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GAHPERD *Journal*



Mission Statement

GAHPERD, Inc. is a non-profit organization for professionals and students in related fields of health, physical education, recreation and dance. GAHPERD, Inc. is dedicated to improving the quality of life for all Georgians by supporting and promoting effective educational practices, quality curriculum, instruction and assessment in the areas of health, physical education, recreation, dance and related fields.



Message from the Editor:

In this issue of the GAHPERD Journal, you will find specific content to help you grow as a professional. The issue includes two peer reviewed manuscripts. I hope you enjoy reading both professional articles, with the first related to sport specialization and the second related to extracurricular participation.

In addition to the scholarly work in this current issue, you will also find highlights from the Georgia AHERD fall convention in Athens plus various advertisements and other content.

Finally, on this page you will find the latest additions to the Georgia AHPERD Executive Board based on a recent vote at our state convention. Special thanks to our new Executive Board members.

If you have comments or questions, please contact me at bheidorn@westga.edu.

Editor
Dr. Brent Heidorn
University of West Georgia

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What makes something special is not just what you have to gain, but what you feel there is to lose.



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Journal Submission: How do I submit an article to the GAHPERD Journal?

Publication Guidelines

The GAHPERD Journal is a peer-reviewed professional journal intended to meet the needs of health, physical education, recreation, and dance professionals in Georgia. It is also intended to be a forum for the discussion of new ideas and pertinent issues facing the profession. Before submitting a manuscript to *The GAHPERD Journal*, please be mindful of the following:

- Manuscripts submitted to The GAHPERD Journal must not be submitted to other publications simultaneously.
- Manuscripts with practical implications for educators at all levels are given priority.
- Acceptance is based on originality of material, significance to the profession, validity, and adherence to the prescribed submission requirements.

Manuscript Preparation

Manuscripts should be double-spaced, including all references and quotations, formatted for 8-1/2" x 11" pages, using Times New Roman 12-point font. Manuscripts should be word processed in accordance with the following guidelines:

- Prepare the manuscript in Microsoft Word and submit it as an e-mail attachment.
- Number all pages and lines throughout.
- Submit all tables, photographs and figures as separate documents, not within the body of the manuscript.
- Limit the manuscript to approximately 8 to 12 pages.
- Include a cover page with the title of the manuscript, full name(s) of the author(s), academic degrees, positions, and institutional affiliations. List the corresponding author's address, telephone number, and email address.
- The writing should be simple, straightforward with clear, concise, and logically presented concepts. Use examples, capture the readers' interest, and stimulate the audience's thinking.
- Keep paragraphs short.
- Have a colleague review the manuscript prior to submission.
- Review all references as the authors are responsible for accuracy. For reference style, follow the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (APA-6th edition).
- Submit graphs, charts, and tables separately. Clearly label and title all illustrations according to APA guidelines.
- Photographs are encouraged. When submitting photographs, be sure they are digital and at least 300 DPI in a jpg format.

Manuscript Submission

Send all manuscripts to Dr. Brent Heidorn at bheidorn@westga.edu. Manuscripts will be acknowledged by email when received.

The Review Process

The Publications Editor will distribute all manuscripts to three members of the Editorial Board for peer-review.

Publication

Copyright: Accepted manuscripts become the property of the Georgia Association for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance. Upon request, authors receive permission to reprint their own articles. The GAHPERD Journal is listed in the Physical Education Index.

