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## **Building Social and Cultural Capital among Young People in Disadvantaged Communities: Lessons from a Brazilian Sport-based Intervention Program**

Ramón Spaaij

*La Trobe University, Australia and University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands*

### **Abstract**

This article explores the concepts of social and cultural capital as analytical tools for investigating the capacity of sport-based intervention programs to contribute to the personal, social and professional development of disadvantaged young people. It draws on survey data ( $n = 129$ ) and qualitative interviews ( $n = 53$ ) with participants of the Vencer program in Rio de Janeiro to examine how the program impacts on participants' personal and skill development and social connectedness. Surveys ( $n = 28$ ) and interviews ( $n = 36$ ) with stakeholders provide additional perspectives on the program's impact on participants. It is argued that the program's contribution to the development of social and cultural capital is closely associated with its ability to develop linkages with multiple institutional agents and the provision of a facilitating institutional context which enables young people to get to know one another and broaden their social horizons.

**Keywords:** Social capital; Cultural capital; Football; Social engagement; Brazil

## Introduction

Recent research provides a critical reflection on the capacity of sports involvement to contribute to the development of social capital (Blackshaw & Long, 2005; Seippel, 2006; Misener & Mason, 2006; Coalter, 2007; Nicholson & Hoye, 2008; Spaaij, 2009; Kay & Bradbury, 2009). It is increasingly recognised that the transformative capacity of sport-based interventions for disadvantaged or disaffected young people can only be realised within a personal and social development approach and not by merely offering sport activities (Crabbe, 2006; Sandford *et al.*, 2006). Such an approach is deemed vital for achieving social benefits beyond immediate participation in sport. However, the capacity of sport-based interventions to engender social and cultural capital is shaped by a range of personal, institutional and structural factors (e.g. Kay & Bradbury, 2009; Spaaij, 2009). Access to social and cultural capital resources is distributed unevenly and varies considerably depending on the wider social context of young people's lives and experiences. This raises the important question whether, and if so how, sport-based interventions can contribute to the development of social and cultural capital of young people whose life chances are profoundly affected by a structural context characterised by poverty, high rates of unemployment and job insecurity, and low educational attainment.

This article addresses the above question in relation to a sport-based intervention program in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The Vencer ('To Win') program aims to improve the employment prospects of young people living in Rio's *favelas* (squatter settlements). The article uses the concepts of social and cultural capital as analytical tools for investigating the impact of Vencer in the lives of participants. These concepts and their application in this article are introduced in the next section. This is followed by a succinct exploration of the wider context of the Vencer program. The article next draws on a mixed-methods study with

participants and stakeholders to examine the program's impact on participants' personal and skill development and their social connectedness. This impact is shown to be closely associated with the program's ability to develop linkages with institutional agents and the provision of a facilitating institutional context which enables young people to get to know one another and broaden their social horizons. The concluding section reflects on the main lessons that can be drawn from the research results with regard to the provision and impact of sport-based intervention.

### **Conceptualising social and cultural capital**

This article contributes to the debate about the impact of sport-based interventions by considering the extent to which, and the processes through which, the Vencer program in Rio de Janeiro fosters the social and cultural capital of disadvantaged youth. Rather than rehearsing this debate in full, this section provides a concise discussion of how the concepts of social and cultural capital are used in this article. It takes as the point of departure Bourdieu's (1986) conceptualisation of social and cultural capital. Bourdieu defined social capital as 'the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 119). Social capital resides in social connections and interaction with others. It refers to a kind of unequally distributed 'resource to action' that is produced by, and invested in, social relationships by social actors for their individual and mutual benefit (Portes, 1998).

A major strength of Bourdieu's notion of social capital is its concern for inequalities and power. For Bourdieu, social capital is primarily an asset of the privileged and a means for maintaining their superiority. However, Bourdieu failed to fully recognise the importance of

social capital to disadvantaged groups (Field, 2008, p. 22). Coleman's (1988) idea that social capital is not limited to the powerful, but can also convey benefits to disadvantaged groups, is an important corrective to Bourdieu. Coleman's work also sensitises us to the fact that social capital does not necessarily arise because people make a calculating choice to invest in it, but also as a by-product of activities engaged in for other purposes.

### *Types of social capital*

Three types of social capital can be distinguished. Bonding social capital refers to close ties between kin, neighbours and close friends, which tend to produce resources that help individuals to 'get by'. Bridging social capital, on the other hand, comprises more distant ties with like persons, such as loose friendships and work colleagues. This type of social capital is usually associated with resources that help individuals to 'get ahead' or change their opportunity structure. Bridging networks are viewed to be 'better for linkage to external assets and for information diffusion' (Putnam, 2000, p. 22). Linking social capital refers to relations between individuals and groups in different social strata. It reaches out to unlike people in dissimilar situations, such as those who are entirely outside the community, thus enabling them to leverage a far wider range of resources than are available within the community (Woolcock, 2001, p. 13-4). Woolcock's (2001) notion of linking social capital includes the capacity of individuals and communities to leverage resources, ideas and information from formal institutions beyond the immediate community.

