular leadership theories today.

Leadership behaviors developed through sports may not be transferable to classroom and life tasks, much less the boardroom. Just as the classroom teaching of abstract leadership constructs is criticized for its lack of transferability to the workplace, so too are the skills learned in a competitive athletic contest which may not transfer to a corporate setting. Bruner et al., (2017) argues that managerial skills "cannot be developed in isolation of context". Athletes may only see their field- developed skills as applicable to sports, and therefore do not use or practice them in the workplace.

The Early Childhood Education Curriculum prepares pupils for future success in the field of early childhood education by improving academic and technology skills, improving employability skills, and articulating courses to community colleges. Early childhood services are split between education, parenting and care programs. Kindergarten is delivered as an extension of public education, an entitlement for all and with no fees charged. Parenting programs have a mix of public and community sponsors (Fortin, Godbout, & St-Cerny, (2012)).

Sports
Although, definitions of sports vary, many scholars agree that sports are institutionalized competitive activities that involve rigorous physical exertion or the use of relatively complex skills by participants motivated by internal and external rewards (Coakley, 2015). Sport as an institutionalized motoric activity requiring systematic physical exertion motivated through desire to improve physical shape, specific personal experience or intended result, performance, victory and reward (Sekot 2006, p. 23). Sport is "a competitive activity involving at least two competitors, requiring physical skill, following formal rules, and occurring within a formal organizational framework" (LeUnes, 2008, p. 5).

Who is a Leader?
According to Douglass (2017), a leader is defined by who participates in leadership by contributing to decision-making and influencing change and quality improvement. Leadership can include center leaders and coach(trainner) leaders. Center leaders include the primary center (or site) leader and other persons who hold formal responsibility for overseeing administrative, operational, and instructional activities within the center. Coach leaders include coaching staff who carry responsibilities in the field or gymnasuim and (1) hold formal responsibilities to supervise and support other coaches and make decisions or (2) who informally contribute to decision making and influencing change and improvement.
Leadership has not been well defined or measured in ECE (Dunlop 2008; Douglass 2017). Early Childhood Education (ECE) leadership is generally defined as "influencing or motivating groups of people to work together toward change, to accomplish a goal or solve a problem" (Douglass 2018; Nicholson et al. 2018). One review from the health field notes four common elements of leadership: (1) it is a process, (2) it entails influence, (3) it occurs within a group setting or context, and (4) it involves achieving goals that reflect a common vision (Cummings et al. 2010). Other studies in the education, health care, and management fields note similar concepts in defining leadership (Gumus et al. 2018; Hitt and Tucker 2016; Wong et al. 2013; Montano et al. 2017; Dunst et al. 2018).
Like experts in most fields, successful leaders have mastered not only "the basics," but also productive responses to the unique demands of the contexts in which they find themselves. In this sense, all successful leadership is "contingent" at its roots. Indeed, impressive evidence suggests that individual leaders actually behave quite differently (and productively) depending on the circumstances they are facing and the people with whom they are working. This calls into question the common belief in habitual leadership "styles" and the search for a single best

model or style. We need to be developing leaders with large repertoires of practices and the capacity to chose from that repertoire as needed, not leaders trained in the delivery of one "ideal" set of practices (Dunst et al. 2018).
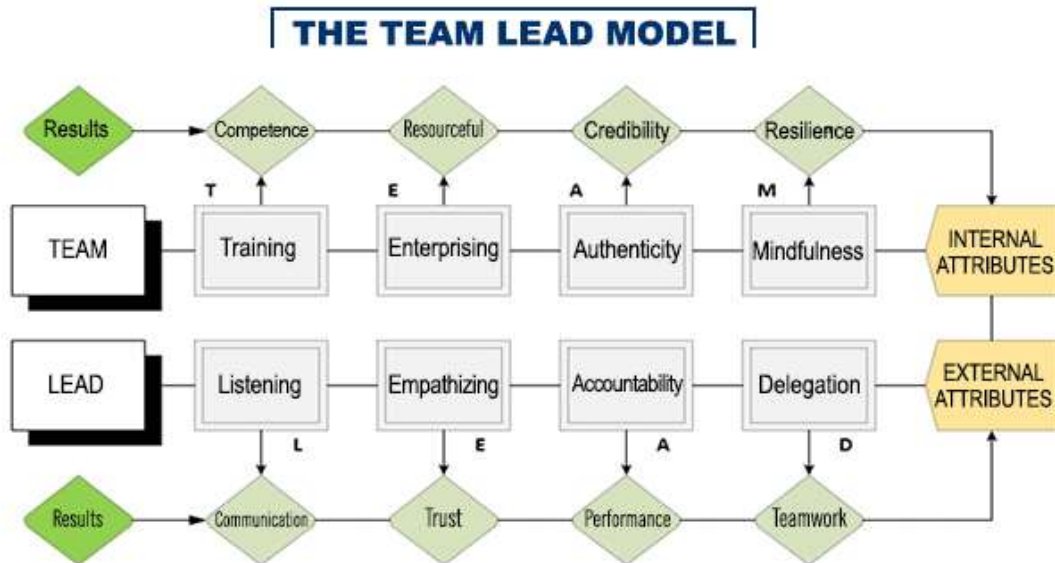
THE TEAM LEAD MODEL