Manuscript Tracking Policy

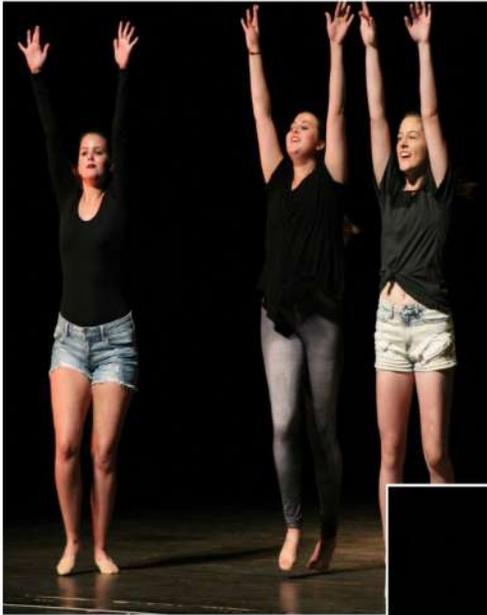
Manuscripts undergo a blind review using criteria of accuracy and applicability to the practical concerns of the target audience. Authors will receive manuscript acceptance, revision or rejection letters via email in about six weeks. Authors asked to revise their manuscripts will be informed how much time they have for resubmission, always given at least two weeks. Upon acceptance, the Publications Editor will send a formal acceptance email to all corresponding authors whose manuscripts have been accepted for publication. The Publications Editor will select publication dates for all manuscripts based on an established editorial calendar. Authors will be notified in advance, and edited manuscripts will be submitted to authors for comments prior to publication.

Thank you to all who attended this year's GAHPERD convention!











Early vs. Late Specialization in Sport

J. Brandon Sluder, Ph.D., Associate Professor, Theresa T. Fuller, M.S. Student, Stephen G. Griffin, M.S. Student, Zachary M. McCray, M.S. Student, Troy University

Abstract

To specialize early or late in sports participation is a current topic that is under debate by many today. This study is a review of the current literature on early versus late sports specialization; the pros and cons of early and late specialization; and how they are viewed today. Sport specialization can be defined as an athlete participating in a single main sport on a year-round basis (greater than 8 months per year) and/or quitting all other sports to focus on a single sport (Myer et al., 2015). The focus of this investigation is on common qualities and trends of elite and non-elite level athletes. Specifically, the physical hours' that elite and non-elite athletes spent in deliberate practice, number of sports played, common injuries within sports, and the psychological effects sports specialization can cause to athletes and their families. Over the past 15 years there has been an increasing interest for youth athletes to specialize and participate at an early age in a single sport year-round (Feeley, Agel, & LaPrade, 2015). Reasons for early specialization vary; however, the main belief held by parents is that early specialization will potentially lead to scholastic achievements in addition to elite or pro status for their children. There are both benefits (pros) and detriments (cons) that come with either decision. The results of this review suggest late specialization is a more effective model for athletic success compared to early specialization. Elite athletes tend to play multiple sports from an early age and typically do not start specialization within a sport until ages 12-15 years old. Elite athletes also tend to have better relationships with their families and communities. Some athletes need to specialize at

an early age if they want to achieve elite status in certain types of sports (soccer, gymnastics, and swimming). The athletes in these sports reach peak performance around the age of 15 years old requiring them to specialize early to be successful as an elite level.

Introduction

The purpose of this investigation is to provide current research on what is considered to be the proper timing of youth's participation in sports. More specifically, the purpose of this investigation was to compare and contrast early vs. late specialization in youth sports. Some schools of thought believe that specializing in sports at an early age will give the athlete an advantage over all other athletes, primarily due to the experience gained from deliberate practice (10 years or 10,000 hours; Ericsson, 1996; Gould, 2010). However, some studies have shown that most elite athletes actually specialized in a particular sport later in their lives (older than 12 years of age), which resulted in better athletic achievement (Lidor & Lavyan, 2002; Moesch, Elbe, Hauge, & Wikman, 2011; Gullich & Emrich, 2006). This investigation analyzes the pros and cons of early vs. late specialization and how each type of specialization affects athletes over their career. Though early and late specialization have pros and cons, the question still remains as to which one is truly more beneficial to the youth athlete.

For many years coaches have encouraged players to drop all other sports and focus on one sport in order to become an elite athlete. The current study examines the evidence supporting optimization of the development of elite athletes while minimizing the risks for injury associated with specialization. Additionally, the authors wanted to provide a list of pros and cons to teachers, coaches, and parents of young athletes in order to bring awareness to the potential effects of both paths.