Different combinations of the three types of social capital will produce different outcomes (Field, 2008, p. 46). Woolcock (2001) contends that the poor typically have a close-knit and intensive stock of bonding social capital that they leverage to 'get by'; a modest endowment of the more diffuse and extensive bridging social capital typically deployed by the non-poor to 'get ahead'; and almost no linking social capital enabling them

to gain sustained access to formal institutions such as banks, insurance agencies, and the courts.

### ***Cultural capital***

Cultural capital refers to cultural goods, knowledge, experience, education, competencies and skills which an individual possesses and which confer power or status in the social hierarchy. It incorporates personal and skill development, for example cognitive capabilities and communication skills. Cultural capital is developed in the contexts of learning within family settings, formal education, workplace training and informal learning. Cultural capital is a central concept in the work of Bourdieu. For Bourdieu, the educational system tends to perpetuate class-based differences in power and prestige (e.g. Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). Cultural capital plays a vital role in the reproduction of dominant social relations and structures. From this perspective, sport-based interventions that target disadvantaged groups are perhaps unlikely to yield any significant benefits for participants in the long term. However, I would posit the potential for at least some degree of social transformation and social mobility for certain participants under certain circumstances (see Spaaij, 2009). The wider socio-economic and cultural capital context of the Vencer program is discussed below.

### **The context of the Vencer program**

The socio-economic context in which Vencer operates is important for understanding the challenges of developing the social and cultural capital of disadvantaged youth. Brazil has one of the highest income inequality indexes in the world (Barros *et al.*, 2000). The country features a shrinking formal economy, poor quality of public education (UNICEF, 2009) and high rates of juvenile unemployment and job insecurity, especially for those with low

educational attainment (Hasenbalg & Silva, 2003; Noieto & Werthein, 2003). In urban Brazil, poverty has become increasingly concentrated among certain segments of the population, including children and youth, the unemployed and people employed in the informal sector (Gacitúa Marió & Woolcock, 2008).

Education is a key correlate of income inequality in Brazil. Pastore (2004) has shown that although only one quarter of Brazilians has completed secondary education, the vast majority of formal employment opportunities in metropolitan areas are available only to those who have at least a secondary education degree. The remaining three-quarters of the population ‘remain in the world of exclusion, prolonged unemployment or precarious work.’ The school-to-work transition tends to be particularly frustrating for young people with low educational attainment. They often experience great difficulty in finding secure employment due to their (perceived) lack of qualification, experience and specialisation (Castro & Abramovay, 2002; Sansone, 2003).

A recent World Bank report notes that in Brazilian society as a whole, ‘there is a lack of recognition of the roles and rights of poor young people’ (Gacitúa Marió & Woolcock, 2008, p. 23). In a context of inequality and exclusion, poor urban neighbourhoods have come to exemplify violence and immorality as a result of the perverse images disseminated by the media about crime, drug use, alcoholism and other destructive behaviours by (young) residents (Jacobi, 2006; Velho, 2008). The World Bank report concludes that there is ‘a need to develop young people’s entrepreneurial capacity and skills by facilitating access to productive resources and assets and developing their managerial skills.’ To this end, the World Bank recommends that ‘[y]outh programs and projects should develop the social, cultural, and symbolic capital of individuals’ (Gacitúa Marió & Woolcock, 2008, p. 104).

The capacity of the Vencer program to develop these capitals of disadvantaged youth in Rio de Janeiro is analysed in this article. The program is coordinated by the NGO Instituto

Companheiros das Américas, a sister organisation of the US-based NGO Partners of the Americas. The original funding for Vencer came from the Multilateral Investment Fund of the Inter-American Development Bank. To date, a total of 1,286 young people aged 16-24 have participated in the program. Two-thirds of participants are females. Approximately 87% of participants had not completed secondary education by the time they entered the program. The greater educational involvement and performance of young women compared to young males is well recognised in the Brazilian literature (e.g. Sansone, 2003). Stakeholders and participants acknowledged this differential. For example, an ICT teacher commented: ‘The girls are much more dedicated than the boys. Boys carry the project in a different way than girls. The girls are more committed than they are.’ Another reason for this differential appears to be the greater pressure exerted by family members on young males to work from an early age (e.g. as street vendors or unskilled manual labourers) in order to contribute to the family income.

