SWABK97.111 - SPORTS AFTER HIGH SCHOOL? AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE SPORTS DROP OUT OF STUDENTS IN THE TRANSITION FROM HIGH SCHOOL TO COLLEGE

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INTRODUCTION

The number of people in today’s society who decide to drop out of sports participation rather than continue is a major concern to physical educators. Although there have been numerous studies conducted to examine why children drop out of sport, most of this information is concerned with the participation or drop out of children whilst still at school (K to 10). As Robertson (1988:11) indicates "unfortunately most of the research and concern in junior sport over the last ten years has been directed at the childhood stage. Now is the time for a change in direction towards a better understanding of adolescent and early adulthood sport."

There appears to have been very little research into sports drop out of students once they have left the school (K to 10) environment. Of ten main studies reviewed, the mean age was 11 years (Anderssen & Wold, 1992; Burton & Martens, 1986; Clough, McCormack & Traill, 1993; Klint & Weiss, 1987; Lewko & Ewing, 1980; Measurement & Consulting Services, 1990; McIntyre, Coleman, Boag & Cuskelly, 1992; Robinson & Carron, 1982; Scanlan, Carpenter, Schmidt, Simons & Keeler, 1993; Weiss, Bredemeier & Shewchuk, 1985).

The drop out rate of children from sport varies from 60% (Orlick, 1974), to between 30% to 40% (McClements, Fry & Sefton, 1982; Sapp & Haubenstricker, 1978, as cited in Robertson, 1988), with the lowest estimation being 22% (Pooley, 1980). It has also been estimated that one third of all junior sports participants drop out of sport between the ages of 11 and 17 years (Brown, 1985; Burton & Martens, 1986; Endicott, 1993; Fox & Briddle, 1988). The variation in the estimated rate of junior sports drop out can be attributed to the fact that they are reported by researchers from a number of different countries (eg. USA, UK and Canada). However, Robertson (1988) suggests that parallels can be drawn between the aims, values, organisation and problems of Australian junior sport and that of all other western countries, particularly Canada and America.

In the Tasmanian government school system years 7 to 10 are generally referred to as ‘high school’ and years 11 and 12 are referred to as ‘college’. The fact that years 11 and 12 are regarded as separate entities and taught in separate educational campuses is unique to Tasmania. All school sports, both representative teams (such as swimming, cross country and athletics) and school sports teams (such as football, netball and hockey) finish at the end of year 10. At government colleges, there are no representative sports teams and very few school sports teams.
Previous research has identified the transition from primary school to high school as being a period of potentially high sports drop out (Langham, 1994; Measurement & Consulting Services, 1990). However, there has been no research into sports participation and withdrawal during the transition from high school to college, which is a unique situation in Tasmania.

AIM

This study aimed to answer questions regarding students sports drop out during the transition from high school to college. The transition from high school to college is unique to government schools in Tasmania, where students in years 7 to 10 are educated in high schools until the end of year 10, and then transfer to colleges for years 11 and 12. The research aimed to find out if this transition from high school to college affected the subsequent participation rates of students in sport, and whether or not it affected participation rates as a function of gender. This research also aimed to identify curriculum changes and teacher practices which would reduce sports drop out during the transition from high school to college.

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RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study aimed to answer the following research questions:

1. Does the transition from high school to college affect the sports participation rates of students at college?

2. Do more females than males drop out of sport?

3. Why do students generally drop out of sport?

4. Are the reasons why males and females drop out similar?
5. How might the physical education curriculum and teacher practices at the college level, be changed to reduce the rate of sports drop out?

6. Are teacher and student views similar on what curriculum and or teacher practices could be changed to reduce sports drop out?

The research questions were derived from the research literature, and a practical knowledge of the Tasmanian government education system.

SUBJECTS

Two groups of subjects were used in this study.

Student Subjects

The student subjects in this study were a random sample of contact groups of year 11, 12 and 13 (repeating year 12) students from a large college on the North West Coast of Tasmania. The random sample consisted of one quarter of the total student population at the college, approximately 175 students, as there were 680 students enrolled at the college in 1995. Of the 175 completed questionnaires, 145 were filled out correctly and were able to be coded and used in this study.

Approximately half the sample were males (n=75) and half females (n=70).

Staff Subjects

The staff subjects in this study consisted of all the physical education teachers (n=2) and the college principal.

PROCEDURE

Permission to commence the study was obtained from

- University of Tasmania Ethics Committee
- Department of Education and the Arts
- College principal
The data collected for this study were collected using two instruments, a questionnaire and an interview. Student subjects completed a questionnaire, while staff subjects were interviewed, both were completed in July/August 1995. The purpose of using two data collection methods was to enhance the quality of the information gained.

Questionnaire

Questionnaires were completed by the students in 'contact groups'. Students at the college are already randomly grouped into contact groups. The questionnaire took approximately 10 -15 minutes to complete.

The questionnaire was self administrative, and contained both closed and open questions. The data gathered was both qualitative and quantitative because the questionnaire contained both open and closed questions.

The questionnaire was designed by myself based on previous researchers' work in the area.

The main descriptive variables included in the questionnaire were:

- gender
- year group
- school subjects enrolled in
- sports played for school and for community clubs while at high school
- sports played while at college
- reasons for ending sports involvement
- what curriculum changes and teaching practices could be made to support and/or increase sports participation of college students.