Literature Review

Sports specialization has grown over the past fifteen years in belief that it will lead to opportunities in professional sports (Feeley et al., 2015). The common belief among coaches, parents and children is that the earlier children participate in a single sport the more likely they will succeed in that sport. According to Ericsson (1996), youth athletes needed to engage in 10 years and/or 10,000 hours of deliberate practice in order to develop athletic expertise and in order to be successful it needed to begin during the early years of youth development. Deliberate practice is defined as a highly structured activity with the explicit goal to improve performance. This concept states that the “level of performance an individual attains is directly related to the amount of deliberate practice” (Myer et al., 2016). However, studies have shown that elite athletes accumulate the same amount of deliberate practice by age 15, although non-elite athletes practiced almost twice as much by age 9 (Moesch et al., 2011).

The research suggests that multiple reasons exist for early sports specialization. The most common reasons for youth athletes to specialize include: parental expectation, pursuit of scholarships, stories of elite athletes, to develop expertise, pressure from coaches, and athletes desire to succeed in their sport (Feeley et al., 2015; Gould, 2010; Jayanthi et al.,

2010). Unfortunately, multiple studies also have shown that specializing in a single sport year-round also increases the risk factors for overuse injuries in youth athletes along with burnout and social developmental issues (Feeley et al., 2015; Gould, 2010; Jayanthi et al., 2010; Myer et al., 2016).

Sport specialization can be defined as participating in a single main sport on a year-round basis (greater than 8 months per year) and/or quitting all other sports to focus on a single sport (Myer et al., 2016), typically during early to middle childhood. Three components (year-round training for >8 months, focusing on a single main sport, and quitting all other sports to pursue a single sport) exist that aid in classifying the level of specialization. Highly specialized youth athletes exhibit all three components. Those with two or three may be considered moderately specialized, and those with only one of these components are classified as a low degree of specialization (Jayanthi & Dugas, 2017; LaBella, Fischer, Pasulka & Dugas, 2015).

Benefits and Detriments of Early Specialization

In a study of issues and concerns, Gould (2010) noted that one of the benefits of early specialization often included better coaching and skill instruction because the most experienced coaches usually worked with players who specialized. It can also be said that the extra hours of deliberate practice can enhance skill acquisition and contribute to the estimated 10,000 hours needed to become highly competent in the specialized sport (Gould, 2010).



Additionally, due to the time demands invested in these sports, time management is improved. Lastly, according to Strachan, Côté, and Deakin (2009), early sport specializers have more experience relating to diverse peer groups than late specializers.

In contrast, overuse injuries are a negative consequence of repeated micro trauma in a tendon, muscle, or bone associated with chronic repetition of specific sport activity movements that include but are not limited to tennis serving, baseball pitching, gymnastics routines, running, and swimming (Malina, 2010). Overuse injury can cause early retirement from sports and is typically the starting point for burnout in sports (Malina, 2010; Myer et al., 2016). Overuse injuries may lead to time away from the sport. When an athlete becomes injured due to overuse injury, the time away from the sport can lead to loss of reason or interest. The athlete loses sight of the end goal and gets frustrated with the lingering injury.

Burnout is not sudden but develops over time. Current evidence-based research supports that burnout is an unfortunate byproduct of early specialization in one sport brought on by physical and emotional exhaustion from the psychological and physiological demands of the athlete's sport (Kutz & Secrest, 2009). It is also associated with perceptions by the athlete that he or she cannot meet the

physical or psychological demands placed upon him or her (Malina, 2010). If it becomes too severe, it can cause withdrawal or eventual dropout from the activities that were previously enjoyable to the athlete (Caruso, 2015).

In addition, the financial commitment (cost development) of continuing participation in early sport specialization can become a burden for parents (Bodey et al., 2013). Costs associated with sport participation may include coaching fees, club membership, uniform and equipment costs, and travel and competition charges. Parents may justify incurring these costs on the front end in hopes that their child will receive college scholarships or gain professional status (Bodey, Judge, & Hoover, 2013).

Early specialization can lead to isolation during an athlete's adolescent years and limits the experiences they have throughout their lifetime (Malina, 2010). As discovered by Malina (2010), focus on a single sport and the associated time commitment may foster isolation and lack of peer socialization especially during the adolescent years. Early specialization may also alter relationships with peers, parents, and family.