## **Methodology**

The Vencer impact study aimed to produce a detailed understanding of how the program is experienced by participants and stakeholders, and to gather evidence on the program’s impact on participants. Active engagement with stakeholders was sought throughout the research process to enhance the usefulness of the research results and to ensure that all stakeholder voices would be fairly heard. Strategies adopted to promote local ownership and locally grounded research outcomes included the contracting of a young female resident as a research assistant and the collaborative design of research methods, interview topic lists and survey questions.

The Vencer case study combined quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative data were compiled from the records kept by program coordinators regarding the pre- and post-program situations of participants, including their employment, education, financial and housing situations as well as their sporting habits. These data were supplemented using survey data. The purpose of the survey was to gather standardised data on the program's impact on (former) participants. The survey comprised 20 closed-ended and open-ended questions.

A total of 129 completed surveys were received, which corresponds to a sampling fraction of 10% and a response rate of just below 52%. This response rate was deemed adequate for analysis and reporting (Babbie, 1979, p. 335), but was lower than initially expected due to reasons discussed below. The sampling frame (N = 1,286) was organised by the research assistant based on the computerised records held by the coordinating agency. The research assistant compiled a list comprising every participant since the start of the program. The list of the population was complete, making random sampling possible. The sex distribution of the survey sample (61% females, 39% males) was broadly representative of the sampling frame, although male participants were slightly over-represented.

Oral surveys were conducted by telephone and face-to-face due to their more personal approach, their greater flexibility and their potential to generate more thorough opinions and impressions from the respondents in comparison with written or electronic surveys. Respondents were randomly selected and contacted by telephone and invited to participate either by telephone or face-to-face. Recruiting potential respondents and getting them to complete and return a survey was a complicated matter, the main reasons being difficulties in locating potential respondents and a lack of motivation to participate in the study on the part of some potential respondents.

In addition to participant surveys, stakeholder surveys were conducted to gather the experiences and views of stakeholders with regard to program delivery and impact as well as local social issues. Surveys were distributed to coordinators, teachers, mentors and other stakeholders (approximately 50 in total). Twenty-eight completed surveys were received and analysed, consisting of a sampling fraction of approximately 55%.

The surveys generated relevant data with regard to participants' education and employment situations as well as their social and leisure behaviours. However, this method failed to produce in-depth insight into their everyday experiences and the meanings they gave to program participation. The quantitative data were therefore supplemented with qualitative data gathered through semi-structured interviews. Interviewing offered the flexibility to react to the respondent's situation, probe for more detail, seek more reflexive responses and ask questions which are relatively complex or personally intrusive in comparison with standardised surveys. A total of 53 interviews were conducted with former Vencer participants. Females made up 66% of the interview sample. A further 36 interviews were conducted with program educators and other stakeholders (e.g. business representatives, school teachers and health providers). The aim of these interviews was to gather additional perspectives on the program's impact on participants.

In all cases, informed consent was sought and obtained in writing. Participants received an information sheet which explained the purpose, aims, methodology and planned outcomes of the research, and they were given the opportunity to raise questions or request further information. The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed and coded in Brazilian Portuguese. The interview and survey responses were coded in the method advocated by Miles and Huberman (1994). Dominant concepts, themes and issues were noted to form categories; these categories becoming codes with which data were interpreted. The data gathered in the interviews and the surveys are presented in the next section.

## **Results**

### ***The nature and impact of the football intervention***

Vencer begins with a belief that team sports, particularly football, are an effective tool for motivating youth to participate in vocational training, for teaching professional skills and to foster meaningful social interaction. In the words of a program coordinator:

Sport, and football in particular, gave us an opportunity to talk about other things, like work skills. Because everybody [in Rio de Janeiro] knows a little bit about football, and even if they don't like it they would like to go watch it. And so it facilitates negotiation and establishes relationships, institutional relationships as well as personal relationships.

The program uses sport as both a physical and an intellectual background for learning. In the first phase of the program, participants play approximately 50 hours on the field and spent around 50 hours in the classroom. During classroom time, sport is still the language that is used; for example, a lesson on timeliness is built around a sport example, and gender is taught within the sports context. In the remainder of the program, the educators continue to use sports contexts and provide regular opportunities for games to keep participants motivated and to stimulate learning via sport.

The Vencer methodology is informed by the theory of experiential learning (Kolb, 1984), with the practical football activities comprising the first stage of a learning cycle (i.e., the concrete experience). This is followed by reflection and analysis of the activity (with the educator as facilitator), conceptualisation (assisted by the educator), and the group-based

transfer of learning. Vencer educators also draw on elements of the critical pedagogy developed by Paulo Freire (1973), most notably the creation of non-hierarchical, dialogical learning spaces and the fostering of critical consciousness. With regard to the former, a program officer commented that:

The relationship between the participant and facilitator is really important because it's more of a 'coaching' relationship than a traditional teacher-to-student relationship. During the facilitator trainings, we really try to emphasise that the facilitator must be on the same level as the participant in order to gain trust and that the learning experience is mutual, not unilateral.

