Journal of Education and Human Development
March 2016, Vol. 5, No. 1, pp. 102-108
ISSN: 2334-296X (Print), 2334-2978 (Online)

Published by American Research Institute for Policy Development
DOI: 10.15640/jehd.v5n1a11
URL: http://dx.doi.org/10.15640/jehd.v5n1a11

The Impact of Intramurals on Young Adolescents

Louis L. Warren[1]

Abstract

This study examines the practice of intramurals and its impact on students' self-concepts and perceptions of their school climate. Instruments used were the Self-Description Questionnaire-II and Quality of School Life Scale. Results showed that students participating in intramurals had higher overall self-concepts than did students receiving no opportunities for intramurals as well as higher overall quality of school life. The findings suggest that intramurals plays an important role in making middle grades more responsive to the needs of young adolescents

Keywords: alternative education, at-risk student, graduation, college preparedness, student drop out, alternative school

Instruction

Recent educational reform reports have focused on a greater national commitment to the improvement of middle grades education (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1996) as well as creating more opportunities for physical activity in our schools (U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2004). This study focuses on one organizational component deemed important for an effective curriculum for young adolescents - intramurals. It is believed that intramurals will affect young adolescents in many positive ways including the affective domain. The purpose of this study was to determine whether intramurals impacted students' self-concepts and perceptions of their school climate.

Young adolescents benefit from some type of moderate activity (Coran, Ball, & Cruz, 2003). The Surgeon General (U.S. Department of Health and Human Service, 2004) recommends that young adolescents increase the amount of physical activity they engage in each week. Other recommendations include "adolescents engage in three or more sessions per week of activities that last 20 min or more and that require moderate-to-vigorous levels of exertion" (Sallis & Patrick, 1994, p. 308). However, within our schools, young adolescents fall short in the amount of physical activity recommended (Simmons-Morton, Taylor, Snider, Huang, & Fulton, 1994). Participation in all types of physical activity declines strikingly as age or grade in school increases (Pate, Small, Ross, Young, Flint, & Warren, 1995).

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) states that the lack of physical activity of young adolescents has decreased significantly in recent years (2004). This lack of physical activity of our children has been labeled national crises (Fontaine, Redden, Wang, Westfall, & Allison, 2003). The CDC (1997) recommends that schools promote within their curriculum opportunities for more physical activity for young adolescents that reach all students. With the current recommendations from the various health organizations to increase physical activity for children, it is important to examine the role that intramurals can play in addressing this major health concern.

[1] Department of Elementary and Middle Grades, College of Education, East Carolina University, 206 Speight Building, ECU, Greenville, NC 27858, USA. (252) 328-4124 (252) 328-2585 –fax, warrenlo@mail.ecu.edu

Middle grades educators (e.g., Alexander & George, 2003; Stevenson, 2002) believed that intramurals are an important component of the middle grades curriculum. Appropriate intramurals for young adolescents stresses participation and cooperation by everyone rather than competition of the few athletically gifted (Messick & Reynolds, 1992; Muth & Alvermann, 1999). It is believed that there are many healthy benefits that include the affective domain to increased physical activity. However, there is limited research on the outcomes of increased physical activity for young adolescents and no research has been identified on how intramurals impacts the students. Specifically, no research was found which compared students who fully participated in intramurals versus students who participated to a limited degree in intramurals versus no intramurals being implemented in the schools which prevent no student participation in intramurals. Do intramurals have differential effects on students' affective domain as expected? Specifically do intramurals have differential effects on students' self-concepts and perceptions of their school climate? This study investigates that question.

Intramurals

Intramurals in middle schools can be defined as a positive recreational and athletic experience for all young adolescents through a planned activity program which supplements and expands upon the regular physical education program (Romano & Georgiady, 1994). The focus of appropriate middle school intramurals is not necessarily winning but participation and having fun. Too often athletic participation has been an area of the middle school curriculum for the athletically gifted, which promoted only a small percentage of participation (Corbin & Pangrazi, 1998). Intramurals provide an opportunity for all young adolescents to be involved (Sallis & Patrick, 1994). Those who cannot participate in the actually playing of the game, can participate by making posters, refereeing, scoring, and equipment room maintenance. Through intramural programs participation, it hoped that all young adolescents can develop a feeling of self-worth and success (Myers, Strikmiller, Webber, & Berenson, 1996). When intramurals emphasizes participation and involvement of students and teams receive recognition and points for the most participation, young adolescents are believed to benefit through better self-worth and attitudes toward school (Morrison, 2004). Meeting the physical needs of young adolescents "often influences their social acceptance, self-concept, and confidence for acquiring mental skill" (Riemeke, 1988). The success of intramural programs depends on the beliefs and philosophy of the schools that serve young adolescents.