Table 1: Early Specialization Pros & Cons

PROS	CONS
Better coaching & skill instruction	Risk for overuse injury
Enhanced skill acquisition through deliberate practice accumulation	Cost development of lifetime sports skill
Improved time management	Burnout to include emotional and physical exhaustion
Diverse peer relationships within group	Social development issues

Involvement in early sport specialization can separate the young athletes from peers and, in turn, interfere with normal identity development (Gould, 2010).

Benefits and Detriments of Late Specialization

Athletes who remain in multiple sports find their identity earlier in their life. They are surrounded by multiple types of people and groups because of the different types of sports. Athletes who do not specialize early tend to get more opportunities to interact with a variety of different athletes because each sport requires conversation and understanding of their teammates. Late specializers or “samplers,” have shown to have increased capability to connect with diverse peer groups (Strachan, Cote, & Deakin, 2009).

Motor skill development is improved by using a cross training technique to help develop the athlete’s overall skills (“Guidelines for Participation,” 2010). This allows athletes who specialize late to increase their skills over the athletes who specialized early. As long as the athlete has multiple breaks of active rest and recovery between sports, physical development is enhanced. Research has shown that sport samplers have more success with

integrating sport and family along with a closer connection to the community, (Strachan, Cote, Deakin, 2009). Sport samplers interact with more peers which promotes the ability to connect with diverse peer groups.

In contrast, there are also negative aspects to late specialization as well. Athletes who play multiple sports have to be able to manage their time, and depending on the amount of sports they play, this can be difficult. Further, Bodey et al. (2013), noted that beyond the responsibilities of the athlete, parents also accrue additional obligations including time constraints and the financial burden associated with maintaining participation in multiple sports. Balancing the cost to purchase the gear required for each sport, ensuring the student makes it to games and practices, and managing the family’s financial obligations contributes to the overall increase in time and financial demands when young athletes play multiple sports (Bodey et al, 2013).



Table 2: Late Specialization Pros & Cons

PROS	CONS
Development of pro social behaviors and personal	Time Burden
Promotes development of intrinsic motivation	Financial demands
Promotes motor skill development	
Increased connection to community, integration of family, and better health outcomes	

Conclusion

An athlete's early specialization in a sport does not guarantee a future in that sport at an elite level. Previous research suggests that the majority of elite athletes did not specialize in their respective sport until ages 12-15 years old (Myer, 2016; Moesch, 2011). A study at one university on National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I athletes found that 70% did not specialize in their sport until at least age 12 years, and 88% participated in more than one sport.

Additionally, only 0.2% to 0.5% of US high school athletes ever

make it to the professional level (Myer et al., 2016; Mostafavifar, Best & Myer, 2013; National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2010). As mentioned earlier in this study, previous research has illustrated that elite athletes accumulate the same amount of deliberate practice by age 15 as non-elite athletes, although non-elite athletes practiced almost twice as much by age 9 (Moesch et al., 2011).

Athletes specializing early who exceed a sports training ratio of 2:1 are more likely to suffer from overuse injuries (Jayanthi et al, 2015; Myer et al., 2016). Sport specific data on current overuse injuries in early specialization is limited. One study showed that 67.4% out of 1190 athletes between the ages of 7 to 18 years suffered from overuse injuries and 32.5% suffered from acute injuries (Jayanthi et al., 2015). Another study reflected that up to 50% of youth pitchers will report shoulder or elbow joint pain throughout the course of a season, with 5-8% suffering injuries severe enough to end their pitch-



ing careers or require shoulder/elbow surgery (Fleisig et al., 2011; Ferguson & Stern, 2014). Additionally, athletes who specialized early can also suffer from psychological stress, burnout, depression; emotional and physical withdrawal from their sport and social isolation from age and sex peers, especially during adolescence (Gould, 2010; Smith, 1986; Bodey et al., 2013). According to Myer et al., (2016) any signs of stress, burnout, and physical symptoms exhibited by the young athlete should be noted to be better prepared to take the appropriate corrective action such as backing off training intensity and frequency. Unfortunately, age-adjusted recommendations for frequency/volume risk have not been made for many sports, however, it was noted that specifically exceeding 16 hours per week of total sports participation, regardless of the number of sports, carries the greatest risk (Myer et al., 2016).

