

Title: Reproduction and Opportunity: A Study of Dual Career, Aspirations and Elite Sports in Danish Sports Classes

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Sport(s): Football, handball, swimming, ice hockey, badminton, basketball and 'other' sports

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Main theme: Danish SportsClasses

Secondary themes: Socioeconomic status (SES), dual career, student-athletes

Aims: SportsClasses have been a key part in national sport talent development and in Team Denmark's pursuit of more medals for their country. The classes bring sport talent development to the public schools with the aim of encouraging simultaneous development of sports talent and the pursuit of an education (i.e., a type of dual career initiative). There is little research which has examined programs such as the Danish SportClasses that target younger athletes in primary school (e.g., ages 12-15 years). Therefore, the primary focus of this study is on the role of social background in these young athletes' attempts to realise their dreams in elite sports. Three research questions will be answered; (1) What are the social backgrounds of the athletes enrolled in the SportsClasses? (2) How are gender, social background, and choice of sport related to the students' experience of the SportsClasses? (3) How do these variables relate to participants' future aspirations with respect to both school and sports?

Method: Data was gathered using two surveys (which were conducted in 2013 and 2015) with Danish SportsClass students (n= 1170) in 7th – 9th grades (i.e., ages 12-15 years) in schools in 15 Team Denmark-supported cities. A total of 577 students answered both surveys. A link was made between student identities and information on student' parents'

education, occupation, and income from Statistics Denmark. In the two online surveys, participants were asked about their history of sport participation, experience as SportsClass students, aspects of their everyday lives, and their future aspirations. The first survey focused on how students experienced the SportsClass program and class environment while they were part of the SportsClasses. The second interview, conducted after the individuals had or were currently in the year of graduating from the SportsClasses, focused more on how the participants had experienced the SportsClasses and their aspirations for the future.

Results and Practical Implications: *Gender.* More boys than girls attended the SportsClasses and boys were four times more likely than girls to prioritise sports over education. *Sport.* More than half of the students in the SportsClasses played either football or handball. Ice hockey players were most likely than all other athletes to maintain their aspirations for a career in sports and had the lowest SportsClass drop-out rate. Out of the top six sports, ice hockey players were disproportionately from lower class backgrounds and typically had lower educational aspirations. Swimmers dropout rate was higher than other top six sports with 39% dropping out. 60% of the swimmers prioritised education over sports compared to only 35% of ice hockey players. Swimmers and basketball players were both likely to have experienced negative effects of the SportsClasses. *Social background.* Students from backgrounds with greater cultural and economic capital and those whose parents were themselves elite athletes were disproportionately successful in gaining access to the SportsClasses. Students from low socioeconomic backgrounds who were underrepresented in the program as a whole often maintained their aspirations towards elite sports (as opposed to a Dual Career focus). *Parents' elite sports background.* Students with elite sports parents may play a role in getting into the program but it did not seem to play a significant role with respect to positive or negative experiences within the SportsClasses. Students with elite sports parents were slightly more orientated towards maintaining a focus on elite sports in the future, but the relationship was not statistically significant.

The current study revealed that social background is not a significant factor in how students experienced the SportsClasses but yet social class background was a significant factor in participants' future aspirations. The majority of students believed that SportsClasses provided better opportunities to pursue a career in sports. However, although SportsClasses are open to every talented athlete, the students in the SportsClasses tended to come from high and middle SES backgrounds.

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