The fostering of critical consciousness is addressed, for example, in sessions on citizenship rights and democratic participation.

The use of sport as a tool for teaching transferable skills was recognised by many participants. A former Vencer participant argued that:

Football is a good way to learn certain skills which you can apply in everyday life and at work. It is not about the technical aspect of the game, for example whether you can give a good pass, but about communicating with others, to work together. These are things that you also need in the labour market. (Female, age 18)

However, football can also have less wholesome effects on skill development and social relationships. Football is all too often a sport that exhibits division, conflict and aggression (e.g. Lambert, 2007; Spaaij, 2010). During the research issues such as aggressive conduct, competitiveness and minor injuries (bruises, broken toe nails) were observed.

The Physical Education (PE) teachers who participated in the research were aware that football can divide groups or communities as much as it unites them. They aimed to present sport activities in a safe and suitable learning environment to ensure that all participants would develop skills and enjoy being physically active. The PE teachers changed the team compositions on a daily basis to reduce the competitiveness of the football activities. They also modified the rules of the games to foster active, participatory learning and to vary the physical and emotional demands of the activities. For example, during one exercise participants played in couples with their hands attached to each other, forcing them to work as a unit. This modified sport was generally appreciated by the participants, as the following comment suggests:

I am terrible at playing football, but I really enjoyed it. It was fun because it wasn't normal football, it was different. There were always activities that made us respect one another. ... When you play football in the street this mutual respect doesn't exist, it's much more competitive. (Female, age 24)

While most respondents valued the less competitive nature of the football activities in Vencer, one participant argued that the competitive aspect of the game actually had educational value: '[I]t is part of the process. In life there is also a lot of competition: people when they look for employment, interviews, those things' (Male, age 18). This comment resonates with the belief of the Football for Peace project in Israel that competition and conflict in football are useful in the sense that coaches can create opportunities for players to resolve these situations in a way that will impact positively upon the young participants (Lambert, 2007, p. 17). Indeed, one of the Vencer educators noted that conflict situations 'are inevitable' and that it is therefore 'so important to have good facilitators who can take

advantage of those moments and turn them into something positive.’ She stressed that these situations generated valuable teaching and learning moments: ‘On the sports field, emotions come out and a lot of these youth respond to conflict with aggression or anger, which can be nerve-wracking but also bring out a lot of really great real-life teaching moments.’

Overall, almost all respondents indicated that football contributed significantly to the learning process. However, only 38% of the survey participants recognised playing football as one of the most enjoyable parts of the program. This considerable discrepancy, the data suggest, stems from participants’ motives for entering the program, as discussed below.

### ***Personal and skill development***

More than 90% of the survey participants viewed playing football as a means for personal and professional development, not as an end in itself. For them, getting a job and enhancing their skills and professional attributes were the ultimate goals of their participation in Vencer, as Table 1 shows. 22% of participants also indicated their aim to meet new people and make new friends, which is indicative of their desire to achieve increased social connectedness and social engagement. It should be noted here that it is difficult to determine whether these were indeed participants’ principal motives beforehand, or whether they express these motives because educators have been preaching this message to them over and over. For example, a few respondents remarked that they did not really have a major reason for joining the program and that they enrolled in the program primarily because they wanted to do something useful with their time. Overall, however, their concerns about their employment prospects closely reflect the social issues facing poor young people in Brazil, as discussed earlier.

**Table 1: Motives for participating in Vencer**

|  | No. of respondents (%) |       |
|--|------------------------|-------|
| Find employment                                      | 94                     | (73%) |
| Learn new skills and develop professional attributes | 93                     | (72%) |
| Meet new people and make new friends                 | 28                     | (22%) |
| Play football  | 12                     | (9%)  |
| Other  | 3                      | (2%)  |

Respondents were asked whether they had learned anything during their participation in Vencer. 92% of respondents answered this question affirmatively, reporting a range of personal, social and professional skills which they deemed important. These included, *inter alia*, communication skills, improved self-expression and self-esteem, working in a team, enhanced attitudes toward professional employment, administrative and technical skills, and increased knowledge of the labour market and citizenship rights. Some examples from the surveys:

To behave correctly during a job interview, speak in public, work in a team, and basic notions of ICT, among other things (Female, age 16-18, survey no. 44)

To work in a team and lose my shyness, and to express myself better (Female, age 19-21, survey no. 50)