Based on available evidence, the global suggestion is that children should be encouraged to participate in a variety of sports. Elite athletes participating in a variety of sports have enhanced development of motor skills that translate to their specialized sport and without sport diversification, children may not fully develop neuromuscular patterns that can be protective of injury. Therefore, it is extremely important to educate those adults who are involved in youth sports (parents, coaches, trainers, family physicians, etc.) on the risks of early sport specialization and on the early signs of overuse injury to prevent more serious injuries that limit the participation and overall success of youth athletes (Myer et al., 2016; Feeley et al., 2015). This can be achieved through the establishment of more coaching and sports clinics through schools, park and recreational departments, and private organizations.

Both parents and coaches should set realistic goals for the athletes that are age appropriate for their sport and discuss both the pros and cons of early specialization (Ferguson & Stern, 2014). Trainers and physicians need to take the type of sport and the athlete's history into account when providing advice on the correct time to specialize. The risks associated with early specialization and the signs of overuse injury should also be discussed (Ferguson & Stern, 2014). Lastly, Myer et al. (2016) recommends that youth participating in more than 16 hours per week, as well as youth under the age of 16 participating in more hours of sport per week than their age, should be closely monitored by parents, coaches, and trainers for indicators of burnout, overuse injury, or potential decrements in performance due to overtraining.



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More about the authors:

J. Brandon Sluder is an associate professor in the Department of Kinesiology and Health Promotion at Troy University in Troy, AL. Theresa Fuller, Stephen Griffin, and Zachary McCray are graduate students at Troy. For more information or correspondence pertaining to this article, email Brandon Sluder at jbsluder@troy.edu

Program Highlight: Health and Physical Education at the University of West Georgia



The fully accredited health and physical education program at UWG teaches all content based upon the national standards for physical education teacher preparation programs. The rigorous curriculum includes courses of introduction, science and exercise physiology, skill development, practicum/methods, assessment, adapted, health content/methods, coaching, and technology. Recent additions include comprehensive school physical activity programs, and current issues and trends in physical education.



One of the foundational elements to the program is the emphasis on skill development and strategies, where students gain valuable experiences learning and practicing in a variety of content areas, including 10 credits plus labs in:

- * Educational games, gymnastics, & dance,
- * Strength & conditioning,
- * Target & outdoor activities,
- * Net & wall games, and
- * Invasion games.