Self-concept

There are a number of definitions for self-concept. Sometimes the term self-concept is referred to as self-esteem. The term self-concept emphasizes self-description while the term self-esteem emphasizes the value one places on self-description. These terms are often used interchangeably because, according to Marsh, Relich, and Smith (1983) "there is little or no empirical support for the distinction between self-esteem and self-concept (p.173). For the purposes of this study, self-concept is defined as the unique perception one has of oneself (Marsh, 1990a; Shavelson, Huber, & Stanton, 1976). This self-perception is influenced by significant others such as parents, teachers, and peers (Beane & Lipka, 1984; Shavelson & Bolus, 1982).

Like parents and teachers, peers and peer groups are often significant others for middle grade students (Beane, Lipka, Ludwig, 1980; Coopersmith, 1967; Marsh, 1990a). It is important that young adolescents are able to interact with a group of peers and feel a sense of belonging within a group, friendships and positive social growth are often enhanced (Brown, Eicher, Petrie, 1986). Additionally, Newman and Newman (1976) suggest that the emotional support of a peer group can be important to the emerging self-concepts of young adolescents. According to Marsh (1984), a strong sense of belonging is important to the emerging self-concepts of young adolescents. Perhaps intramural participation with peers will promote support, friendship, and a sense of belonging for the students. If so, because positive interactions and friendships are important variables for the development of a positive self-concept and because intramurals encourages these types of interactions to occur, then the young adolescents' self-concepts could possibly be affected.

School Climate

School climate is important for middle grades schools. While attending middle grades schools, young adolescents are making a variety of decisions about themselves as individuals and as members of the school community (Johnston, 1992). The school climate will often affect how young adolescents make these decisions.

School climate is defined as "prevailing or normative conditions which are relatively enduring over time and which can be used to distinguish one environment from another (Kelly, 1980, p.2). School climate serves as a basis by which students establish expectations and interpret events that happen at school. The climate of a school is determined for the most part by the faculty, the curriculum, and the students (Brimm & Bush, 1978; Curan, 1983; Gaddy & Kelly, 1984).

The school climate of middle grades schools is important because early adolescence is a time when students begin to question the value of education and whether or not school is a good place to be (Lipsitz, 1984). For young adolescents "the decision to remain connected to the school and become full participant in its programs and rituals may be largely a function of the school's climate" (Johnston, 1992, p. 78). Wehlage, Rutter, Smith, Lesko, and Fernandez (1989) suggest that the intangible feelings of a school's climate can lead young adolescents to bond with or abandon the school. Intramural participation can perhaps enhance students' sense of connection to their school.

Method

Setting: This study was conducted in twelve middle grades schools in two southeastern states. Of the twelve schools, four had an intramural program (implemented during the school day) in which ninety-percent of students participated (the remaining ten-percent of students who did not participate were classified as special needs students or health related prevention), four had an intramural program (included during the school day) in which student participation was voluntary and four schools did not have any type of intramural program. All twelve schools also had an interscholastic athletic program. All twelve schools were comparable in their demographics.

Intramural programs with full participation. Four schools with functional intramural programs were selected for this study. The intramurals occurred during the school day. A functional intramural program is defined as a program where 90% or more students participated in a supervised team athletic activity for a minimum of 20 minutes at least once a week. All students were expected to participate. The researcher observed the intramural activities and interviewed a random sample of participates and determined that each school intramural program did promote participation and not competition. This intramural program co-existed with the interscholastic athletic program. Twelve percent was the average rate of student participation for interscholastic athletic participation.

Intramural programs with partial participation. Four schools had fully functional intramural programs in which students volunteered to participate. The intramural program occurred during the school day. Only students who wanted to participate in intramurals participated. Each school had a participation rate above 40% but below 50%, with an overall average of 44% participation.

Non-intramural programs. Four schools that only had interscholastic athletic programs were selected for this study. These schools did not have any type of intramural athletic programs in their schools. The interscholastic athletic was the only opportunity for students to participate in some type of organized athletic activity.

Subjects: The subjects for this study were the eighth grade students in the twelve schools selected for this study.