I learned to interact with people who are different, to communicate better. (Female, age 16-18, survey no. 75)

Not to be prejudiced and to listen better to those around me. (Female, age 19, survey no. 77)

To work in a group, my shyness diminished and I improved my knowledge about the labour market. (Male, age 18, survey no. 126)

The interviews yielded similar results, as the following excerpts indicate:

It turned out to be the best thing I have ever done. Because today I am working, I know new people, my composure has changed a lot. I was very closed in terms of communication, shyness. I learned to speak in public, the teacher taught us that. (Female, age 18)

The truth is that it is a very good opportunity for everyone. Many people think that it's just another course, but when you start to attend the classes you see that it's really different from what normally happens. You learn innumerable things, how to interact with other people, independent of prejudices. ... [E]veryone thinks you are just going there to play football, but during the course you learn that it's different, you learn to respect one another's space, learn to have respect, have a goal. (Female, age 20)

Teachers and other stakeholders generally observed similar changes in participants' personal and skill development, but they also indicated a greater variety of issues. Table 2 summarises these results.

**Table 2: Stakeholders' views on the Vencer program's main impact on participants**

|   | No. of respondents (%) |       |
|---|------------------------|-------|
| Personal development, increased aspirations and awareness of one's capabilities | 46                     | (36%) |
| Introduction to and improved knowledge of labour market                         | 37                     | (29%) |
| Enhanced self-esteem and/or self-confidence                                     | 27                     | (21%) |
| Social connectedness, increased awareness of different social groups            | 18                     | (14%) |
| Enhanced capacity to work in a team or a group                                  | 18                     | (14%) |
| Improved behaviour and attitudes  | 14                     | (11%) |
| Increased social skills and capacity for self-expression and communication      | 9                      | (7%)  |
| Ability to plan one's future  | 5                      | (4%)  |

### ***Acquired skills transferred to non-sport contexts***

The research findings point to a vital outcome of the program: the development of skills that are transferable to other contexts. The transferred skills reported by participants included: improved communication and relationship skills, which helped participants assert themselves in interactions in family and other settings; decision-making skills of use at home, in school and at work; and enhanced self-esteem and self-confidence which transferred as a life skill. Program participation can thus be viewed as a means for acquiring new skills and knowledge which transcend the specific program context and serve young people in a very real and practical way in other facets of life (Sandford *et al.*, 2006, p. 264). The relevance of this finding is confirmed by a recent study of sport-based intervention programs in Brazil, India and Zambia, which also provides multiple reports of learning occurring through sport and then being transferred to other contexts (Kay *et al.*, 2008).

An important additional component of the Vencer program, which was absent in the programs studied by Kay, is the practical application of the learned professional skills. The objective of this component is to provide opportunities for participants to put their training

into practice, based on the assumption that demonstrable work experience is crucial to obtain future employment. Participants are supposed to complete at least 180 hours of on-the-job experience through internships in areas such as telemarketing, administration, ICT, sales or community services. The relevance of this component partly lies in the novelty of this experience for participants. Many young people abandon school in search of employment, but lack the qualifications and skills necessary to obtain steady jobs (Sansone, 2003). They commonly end up working in precarious jobs in the informal sector from an early age, tend to earn less than the minimum wage and receive fewer benefits than those in the formal sector (e.g. no social security or paid vacations).

The limited practical work experience facilitated by program participation was perceived by many participants and stakeholders as contributing to the development of professional skills and knowledge of the functioning of the labour market. One educator explained this as follows:

They get at least one month of practical experience to know how the labour market is. Because some have never had any such experience. To know how to deal with the labour market, to know its function, to know the company, the employees, how to behave within a company. I think that's important.

Several participants held similar views, indicative of which are the comments below:

[The on-the-job experience] is very important. ... When you are doing a course to train for a profession, there is nothing better than to go out there and apply what you have learned. (Female, age 19)

[W]e learn things in class, but when we go there for work experience, we see how the labour market is, how things really work. (Female, age 22)

The limited work experience provided as part of the program can serve as a basis for the development of cultural capital. However, the conversion of this experience into post-program employment (and hence into economic capital) is often a difficult process. One of the program's key challenges has been to establish partnerships with public and private sector organisations to create job placements for participants. To date approximately 71% of former participants have completed an internship. The survey results show that participants considered job placement a crucial part of the program as it enabled them to gain some professional experience and credentials. Respondents noted their lack of professional experience, not having completed secondary education and the poor quality of public education as barriers to obtaining secure and rewarding employment. Some young people also felt discriminated by potential employers for being *favelados*, which has led some of them to try to conceal their residential address during the job interview process. Prejudices and stereotypes held by potential employers may frustrate educators' efforts to establish partnerships with the private sector, as a program coordinator confessed:

We talk to people from big companies around here. I ask them how many of their employees come from this community. They say 'just a few'. Why? ... 'Oh, because in the *favela* we don't have qualified people' ... [T]hey have the idea that 'it's poor so nothing is good'.

