Abstract

Capturing the realities of sports programmes: systematic ‘messiness’?

Early workings based on traditional methods (Schuman, 1967, as cited in Clarke and Dawson, 1999) have given way to more pragmatic, social paradigms with *scientific realism* (Pawson and Tilley, 1997) and *evaluation utility* (Patton, 2002) establishing evaluation research as a specialist area of applied social research. There has been more pressure for those who work in community sport to deliver with evaluation in mind. This can be interpreted as the government demanding greater accountability for its investment, but it is more than that. Community sport needs to modernise. It needs to be able to fully explain not just what works but why it works. Given the current economic and political instabilities, sport needs to work harder than ever to establish itself as a mainstream function of our communities needs and development (Coalter, 2007). Evaluation may not be a panacea but it will provide support in terms of evidence based decisions and stronger rationales for community sport’s existence. Evaluation is not an exact science and draws on a number of disciplines, using an eclectic repertoire of concepts and methods (Rossi, et al. 2004). To this end, this positional paper will reflect on the processes of a six-year community sport and physical activity strategy evaluation. Recommendations based on the reflection will be acknowledged. The strategy and the evaluation (Daniels, 2016) were developed by the Community Sport Network for this region and involved expertise from the Manchester Metropolitan University, public sector sport development and third sector sports clubs whose projects where supported by Sport England’s Community Investment Fund. The paper will present outcome patterns for the strategy and explain the methods that helped build them.

References