Students. Eighth grade students were selected for this study because they are in their last year in a middle grades school. If intramurals has an impact on students, it should be evident by the end of the middle grades. Five-hundred thirty-six eighth grade students initially participated in this study. However, 42 students' questionnaires were dropped from the study when their background information revealed that they had not attended their present school for each of the middle grade year. As a result, 494 eighth grade students participated in this study. There were 224 males (mean age = 14.8) and 270 females (mean age = 14.5).

As illustrated in table 2, two randomly selected eighth grade homeroom classes were selected in each of the twelve participating schools.

Instruments

Two instruments were used in this study. The Self-Description Questionnaire-II (Marsh, 1990b) was used to assess student self-concept and the Quality of School Life Scale (Epstein & McPartland, 1977) was used to assess students' perceptions of the school climate.

Self-Description Questionnaire-II (SDQ-II). The SDQ-II is a self report scale designed to assess overall self-concept of young adolescents in grades 7 through 10. The 102 items, and scores can range from 102 (lowest self-concept) to 612 (highest self-concept). Respondents use a scale to indicate their perceptions: 1=false to 6 = true with 3 = more false than true and 4 = more true than false. (Sample questions: Overall, I am no good; I am usually relaxed). Internal consistency, as measured by Cronbach alpha, for overall self-concept is .94.

Quality of School Life Scale (QSLS). The QSLS is a self-report scale designed to assessstudents' overall perceptions of school climate as well as their satisfaction with school in general, commitment to classwork, and reactions to teachers (e.g., True or False: I like school very much). The scale consists of 27 items, and scores can range from 0 (least positive school perception) through 27 (most positive school perception). For elementary school students (i.e., K-8), the overall reliability of the QSLS is .86. The KR20 coefficients for the three subscales are .64 for attitudes toward teachers, .72 for commitment to schoolwork, and, .81 for satisfaction with school.

Procedure

The researcher administered all instruments to the students during their homeroom period. The principals of each school were present at the beginning of the class period in the selected classes to introduce the researcher. The teacher was not present and the principal left after the introduction. The researcher explained to the students that they were informed that the SDQ-II and the QSLS were not tests, but questionnaires to help educators better understand middle grades students and create a better school for them. Students were informed that all honest answers were correct answers. Students understood that their responses were anonymous and that their teachers would not have access to the completed questionnaires.

Within each school, one class was administered the SDQ-II first, whereas the other class was administered the QSLS questionnaire first. When all students had completed both questionnaires, the researcher walked among the students at their desks and stapled both questionnaires together. The stapled questionnaires were then collected by the researcher.

Results

One way analyses of variance (ANOVA) were performed to assess the effects of full participation intramural programs vs. volunteer participation intramural vs. non-intramural programs on each of the following measures: students' self-concepts and students perceptions of school climate. For the two student dependent variables, the unit of analysis was the classroom.

Students'self-concept

Results indicated a significant difference among the different levels of intramural participation, $F(2, 21) = 4.96$, $p < .05$. Results of the follow-up test indicated that students who attended schools with full intramural participation had statistically significant higher overall self-concepts ($M = 485.36$, $SD = 22.31$) than students who attended schools that had partial intramural participation ($M = 457.58$, $SD = 16.44$) and students who attended schools with no intramural program ($M = 456.96$, $SD = 22.49$). The difference between the self-concepts of students who attended the partial intramural participation and students who attended schools with no intramural participation was not statistically significant.

Students' perceptions of school climate

A one-way analysis of variance was applied to the three subscales as well as to the overall score on the Quality of School Life Scale.

Satisfaction with school. The results indicated a significant difference among the different levels of intramural participation, $F(2, 21) = 51.82$, $p < .001$. The Dunn-Bonferroni follow-up test results showed that the students who attended schools with full intramural participation had a statistically significant higher satisfaction with school ($M = 3.84$, $SD = .58$) than students who attended schools with partial intramural participation ($M = 2.04$, $SD = .25$) and students who attended schools with no intramural programs ($M = 1.49$, $SD = .55$). Additionally, students who attended schools with only partial intramural participation had a higher satisfaction with school ($M = 2.04$, $SD = .25$) than did students who attended schools without an intramural program ($M = 1.49$, $SD = .55$).

Commitment to classwork. The results indicated a significant difference among the organizational patterns, $F(2, 21) = 70.28$, $p < .001$. The Dunn-Bonferroni follow-up test results indicated that students who attended schools with full participation in intramurals had statistically significant higher commitment to classwork ($M = 8.21$, $SD = 1.18$) than students who attended schools with partial intramural participation ($M = 4.99$, $SD = .55$) and students who attended schools with no intramural programs ($M = 3.09$, $SD = .78$).