Thirty-seven percent of the survey respondents indicated that they had found significant (yet not always formal) employment. In their view, this was in part thanks to the professional

development and learning activities offered by Vencer and to the social credentials provided by program staff. The latter is also an indication of the potential contribution of the program to the development of social capital, as discussed below.

### **The development of social capital**

Rio de Janeiro's *favelas* have historically been characterised by dense social networks and a vibrant community life (Zaluar & Alvito, 1998; Valladares, 2005). In recent decades, however, the pervasive sense of fear associated with drugs-related and police violence (as reflected in very high homicide rates) has significantly diminished the level of sociability, the use of public space for leisure and recreation, and membership in community organisations (except religious). In short, it has diminished the social capital of the communities, which had been one of the few effective assets in getting out of poverty during earlier periods (Perlman, 2006, p. 173). The Vencer survey results show very low rates (<10%) of youth participation in organised social, cultural and leisure activities, with the mere exception of religious activities (28%). Political participation has also decreased strikingly over the past three decades (Wheeler, 2005).

The decreased access to safe public spaces and the inadequate social and leisure infrastructures within many poor communities means that young people tend to 'circulate in a restricted area, segregated in their neighbourhoods, not necessarily exercising their social citizenship rights such as the benefit of using the city in which they live' (Castro & Abramovay, 2002, p. 157). In many communities it can be dangerous to be outside and young people are often confined indoors after school, further limiting opportunities to form friendships. In such conditions, the formation of supportive peer relationships requires a facilitating institutional context which enables young people to get to know and learn to trust one another (Stanton & Spina, 2005, p. 412).

The research results indicate that Vencer provided a context for meaningful social interaction, which served as a basis for the development of social capital. At the most basic level, it provided a space where young people could together and create and maintain friendships. The informal nature of the sporting activities and the common focus and teamwork involved allowed open and democratic relationships between young people and educators. As noted, 22% of the survey respondents reported that making new friends and meeting new people was a major reason for participating in the program. Several interviewees stressed the collaborative, inclusive nature of program participation, suggesting the importance of bonding with participants and staff.

We constructed a kind of family. We studied, made mistakes, had various experiences with various teachers. Each of us developed in a certain way, helping each other.  
(Male, age 17)

In the beginning it was quite difficult for me because I was very shy, I was quiet and didn't really talk to anyone ... but as time went on I came to see that one cannot live without others. It was a very close group, like a family, it was very nice. (Female, age 21)

These comments are indicative of the development of bonding social capital, that is, the formation of close ties and peer networks among participants. These ties reportedly facilitated a context for mutual social and emotional support. They also provided an opportunity for greater social connectedness:

[Socially] a lot has changed ... In the past I stayed indoors, I worked, I was only thinking about my husband and myself ... I thought that the world was just me and my husband, nothing else. ... Now I have great friendships. We know new people, people whose friendships will last. We always see people who participated in the course, different people. (Female, age 24)

Key to these social outcomes appears to be the development of supportive, longer-term trusting relationships that transcend the duration of the program. Young staff members, several of whom are themselves former Vencer participants, acted as peer educators whose socio-cultural distance to participants was relatively small. The value of this type of peer education is recognised in recent studies on development through sport (e.g. Coalter, 2007, p. 75-77). Interviewees expressed this in the following terms:

The teachers and the mentors were like our friends, you know? They were very close to the students. (Male, age 18)

A: It's funny because in normal schools the classrooms are very full ... and here they are much smaller so you can see other people better. The teachers circulate more among students ... they give more attention to each student.

Q: Did this way of teaching also help you learn things?

A: It's more dynamic, working, with control over the group, which has fewer people. That's better.

Q: How was the contact with teachers?

A: ... They were always willing to help us with any difficulty, even if it wasn't their subject. We could always ask them for help. They stimulated us with regard to our

studies, showing us their life experience. The majority of them have been to university, which isn't easy ... (Female, age 18)

Program participation also contributed to the development of social relationships between participants from different neighbourhoods and between participants and other residents. These relationships provided participants with an opportunity to broaden their social horizons and to familiarise themselves with life outside of their own immediate surroundings. Staff members underlined the importance of this outcome for breaking down social boundaries and mutual fears:

When a young person leaves the community they broaden their horizon. The age group of the Vencer program is very much a prisoner of their communities, their group is their community. ... They don't explore the city a lot. When they have access to the labour market they succeed in seeing other possibilities; when they leave to do a course they have to position themselves in a different manner so they are in a different space. (ICT teacher)

Because they do everything here in the community, they don't know how to behave themselves outside of it. They have fear of the outside and feel that they are different. So the issue of taking them to those other spaces is very important because it enables them to see that the world is not just inside their own communities. (Mentor)

As part of the program, participants were stimulated to engage more fully in social life outside of their immediate communities, for example through volunteering, community work and leisure activities.

