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Sports in contemporary society

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Abstract

Quality physical education programs are needed to socialize the youth into the total education process and also increase the physical competence, health-related fitness, self-responsibility and enjoyment of physical activity for all students so that they can be physically active for a lifetime. Physical education and sports programs can only provide these benefits if they are well-planned and well-implemented.

The physical educator recognizes the essence of sports in his quest of humaneness, and he accepts the current barriers that now block his envisioned ideal about sports as a challenge. His thrust at the cutting edge of this frontier does not leave him uniquely alone in his quest and do not isolated him from other disciplines. There must be an integration and a synthesis of many approaches to socialization through sports, but while other disciplines may well contribute to the evolution of the sports ideal, the application of this process will ultimately be left to the educator and the physical educator who organizes, administers, and teaches the sports curriculum, should design his activities accordingly.

Keywords: Physical education, sports & games, socialization, leadership

Introduction

Just as physical education and sport have been variously labeled and have faced seeming identity crises, they also have been described in a multitude of ways. What do physical education and sport mean to you? Are they synonymous with exercise, play, games, leisure, recreation, or athletics? Before physical education and sport can be defined, each of these terms needs to be understood. Exercise, in the physical dimension, means using or exerting the body. Play refers to the resultant action, or what the participants do during physical exertion. Games range from amusements or diversions to competitions with significant outcomes governed by rules. Freedom from work or duties describes leisure, which may or may not be used for physical activity. Similarly, recreation refreshes or renews one's strength and spirit after toil, again with or without activity. Athletics are organized, competitive activities in which skilled individuals participate.

Purpose of Sport

Purposes and objectives are often used interchangeably although they differ somewhat in meaning. A purpose is a stated intention aimed at determining to make the dean's list this semester and aiming to earn phi beta Kappa recognition as a senior are examples. Historically, physical educators have been challenged to impact significantly the lives of those they teach. Physical education and sport experiences have provided opportunities to learn motor skills and to dynamically affect students' physical, psychological, and emotional well-being, thereby enhancing the quality of their lives. Thus, the aim of physical education and sport is to increase every individual's physical, mental, and social benefits from physical activities and to develop healthy life-style skills and attitudes. To help each person make these attitudinal and behavioral changes, physical education's purpose is to optimize quality of life through a long-term commitment to an enjoyable, personal exercise program that will meet varied needs in a changing world.

Society determines the Place of Physical Education

Whether an item of physical education or sport is popular in colleges and schools depends largely upon public interest, spectator approval and media popularity. That is how the major and minor sports emerge in educational institutes. In our country basketball, volleyball,

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football and track and field events are major in the sense that they are more popular than other events. Educators tend to adopt whatever the public likes and supports and ignores other items. Similarly, young people are exposed to a certain type of sport environment only because society has accepted it rather than because of its real contribution to their individual growth.

Society has the following needs and wants with regard to the development of the students:

- i) Social poise and understanding of self.
- ii) Social consciousness with an accompanying sense of values.
- iii) Leadership and followership.
- iv) Good citizenship.
- v) Good sportsmanship.
- vi) Cooperation and competitive zeal.
- vii) Acceptance of all irrespective of language, caste, or religion.
- viii) Positive social acquaintances. It is true that some of the above said needs are parallel to the needs of the individual, nevertheless, society conditions the individual to have particular needs and wants, generally in harmony with societal needs.

Social Poise

Social adjustment and physical education should provide opportunities of developing social poise and self-understanding. Social competence for better adjustment should be the major aim while selecting events and coaching individuals, so that the student develops responsibility for his own actions and accepts their consequences. Physical education provides such opportunities especially in a team where winning depends not on a single individual but on the cooperation extended by all the members of the team.

Social Values

Society requires the experience of sharing with others, adhering to the rules, a philosophy of life based on ethical behaviour, morality and concern for individual dignity and worth. The students should understand what is right and what is wrong and learn to adhere to democratic principles. As physical education and sports open opportunities for interaction with team mates and opponents, the student develops a concern for other members of the team.

Leadership and Followership

Society expects from the school and physical education, virtues like accepting responsibility, making positive decisions, influencing and mobilizing others all of which are the essential qualities of leadership. Otherwise, education has no justification for its own existence. In this respect, physical education chooses of the best liked people. Physical education helps in accepting and appreciating others irrespective of such factors.