Reactions to teachers. The results indicated a statistically significant difference among the levels of intramurals participation within schools, $F(2, 21) = 51.89$, $p < .001$. Results of the follow-up test revealed that students who attended schools with full intramural participation had statistically significant more positive reactions to teachers ($M = 8.43$, $SD = 1.32$) than students on who attended schools with partial intramural participation ($M = 5.28$, $SD = .38$) and students who attended schools with no intramural programs ($M = 3.40$, $SD = 1.05$). Students who attended schools with partial intramural participation had statistically significant more positive reactions to teachers ($M = 3.40$, $SD = 1.05$).

Overall perceptions of school climate. The results indicated a significant difference among the levels of intramural participation, $F(2, 21) = 173.61$, $p < .001$. Follow-up results showed that students who attended schools with full intramural participation had statistically significant higher overall perceptions of school climate ($M = 19.56$, $SD = 1.33$) than students who attended schools with partial intramural participation ($M = 12.33$, $SD = .62$) and students who attended schools with no intramural programs ($M = 7.47$, $SD = 1.72$). Further, students who attended schools with partial intramural participation had statistically significant higher overall perceptions of school climate ($M = 12.33$, $SD = .62$) than students whose schools had no intramural programs ($M = 7.47$, $SD = 1.72$).

Discussion

Results of this study indicate that the possibility exists that intramurals can play a role in making middle grades schools a better and more responsive place for young adolescents. Students who attended schools that had full intramural participation had statistically significant higher overall self-concepts than students who attended schools with limited participation and schools with no intramural programs. This result lends support to the notion of promoting intramurals in middle grades schools with full participation being the goal. Without intramurals, a major objective of the middle grades schools to contribute in a positive way to students' self-concepts is possibly undermined. Intramural provide students opportunities to be included and be successful by participating. When students believe that they successful by participating in intramurals and they are able to have fun outside of the classroom, then perhaps their self-concepts can be affected in a positive way.

The critical role of intramurals that include full participation is further supported by the result that no statistically significant difference was found between the self-concepts of students who attended a school that had partial intramural participation and schools that did not offer intramurals. This result is interesting in that it lends support to the notion that intramurals, in and of them, is not enough unless the students believe that participation is what is important and not necessarily winning. If students do not have the opportunity and encouragement to participate in intramurals, they may miss an important opportunity to receive a positive outcome from school.

The results of this study indicate that students who attended schools with full participation of intramurals have statistically significant higher satisfaction with school, higher commitment to classwork, more positive reactions to their teachers, and higher overall perceptions of school climate than students who attended schools with partial intramurals and students who attended schools with no intramurals. This finding indicates that intramurals is possibly an important component of effective middle grades schools and should be provided to help establish a more positive and caring school climate for students.

In addition, according to the results of this study, students who attended schools that at least had an intramural program have significantly higher satisfaction with school, higher commitment to classwork, more positive reactions to teachers, and higher overall perceptions of school climate than students who attended schools that did not have any intramurals. Thus, intramurals, even with limited participation, appear to provide a more positive school climate for students than schools with no intramurals. The inclusion of an intramural program could possibly be providing students options for participating in something outside of the classroom and promoting school spirit.

Conclusions

Results of this study suggest several directions for future research. For example, more research should be conducted employing an experimental design to determine whether or not a cause-effect relationship exists between school organizational pattern and the dependent variables examined in this study. The effect of intramurals on the health of students and academic achievement also should be examined. Even though intramurals are intended to be effective for all students, regardless of the health or academic ability, this assumption needs to be empirically validated. Finally, future research should focus on the faculty of schools that implement intramurals in their schools. For example, what role do they play in the success of intramurals? Future research should explore these issues.

References

Alexander, W. M., & George, P. S. (2003). The exemplary middle school (3rd ed.). New York, NY: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Beane, J. A., & Lipka, R. P. (1984). Self-concept, self-esteem, and the curriculum. Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.

Brimm, J. L., & Bush, D. (1978). Reactions to environmental factors in the school. The NASSP Bulletin, 62(421), 105-106.

Brown, B. B., Eicher, S. A., Petrie, S. (1986). The impact of peer group ('crowd") affliliation in adolescence. Journal of Adolescence, 9, 73-96.

Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development. (1996). Great transitions: Preparing adolescents for a new century. New York, NY: Carnegie Corporation.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (1997). Guidelines for school and community programs to promote lifelong physical activity among young people (MMWR, 46, No. RR-6, 1-36). Atlanta, GA: Author.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2004). Verb – A social marketing campaign to increase physical activity among youth. Preventing Chronic Disease, 1, (3), 1-9.

Coopersmith, S. (1967). The antecedents of self-esteem. San Francisco: W. H. Freeman.

Coran, M. I., Ball, G. D., & Cruz, M. L. (2003). Obesity and risk of type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular disease in children and adolescents. Journal of Clinical Endocrinology and Metabolism, 88, 1417-1427.

Corbin, C. B., & Pangrazi, R. P. (1998). Physical activity for children: A statement of guidelines. Reston, VA: American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance.

Curan, T. J. (1983). Characteristics of the effective school – a starting point for self-evaluation. The NASSP Bulletin, 67 (465), 71-73.

Epstein, J. L., & McPartland, J. M. (1977). Quality of School Life Scales. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Fontaine, K. R., Redden, D. T., Wang, C., Westfall, A. O., & Allison, D. B. (2003). Years of life lost due to obesity. Journal of American Medical Association, 289, (20), 179-186.

Gaddy, J. R., & Kelly, L. K. (1984). Down safe corridors: Eliminating school disruption. The NASSP Bulletin, 68 (472), 13-17.

Johnston, J. H. (1992). Climate and culture as mediators of school values and collaborative. In J. L. Irvin (Ed.), Transforming middle level education: Perspectives and possibilities (pp. 72-92). Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.

Kelley, E. A. (1980). Improving school climate: Leadership techniques for educators. Reston, VA: National Association of Secondary School Principals.

Marsh, H. W. (1990a). Self-Description Questionnaire-II. A multidimensional, hierarchical model of self-concept: Theoretical and empirical justification. Educational Psychology Review, 2, 77-172.

Marsh, H. W. (1990b). Self-Description Questionnaire-II. San Antonio, TX: The Psychology Corporation.

Marsh, H. W., Relich, J. D., & Smith, I. D. (1983). Self-concept: The construct validity of interpretations based upon the SDQ. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 45, 173-187.

Morrison, R. F. (2004). Something for everyone in IM (intramurals). Retrieved February 15, 2004 from http://www.7oaks.org/rfmorrison/PhysEd/IM.html.

Muth, K. D., & Alvermann, D. E. (1999). Teaching and learning in the middle grades (2nd ed.). Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.

Myers, L. (2004). Something for everyone in IM (intramurals). Retrieved February 15, 2004 from http://www.7oaks.org/rfmorr

Myers, L., Strikmiller, P. K., Webber, L. S., & Berenson, G. S. (1996). Physical and sedentary activity in school children grades 5-8: the Bogalusa heart study. Medicine and Science in Sports and Exercise, 28, 852-859.

Newman & Newman, P. R., & Newman, B. M. (1976). Early adolescence and its conflict: Group identity vs. alienation. Adolescence, 11, 261-274.

Pate, R. R., Small, J. G., Young, J. C., Flint, K. H., & Warren, C. W. (1995). School physical education. Journal of School Health, 65, 312-318.

Ramon, L. G., & Georgiady, N. P. (1994). Building an effective middle school. Madison, WI: Brown and Benchmark.

Riemeke C. (1988). All must play – the only way for middle school athletics. Journal of Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance, 59, (3), 82-84.

Sallis, J. F., & Patrick, K. (1994). Physical activity guidelines for adolescents: consensus statement. Pediatric Exercise Science, 23, 302-314.

Simmons-Morton, B. G., Taylor, W. C., Snider, S. A., Huang, I. W., & Fulton, E. (1994). Observed levels of elementary and middle school children's physical activity during physical education classes. Preventive Medicine, 23, 437-441.

Shavelson, R. J., & Bolus, R. (1982). Self-concept: The interplay of theory and methods. Journal of Educational Psychology, 74, 3-17.

Shavelson, R. J., Hubner, J., Stanton, G. (1976). Self-concept: Validation of construct interpretations. Review of Educational Research, 46, 407-441.

Stevenson, C. (2002). Teaching ten to fourteen year olds (3rd ed.). Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.

U. S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2004). Physical activity and health: A report of the Surgeon General, Atlanta, GA: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Chronic Disease and Health Promotion.