LEADERSHI**NOW**   ©2022 *The TEAM LEAD Model of Self Leadership* by Joe Wolemonwu

T.E.A.M. L.E.A.D. is an acronym for Training, Enterprising, Authenticity, Mindfulness, Listening, Empathizing, Accountability, Delegation. This model identifies eight leadership requirements, accomplishments, and skills a leader must have to be effective. In essence, this model offers a quicker rate of acceleration in all quadrants of the organization by the consistency of the leader's conviction and commitment to excellence.

Montano et al. (2017) opined that a leader must possess all of the eight core T.E.A.M. L.E.A.D. attributes to be more effective. The Team Lead concept is a self-leadership approach to leading a team. Four attributes with the acronym T.E.A.M. has *internal* attributes the leader must possess, while the remaining four L.E.A.D. show *external* attributes that enable the leader to lead the team effectively.

Training enhances performance, grows knowledge, makes a leader *Competent*, and boots productivity through learned skills.

Enterprising develops a leader's capacity to generate ideas and skills that make them creatively *Resourceful*. A resourceful leader always finds a way to take advantage of a situation.

Authenticity gives a leader *Credibility* and makes people appreciate your leadership.

Mindfulness creates *Resilience* and happiness and increases productivity. It helps regulate your emotions. It enables you to have a greater level of emotional intelligence.

The second part begins with Listening, helps a leader *Communicate* effectively and makes them more charismatic by keeping them engaged in a conversation, and helps improve the leader's relationships with others.

Empathizing with others helps build *Trust* and encourages open communication and effective feedback.

Accountability helps to improve *Performance* and enables people to be in control of their actions.

Delegation helps promote *Teamwork* by creating a mentorship environment that supports learning and development with credible skills to grow and work effectively as a team.

T.E.A.M. L.E.A.D. focuses on growing the leader internally first and having those qualities exhibited and passed on to the entire organization as a fundamental recipe for success and progress. As organizations are constantly evolving and transforming as it progresses, the same applies to the leader, who must acquire new knowledge to remain relevant and effective in leading the organization. When an organization stagnates, it dies, consequently failing to produce the goals of its mission. A leader must also intellectually grow while constantly adopting some personal attributes and skills which accentuate goodness and effective leadership (Montano et al. 2017).

The most common measurement of a leader's effectiveness is assessing group performance and the scope to which the goals and objectives of the group are met. The degree to which this can be measured is a strong indicator that leaders can influence their subordinates and lead them to achieve the organization's strategic objectives.

Leadership and Sports

Coaches have a profound and lasting impact on the athletes and teams they train. Leadership theories can benefit from considering coaches as leaders and understanding how coaches' behaviors have an impact. Leadership in sports is now an education policy priority around the world. Increased sports autonomy and a greater focus on coaching and sport results have made it essential to reconsider the role of coaches as leaders in sports. There is much room for improvement to professionalise sports leadership, to support current sports leaders and to make sports leadership an attractive career for future candidates (Hitt and Tucker 2016), and as such be included in childhood education curriculum of studies.

There is a rich body of evidence about the relevance to leaders of such features of the organizational context as geographic location, level of sport and both sport and location (district) size. Each of these features has important implications for what it means to offer successful leadership. For example, successful coachs in inner-city clubs often find it necessary to engage in more direct and top-down forms of leadership than do successful coachs in suburban settings. The curricular knowledge of successful elementary coach frequently rivals the curricular knowledge of their trainner; in contrast, secondary coachs will typically rely on their department heads for such knowledge. Similarly, small sports allow for quite direct engagement of leaders in modeling desirable forms of instruction and monitoring the practices of coaches, whereas equally successful leaders of large sports typically influence their coaches in more indirect ways; for example, through planned professional development experiences (Wong et al. 2013).

This evidence challenges the wisdom of leadership development initiatives that attempt to be all things to all leaders or refuse to acknowledge differences in leadership practices required

by differences in organizational context. Being the principal of a large sport, for example, really does require quite different capacities than being the coach of a small sport.