Sport and Social Values

Values are beliefs or ideals. They provide social criteria for assessing what is desirable or acceptable behaviour in specific situations. In this regard, sport is a value respectable for society: It disseminates and transmits social values. It can influence the social status of participants and in turn the participants are often held as symbolic representations of social values. Therefore, sport can be considered as an avenue for transmitting values to its participants. We assume, for example, that youngsters who participate are learning not only

about the sport itself but also to play the larger game of life. Inherent in this belief is the further assumption that the values that are acquired are desirable and reflect the normative expectations of society. And so sport is considered to magnify and accentuate some value orientations of society. What might these society/sport values be? According to an earlier writing, seven common value themes are shared by society and sport: character development from experience, discipline and social order, competition and the facilitation of success, physical fitness, mental fitness, a religious ethic and patriotism and love of country.

More recently the themes have been stated as effort to achieve, sportsmanship, teamwork and the need to cope with victory and defeat. And another writing suggests that they are courage, gameness, integrity, gallantry and composure. Whatever the values happen to be, a general opinion exists among the public that sports can serve a positive function through the transmission of acceptable societal values and on this basis sports are viewed as a potentially strong socializing agent.

Sport as a Socializing Process

Socialization is the process of developing and moulding an individual to behave in a manner that is consistent with the social expectations of a group. Because it imposes constraints in the range of acceptable behaviour, socialization to some extent induces conformity. Sport can be an agent of this process within its own structural boundaries and consequently sport is often said to be a microcosm of society; that is, sport is society in miniature. Learning to be an athlete involves not only the development of appropriate motor skills but also the internalization of attitudes, dispositions, self-perceptions, and competitive behaviour. It mandates mental skills that are necessary to respond to the strategic and social necessities of participation, including emotions that are often sport specific. Playing tennis, for instance requires a somewhat different behavioural code than playing rugby. And playing tennis for a regional championship incorporates different behavioural allowances than playing your cousin during a family reunion. It has long been held that participation in competitive sport has socializing effects. For example, we assume that sport endenders a value of competition.

In fact, competition is a learned trait and sport appears to be one of the more emphatic avenues for learning about it. By itself, competition can generate high levels of motivation to perform well and higher overall accomplishments that if competition were absent. But competition generally allows only a few elite individuals to emerge with the top prize. That equates, in sports, to winning. And so there may be negative consequences for those who do not win. Feelings of inferiority or helplessness may surface and low self-esteem may develop, leading in some cases to withdrawal from the competitive scene. The effects of competition appear to be most penetrating for young players. At best, competition can be a forum for the positive pursuit of personal excellence. At worst, competition results in destructive rivalry, high levels of anxiety, self-depreciation, and insensitivity and toward others, cheating and destructive aggressing. But youngsters who gain positive support from parents and coaches can benefit significantly from competitive experiences through the development of self-confidence and improved relationships with other players.

Furthermore, if games are designed to emphasize cooperation, the players can show increases in cooperative behaviour not only in games but also in free play and classroom activities.

Strangely, it is the outstanding athlete who sometimes acquires the least socialization. Athletically gifted youngsters may experience inordinate pressures to succeed, creating a desire to drop out of competition but making it difficult for them to do so because the message has become ingrained that winning is what counts in life. So the player becomes pampered and protected and as the player gets older, more character development is confined to performance criteria. In this sense, sports could be viewed as having a suppressing effect on socialization because of the safeguarding that many outstanding athletes receive. In truth, no solid accumulation of evidence supports the contention that sports are a critical element in the socialization process.

Nor is there substantial research that supports the concept that sports build character or good citizenship, or promotes any other desirable and valued personality traits. But these are statements that may be too cautious and far too general to be easily accepted by anyone who has played in this microcosm of life.

Socialization through Physical Education

At a less intensive level and to the extent that it brings people together for a common purpose, a physical education class could be considered as a potential agent for socialization. And it has always been assumed that desirable social behaviours could be taught through properly structured in-class experiences. In fact, physical education classes were some of the earliest settings used by sport sociologists to study the effects of group interaction. Results have been disappointing, however. The first studies found the classes to have little if any effect and later observations derived only speculative conclusions about any socializing consequences of participation. Perhaps this is because physical education classes meet only a few hours a week on the average and the range of social interactions tends to be limited. Moreover, participation is often compulsory and this alone may dampen any sense of group affiliation.