Vencer thus facilitates an institutional context in which young people can get to know one another and broaden their social horizons. Moreover, the organisation provides an extensive social network which contains valuable resources. As noted, the program aims to link participants to a range of educational, employment and leisure opportunities that were previously unavailable to them. One way in which the program contributes to the development of linking social capital is through the student-mentor relationship. Mentors are recruited from business, education, government and other professions with the aim to transmit some of their knowledge onto participants and to serve as examples to participants. In some cases mentors established a personal relationship with individual participants. According to one of the PE teachers:

They [participants] really like the mentors. When they talk with directors of major companies or [employees] with important functions, they create aspirations as to what they could be one day too. Mentors also end up being mental advisers, which creates a link between them.

The interview data support this observation:

He [the mentor] shares his experience and vision with us. Because he works at a major company here in Brazil, so he knows how people view employers, how it is inside the company. I think that's important. (Female, age 18)

My mentor worked in a hotel. I believe he was the manager of a hotel. He gave many tips, he stimulated people to go to university. He talked about different areas of hotel

management. ... He explained what every sector did, what the function of each employee was. (Female, age 19)

Vencer increasingly invests in post-program follow-on. For example, staff attempt to assist former participants in finding employment opportunities or to help them gain access to tertiary education. On several occasions staff members have been instrumental in helping former participants to obtain scholarships for university education, ICT or language courses. They also regularly exert influence on recruiters or supervisors of an organisation who play a critical role in hiring participants, and facilitate certifications of participants' social credentials in ways similar to those described by Spaaij (2009) in his study of a sport-based intervention program in the Netherlands. A former Vencer participant, who now worked as an administrative assistant at one of the implementing NGOs, explained the importance of post-program assistance as follows:

If people didn't maintain contact after completing the program, they would feel a bit isolated and left on their own. So we are always there for them. If they cannot find work, we look for opportunities and help them apply for jobs. And I call them or contact them online to see whether they got the job or not so that I don't lose contact with them. (Female, age 26)

### ***Family-level effects of social and cultural capital***

This article has focused primarily on the creation of social and cultural capital at the level of the individual. This focus on the individual corresponds to micro-level conceptualisations of social capital like those of Bourdieu (1986) and Coleman (1988). However, the research results indicate that the Vencer program also contributed to the development of social and

cultural capital beyond the level of the individual, most notably at the family level and, to a lesser degree, at the level of local communities. Family-level effects are recognised in the literature on Brazilian *favelas* (e.g. Pino, 1997) and appear to be in line with (particularly) Coleman's thinking about social capital. Pino (1997) has noted that, in Brazil, 'the participation of the poor in community life takes place through the family'. Coleman (1988) argued for the importance of social capital within the family for a child's intellectual development and educational achievement. The data show that young people's development of social and cultural capital through participation in Vencer could also contribute, indirectly, to the personal and skill development and the social connectedness of their relatives.

Some interviewees described how they contribute to the family income and assist in the education of family members, for example by paying for a course or university entry exam. One girl's mother was illiterate and the girl reportedly stimulated her to learn to read. A 22-year-old female former participant now holds the rank of sergeant in the Brazilian army and she uses part of her wage to pay for her sister's tertiary education. She was the first female in her community to achieve this position. During the interview she reported that when she first arrived home dressed in her new uniform the entire neighbourhood visited her to learn more about her new function and some indicated that they wanted to pursue a similar career. As such, she served as an example for other young women.

### **The added value of the football intervention**

The data presented in this article raise the question to what degree the development of social and cultural capital can be attributed to football, as opposed to other program components. The results suggest that football was an integral part of the broader project of opening up possibilities for the development of social and cultural capital among participants. The football activities in Vencer had at least two key characteristics that made them a suitable

vehicle for delivering some of these outcomes. First, football was used to facilitate a fluid learning environment for supporting and delivering educational content to young people. Football activities generated valuable teaching and learning moments, which were carried over to the classroom-based sessions.