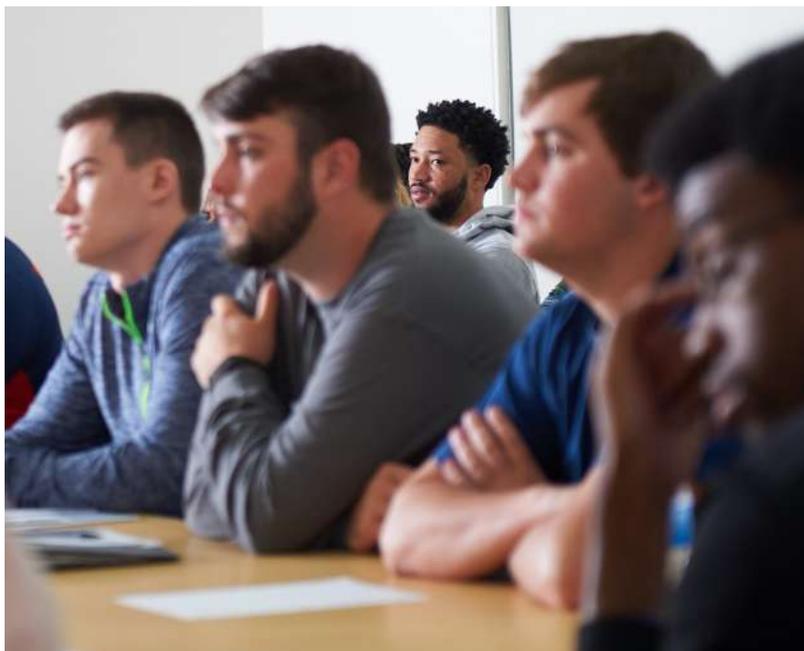




In addition, all teacher candidates enroll in more than 15 credit hours of teaching experiences in local schools before the 15-week student teaching internship. The program is housed in the beautiful Coliseum and surrounding areas which boast state-of-the-art technology-enhanced classrooms, a fitness lab & aerobics studio, five full-sized basketball courts, a walking track, six tennis courts, and large additional outdoor green spaces for numerous physical activities.



Program faculty are committed to excellence in teaching, service, and research, and are well-represented at state, regional, and national conferences, and are well-published in a variety of national journals. Full-time faculty members' areas of expertise include curriculum and instruction, sport-specific pedagogy, supervision, comprehensive school physical activity programs, and mental fitness. The program is part of the Department of Sport Management, Wellness, and Physical Education in the College of Education.



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For more information, contact
Dr. Brian Mosier, Department
Chair and Associate Professor
at bmosier@westga.edu
678-839-5424



Extracurricular Participation and Self-concept in Rural Elementary Students: A Casual-comparative Study

by Donna Sexton, Ed.D.

ABSTRACT

The purpose of the ex post facto, causal comparative study described was to test the interactional framework of self-concept theory and Gibson's ecological theory of perceptual development with Erikson's theory of psychosocial development by investigating the overarching research question, Is there a statistically significant difference between mean scores for self-concept (academic, social, and overall) based on extracurricular participation portfolio (sports only, non-sports only, mixed activity types, or no participation) in rural elementary students?

The relationship of extracurricular participation to positive outcomes in adolescents has been established in prior research. This study is significant because it ameliorates the paucity of research on such variables with rural elementary students. A convenience sample from three North Georgia elementary schools was used. Students completed the Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale, Second Edition. Scores were compared to students' extracurricular portfolios for the previous 6 months. Data were collected over a period of 3 weeks at the schools and extracurricular facilities. An ANOVA using SPSS was conducted for each null hypothesis to obtain results indicating a significant relationship between extracurricular portfolio and self-concept scores. Educational and extracurricular practitioners are encouraged to

use the study as inspiration to conduct their own research on programs in their communities.

To see a demonstration of the significance of extracurricular activities, one only need attend a Friday night high school football game. From the players, cheerleaders, pep squad, band members, and concession stand workers, to the coaches, fans, and family members, entire communities may be involved in such an event. Largely because of this prominence of extracurricular activities for high school students, a great deal of literature exists on extracurricular participation and its relationships with various outcomes for adolescents. One such outcome is self-concept, shown through decades of research to be significant in numerous areas of human functioning (Harter, 2012; Marsh, 1990; Scott & Santos de Barona, 2011). However, comparatively little research examines these variables in elementary students, particularly those from rural areas (Denault & Déry, 2014; Metsäpelto & Pulkkinen, 2014). Questions remain as to whether extracurricular activities are helpful to younger, rural students. Various factors build a case for additional research to answer these questions, particularly in light of the current climate for practitioners, those who sponsor or work with children in their extracurricular endeavors. National statistics indicate that over 80% of students in kindergarten through grade 12 participate in extracurricular activities (Fredricks, 2012; Mahoney, Harris, & Eccles, 2006).

As larger numbers of elementary students participate, these endeavors are becoming more significant to their development and social context (Denault & Déry, 2014; Metsäpelto & Pulkkinen, 2014). Researchers have long known that elementary students differ from adolescents in terms of their worries, abilities, social relationships, and emotional or behavior problems (Mash & Barkley, 2014). Researchers have also studied extracurricular involvement among younger students (Dimech & Seiler, 2011; Simoncini & Caltabiono, 2012), but there is a paucity of research as compared to research on adolescents (Denault & Déry, 2014; Metsäpelto & Pulkkinen, 2014).