Additionally, there is no reason to believe that physical education classes would influence behaviour any more than other school experiences, for it is difficult to know the specific reinforces that are most important in people's lives. Nonetheless, a shade of evidence holds that attitudes about play can be influenced by young people's experiences in structured play situations and that a quality loosely called sportsmanship can be promoted within specific activities. However, this behaviour does not seem to generalize to other settings or activities. Potentially, apparently the best strategies, at least for younger learners, are to offer activities with the intention of providing enjoyment and to give participants personal responsibility for their own behaviours within the activities. This goal has been incorporated into the Physical Best program adopted by the American Association for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance. Its objectives are to motivate children to participate in physical activity and improve their level of physical fitness. A central focus is to directly involve children in setting their own fitness goals, thus enabling them to perceive control over their own actions and to develop a stronger commitment to goal achievement.

Sports in Educational Settings

Not surprisingly, sociology of sport has given a great deal of attention to sport in educational settings, with mixed reviews. In general, the evidence questions the widely stated belief that sports are compatible with the overall goals of the education.

To a large extent, athletic programs are supported by schools for self-serving purposes. They are usually appraised internally by factors other than as educational experiences-in essence, did the teams, win and did the program make money? If any educational goals are achieved, they are more likely to occur at the elementary school level. At each successive level, sport becomes more serious, bureaucratic and elitist and therefore less educational. Sport moves from informal arrangements to corporate sport. Thus, in elementary and middle or junior high school, playing sports for their own sake, with the intrinsic rewards that can occur, is methodically replaced in time by selective participation and an increasing emphasis on winning as the atmosphere for the participants becomes more work like. Many of the inbred hypocrisies of sports are well known.

Television contracts dictate when teams will play and even influence when time-outs are called during games. Teams have become dictatorships. Wins and losses become viewed as profit-loss statement. The athletic program is a business, to be inventoried like any other financial investment. This leads to flagrant recruiting violations and other outright immoral and illegal behaviour on the part of coaches, alumni and administrators. Athletes become interchangeable parts, as the manufacturing of champions is no longer a craft but an industry, calling for specialized laboratories, research projects, training camps and even experimental sport centres. The real surprise is not the existence of corruption in sport, but rather how widespread it is. Every year a list of major schools receives probation and now in recent times smaller schools are joining the list. There is growing concern about the filtering down of unethical practices into the athletic programs of high schools. Sport sociologists are making a comprehensive study of the structure of the mega business and are probing the long-established the traditions of sports. In the process they are discovering the effects of abuse. The intent is not to discredit sports or to demean acclaimed benefits, but rather to reveal the inner workings and to document the shortcomings. The ultimate goal is to reinstate ethical sanity.

Socialized (Sport)

Physical education should be socialized in its objectives and approaches. The new socialized physical education is much less dependent upon traditional games or routine books or even rigid rules and regulations so long as it serves social purpose. Sports equipment and sports material, individual and team activities, leadership and followership roles, opportunities to supervise and umpire a game, interaction with the audience and first-aid give the student a vicarious contact with social life. Besides, intra-mural, inter-school activities, inter-district, inter-state and inter- zonal games and sports give him first-hand experience and personal contacts with different segments of the community and different regional and language groups. One strong point of physical education is that is less bookish and more practical in orientation. The play field is the open classroom, action is the methodology, social responsibility is the goal, and give and take are the rules of the play. The extent to which physical education meets social demands and fulfils social obligations depends not only on the physical education teacher and his programmes but also on the cooperation and encouragement that he receives from other teachers, heads and other authorities. The school as a whole should strive to train the student in his social responsibilities and obligations. That means social vision should be developed at all levels of

school education and opportunity for exhibiting this attitude should be properly provided; otherwise there is a danger of producing only graduates and not citizens who are useful to the society. As a life-oriented subject, physical education has much more to contribute than what is usually recognized. Attempts should also be made to collectively act by mobilizing academic and physical sources and activate the student for successful social life.

Conclusion

Physical education is a basic social need of society which is the need for physical fitness and socially responsible citizens, and it also develops an awareness of the role of growth material progress. Physical unfitness is one of the identified problems of the society which could not be solved completely. Through the development of physical and social habits, and attitudes, physical education becomes one of the major areas which contribute to social well-being.

Socialization is the process by which people become familiar with and adapt themselves to the interpersonal relationships of their social world. Through socialization, people develop ideas about themselves and about those with whom they interact. Inevitably, socialization is a two-way process that affects everyone to a greater or lesser degree. It takes place throughout one's life, but it is during the early years that the most crucial phases occur. In these phases a person's sense of self, social identity, and relationships with others are shaped.

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