Second, the football activities contributed to building relationships which underpin the outcomes of the program. During football participants were able to develop a commitment towards each other and display their willingness to work as a team. These activities assisted in helping participants develop social skills involving co-operation and collaboration, responsibility, personal commitment and discipline. These social outcomes reflect those reported in other sport-based interventions, notably the Football for Peace project (Stidder, 2007, p. 95). The team spirit that developed among participants during the sport activities also spread to their daily lives, as was also reported by Kunz (2009) in her study of a sport-based intervention initiative in Iran. Many participants met with each other outside the project activities; they formed groups to study together, and, in several cases, became friends. The manipulation of the learning games by PE teachers, through modified rules and changing team compositions, contributed to the creation of an inclusive participatory learning environment in which both males and females, and both talented and less talented players, had the opportunity to develop social skills and relationships.

### **Conclusions: lessons for effective sport-based intervention**

This concluding section outlines succinctly the lessons that can be drawn from the research results with regard to the provision and impact of sport-based intervention. These lessons will be of value to sport pedagogues and other stakeholders involved in sport-based intervention programs.

### ***Building and maintaining linkages with institutional agents***

The development of social connections is a major outcome of Vencer reported in the data. Vencer provides a context for meaningful social interaction which serves as a basis for the development of social capital resources. It does not merely facilitate a close-knit network of people with similar experiences of socio-economic disadvantage (i.e. bonding social capital). Rather, the program also contributes to the creation and maintenance of linkages with people who can offer information and resources not currently available to the youth and their families. These people can be termed institutional agents, ‘who have both the capacity and commitment to either directly provide or negotiate the provision of institutional resources, support and opportunities for others’ (Stanton-Salazar *et al.*, 2000, p. 215). Social connections of this type include participants’ interactions with teachers, mentors and representatives of private and public sector organisations.

Fostering durable linkages with institutional agents is potentially critical for compensating for social and economic disadvantage (Woolcock, 2001). The research results suggest that linking ties can be deliberately created. They point to the establishment of new social networks which enable young people to construct new cultural, educational and professional reference models. In theory, these linkages may allow participants to become peer educators in their own right by supporting relatives and friends and by enabling them to learn about and seek previously unavailable resources, and to share resources with other community members. The data presented in this article give some evidence of such processes, but the extent to which Vencer produces these outcomes in the long term remains inconclusive at this point. The latter also remains an under-explored theme in the literature on social development through sport.

### ***Multi-agency and sustained approach***

The above suggests that a major success marker of the Vencer program is its multi-agency approach. Vencer regards sport as only one element of the intervention approach and, like many other sport-based intervention programs, invests in public-private partnerships. These partnerships are believed to help to build bridges and break down barriers and to offer disadvantaged young people practical assistance and new opportunities. As noted, building partnerships is an ongoing process that is not without difficulties. Moreover, it is not clear whether the linkages with institutional agents created through the program would survive the removal of external support mechanisms (cf. Field, 2008, p. 151). The research results suggest that, as Long and Sanderson (2001, p. 200) have noted, sport-based interventions need to be sustained if the benefits are to be anything other than transitory.

### ***The wider context of sport-based intervention***

Any consideration of the transferability of the acquired social and cultural capital should take into account the facilitating and inhibiting influences in the wider social context of participants' lives and experiences. Kay and Bradbury (2009, p. 138) note that the capacity of sport-based interventions to engender social capital in its various forms is shaped by a range of factors, notably 'the capacity of individuals to possess and utilise the material and symbolic resources to access and negotiate those social networks through which social capital might be best realised.' The present analysis also points to structural factors that can negatively affect the convertibility of social and cultural capital into economic capital. Major factors in this regard are the shrinking formal economy and the poor standard of public education in Brazil, which particularly affect the school-to-work transition of disadvantaged youth. It is questionable whether a sport-based intervention program with an average duration of six months can compensate for major income and educational disadvantage to any real

degree. Vencer stakeholders are aware of this and tend to regard participation as ‘a first yet significant step’ towards improved educational and occupational attainment. The program’s capacity to contribute to the development of participants’ skills and social connections is of vital import in this regard.

### ***Fostering a forum for local ownership and community engagement***

Appreciation of the wider context in which sport-based social intervention programs operate also means that these initiatives need to engage actively with the people who play significant roles in participants’ everyday lives, notably their family members. The research results indicate that the involvement of families in the Vencer program is not structurally embedded, and this is an area that deserves further attention. Moreover, to enhance the sustainability of programs such as Vencer it is imperative that they encourage young people, their families and local residents to contribute to the program with ideas, time or resources in order to cultivate a sense of ownership and voice. This would allow them to act not merely as recipients or clients but also as contributors and educators in their own right, hence fostering a broader forum for community engagement and non-paternalistic participatory education. By focusing on issues of ownership, participation and partnership, sport-based intervention programs can engender an impact which is both substantive in scale and lasting in time.

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