Sports leadership has become a priority in sports policy agendas internationally. It plays a key role in improving sports outcomes by influencing the motivations and capacities of coaches, as well as the sports climate and environment. Effective sports leadership is essential to improve the efficiency and equity of sport. As countries are seeking to adapt their sporting systems to the needs of contemporary society, expectations for coaches and sports leaders are changing. Many countries have moved towards decentralisation, making sports more autonomous in their decision making and holding them more accountable for results. At the same time, the requirement to improve overall sports performance while serving more diverse populations is putting sport under pressure to use more evidence-based practices, and as such move to schooling foundation which childhood education (Wong et al. 2013).

Leadership and Childhood

Despite the extensive research about leadership, there is not much research addressing leadership in childhood education (0 birth – 18 years). Much of the research regarding leadership is focused on or structured around business leaders or executives. One would think that studying leadership in early years would prove to be valuable because it could give insight into the development of leadership in adults. Even at a young age, children exhibit leadership skills. Just as children learn other important skills, children can learn and build on these leadership skills through their experiences. Many developmental psychologists support the developmental importance of experiential learning (Popper & Mayseless, 2007). At a young age, children are much more prone to learning skills and retaining them throughout their life. During childhood and adolescence, an individual's behavior, personality, and skills are more malleable than they are in adulthood.

Maria Montessori, a pioneer of early childhood education, believed in this idea. She heavily supported and promoted the idea of sensitive periods, the periods of a child's life when skills are best learned. Similarly, in order for an individual to develop good leadership, it is best if various skills are taught at different stages in his or her life, during the sensitive periods when certain skills are best learned (Murphy & Johnson, 2011). As detailed in the table below, Murphy and Johnson (2011) created the periods according to age ranges from 2 years up through 18 years. Although an individual continues to learn vital leadership skills past childhood, the skills learned later build off the skills learned when young, which only stresses the importance of learning as a child. For example, in the high school – late adolescence stage (ages 15-18), an individual might need to work with others to complete a project at school or a summer job. In order to do this effectively, he or she should have emotional intelligence in his or her interactions with others, which should be learned in the preschool years stage (ages 2- 5) (Murphy, 2011). In order to do this effectively, a leader will need to use all the skills he or she learned earlier in life such as influencing others practiced in the preschool years, coordinating others in teams practiced, , public speaking to gain support for a cause, and motivating team members, all these practiced in childhood education. The childhood

education structured inline will go long way to reposition sports leadership national development.

Leadership tasks and skills for youth

Age Range	New Leadership Tasks and Skills
Preschool years (ages 2-5)	Influencing others
	Getting others to like you
	Communicating wishes
	Increased need for emotional intelligence with others (reading the emotions of others, and delaying gratification)
Elementary school (ages 6-11)	Coordinating others in teams
	Earthy school leadership tasks (e.g., classroom monitor, or teacher's helper)
	Fundraising (e.g., selling candy, etc.)
	Public speaking to express ideas
	Increased need for social intelligence in interactions with others (understanding social situations and acting appropriately)

Murphy, 2011

CONCLUSION

Sport has the power to change the world. It has the power to unite in a greater way than other activity does. It speaks to youth in a language they can understand. Sport can create hope where once there was only despair. It is more powerful than governments in breaking down racial barriers. It laughs in the face of all odds and types of discrimination. It is only but an urgent need to be properly structured into the childhood education curriculum to reposition tomorrow leadership for national security, peace and unity.

Play gives children the opportunity to develop skills in influencing others, getting others to like them, communicating wishes, and emotional intelligence (Murphy & Johnson, 2011). As children grow older, they have the opportunity to participate in athletics. Athletics give children the opportunity to interact with peers while working hard and striving toward a common goal as a team. With proper coaching, children can learn many skills from athletic participation. Leadership skill development in young children must be seriously considered in childhood education. However, more research is needed in the early development of leadership. As professional leadership development programs fail, it is time to turn the attention to leadership development in children.

Recomemdation

The following recomemdations were suggested;

- Initiate and mentor a multi-stakeholder process that involves early years, schools, Community Based Organizations (CBOs) and mandated local government offices at neighborhood levels.

- Undergo a massive national rehabilitation of all neighborhood, public and private school sports playing fields to increase accessibility to a variety of sports and encourage friendly participation for all.
- Create more recreational spaces for public uses.
- All Schools from pre-primary to tertiary levels should develop and implement a structured and concise sports curriculum.
- Equip neighborhood volunteer coaches and school sport teachers in comprehensive coaching techniques (sport, life skills, counseling) through tailor-made training.
- Facilitate 'sport for all 'campaigns and sport events in the neighborhood & schools to sensitize the community and authorities.

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