Interview

The interviews of the three staff members took approximately 5 minutes each to complete; staff responses to the questions were audio tape recorded by the researcher to increase the accuracy of data collected.
The interview was conducted by myself and the questions asked in the interview were designed by myself after close collaboration with supervisors. A standardised open-ended format was used.

Questions asked during the interview were:

- Do you think the transition from high school to college is an area of high sports drop out?
- Do you think changes in teacher practices and curriculum changes could reduce sports drop out?
- What changes, teacher practices and curriculum changes, would you suggest?
- What sports teams/subjects does the college offer students?

The results of both the interviews and questionnaires were then entered into StatView for analysis. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyse the data. The analysed results were then presented in written, tabular and graphical forms.

RESULTS

Identifying the number of students that have dropped out of sport during the transition from high school to college illustrates a major problem with the issue of sports drop out, the defining of a sports drop out. A large majority of students (72%) ended their involvement in a sport during the transition from high school to college. This figure however does not show the distinction between a person that still participates in a different sport and a person who no longer participates in any sport. For the purpose of this study classification of the types of drop outs is stated to minimise difficulties in interpretation. A sports drop out is an individual who has ended their involvement in a particular sport and, as a result, is no longer involved in sport. A smaller number of students (26%) had dropped out of all their sports involvement. Therefore, 26% of students had dropped out of sport during the transition from high school to college.

72% of the students surveyed had experienced sports withdrawal, while only 26% had dropped out of sport completely (sports drop outs), the remaining 46% had ended their involvement in a sport but where participating in a different sport (sports transfers).

This study also found that more females (31%) dropped out of sport than males (20%), resulting in more males than females participating in sport.

REASON FOR DROPPING OUT
Students dropped out of sport for a variety of reasons, however, the major factors influencing sports drop out were identified as:

- having more interesting things to do
- study commitments (lots of homework)
- high school sport ending
- sport they were playing was not enjoyable.

Previous literature suggested that sports drop out is influenced by a number of factors, and this study supports these findings. All 23 factors listed in the questionnaire were identified as influencing the sports drop out of at least one student. With so many factors influencing sports drop out, reducing sports drop out will not be an easy task. However, identifying the factors that influence this phenomena is at least a step in the right direction.

Study commitments were a major influencing factor in sports drop out and this reflects the emphasis on academic achievement at college.

Having more interesting things to do and the sport they were playing not being enjoyable were another two of the main factors influencing students sports drop out. If an individual is participating in a sport and not enjoying it, they are likely to drop out of that sport and participate in another activity (not necessarily another sport) that they find more interesting. Reducing sports drop out by addressing these two factors relating to interest and enjoyment, cannot really be achieved by changes to the curriculum and teacher practices at the college level.

SUGGESTED CHANGES

The staff and student subjects that participated in this study gave a number of suggested changes to the curriculum and teacher practices at the college level to try and increase/support students sports participation in the effort to try and reduce sports drop out. The suggestions made by the students and staff relate to the factors that influenced the students sports drop out.

Increasing school sport at the college level was the main suggestion made by students for increasing or supporting students sports participation. High school sport ending was one of the main factors influencing sports drop out and therefore, introducing or increasing school sport at the college level may reduce sports drop out.

School sport at the college level could be increased as currently there are few opportunities for students to participate in school sports teams at college. 79% of the students surveyed...
stated that they would participate in a sport they were interested in if the college offered them the opportunity. College sport could be increased by implementing some of the suggestions made by the student and staff subjects of this study. For example, college sports teams could participate in community sports competitions and rosters, as suggested by both staff and student subjects. This would require a closer liaison between the college and community sporting organisations, as also suggested by the staff subjects. College sport could also be increased by competition within the college:

- lunch time sport;
- college championships;
- fitness classes;
- and the promotion of the sports centre and other facilities.

All these ideas were suggested by students and require only involvement from within the college itself. However, it would require the involvement of college staff, who would need to be persuaded/encouraged to participate.

Suggested by teacher

The value placed on physical education, health & leisure education, needs to be higher in relation to other academic subjects.

A suggestion made by students was to introduce a compulsory sports subject. However, 55% of the students surveyed stated that they already study a sports related subject. This suggests that physical education, already have a high value amongst students.

IMPLICATIONS FOR HIGH SCHOOL PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND COLLEGE SPORT

One of the aims of the high school physical education program is to promote life-long involvement in sport to students (A Statement of Health & Physical Education for Australian Schools, 1994). This study, however, has found that students are dropping out of sport during the transition from high school to college. Therefore, this aim is not being achieved, and the physical education program delivered to students both at high school and college may need to be changed. This study has identified possible changes that could be made at the college level. Future research could look at identifying possible changes to the high school and college physical education program, to promote the aim of life-long involvement in sport to students.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The usefulness of this study lies primarily in the groundwork it has laid for extension of the study. In the event that this study is extended, the instrument used for data collection could
be revised and reused. Some of the items on the questionnaire placed limitations on the study. One of the items on the questionnaire proved to be ambiguous.

As this study focussed on one college on the North West Coast of Tasmania, future studies could use the same questionnaire with students from other colleges in both the North and South of Tasmania in order to make comparisons, and to see if the drop out rate is consistent around the state and if the factors influencing sports drop out vary between the three regions. Cross-referencing between regions would enable a researcher to determine if sports drop out is a phenomenon common in one college or is a general phenomenon across Tasmanian year 11 and 12 colleges.

More research needs to be done Australia wide into sports drop out and the reasons behind this phenomenon, and how it can be reduced. This study has identified a lack of Australian research into sports drop out.

REFERENCES