The same is true of rural students (Ferris, Oosterhoff, & Metzger, 2013). A lack of research may be problematic for this population on a practical level. Inadequate funding in rural areas may limit what extracurricular activities are offered, when leisure time options for youth in rural areas are already limited compared to urban areas (Edwards, Kanders, & Bocarro, 2011). Rural youth may not be able to compensate for a lack of such offerings, since poverty rates are high in many rural communities (Strange, 2011). There is evidence that extracurricular activities contribute to positive outcomes for rural students (Ferris et al., 2013), but without research on their extracurricular participation, decision makers could unknowingly cut beneficial extracurricular programs due to funding problems (Kronholz, 2012).

One positive outcome associated with extracurricular involvement is higher self-concept (Blomfield & Barber, 2009, 2011; Bohnert, Fredricks, & Randall, 2010).

One's perception of oneself, or self-concept (Shavelson, Hubner, & Stanton, 1976), is significant to psychology and education and has a history that has evolved alongside that of extracurricular activities (Pajares & Schunk, 2002). Psychologists have come to see a positive self-concept as a key to good psychological health (Pajares & Schunk, 2002; Shavelson et al., 1976), but little time has been devoted to self-concept in the classroom environment during the 21st century due to a primary focus on standardized testing (Styron & Styron, 2011). Some have therefore looked to extracurricular activities as possible self-concept builders instead of the classroom.

Several theories point to the potential of extracurricular activities to affect students positively. First, self-concept theory posits that one's perception of oneself is shaped by interactions with environment, other people, and with one's own learning (Keyes & Ryff, 2000; Kinch, 1963). Another related theory is Gibson's theory of ecological development, which also looks at self and environment with emphasis placed on environmental affordances, or opportunities (Miller, 2011). Third is Erikson's theory of psychosocial development, which divides life into stages (Soeker, 2014). During the middle childhood stage, industry versus inferiority, children tend to "evaluate themselves based on . . . standards set by others" and have a strong desire to please adults (Muro, Stulmaker, & Rose, 2012, p. 12),

In light of the empirical and practical need for more research on rural elementary students' extracurricular involvement and self-concept, the causal-comparative study described herein is provided as an example of research that could be undertaken by practitioners. The study tested the interactional framework of the three theories described by comparing academic, social, and overall self-concept scores on the Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale, Second Edition (Piers-Harris 2) of rural North Georgia elementary students based on extracurricular participation portfolio (Piers & Herzberg, 2002).

Design

A causal-comparative design was employed, as random assignment of students to extracurricular activities was not a possibility. A similar approach has been used in previous studies on extracurricular participation (Blomfield & Barber, 2009; Dinç, 2011; Ludden, 2011; Metsäpelto & Pulkkinen, 2012). The presumed cause, or independent variable, was extracurricular involvement portfolio. The portfolios were similar to those from studies on adolescents and consisted of four levels: sports only, non-sports only, mixed activity types, and no participation (Blomfield & Barber, 2009, 2011; Kort-Butler & Hagewen, 2011).

Participants and Setting

The population consisted of elementary students attending a North Georgia school district designated as rural according to National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) locale codes (Governor's Office of Stu-

dent Achievement, n.d.). Participants were a convenience sample of volunteers from this population who obtained written parent permission. They consisted of 306 third through fifth graders attending three elementary schools. Of these, 153 were male and 153 female, with 53 students designated as having an extracurricular portfolio of sports only, 50 as non-sports only, 37 as mixed activity types, and 166 as no participation. The sample and cell sizes met criteria defined by Warner (2013) as appropriate for a large effect size, power of .80, with an α of .05 (p. 209). In terms of ethnicity and sex, the sample consisted of 73.9% White, 24.7% Hispanic, and 1.4% American Indian/Alaskan Native, Asian/Pacific Islander, Black, and Multi-Racial combined. It was closely representative of the population from which it was drawn (Governor's Office of Student Achievement, 2014).

Instrumentation

To measure the independent variable of extracurricular participation portfolio, the researcher checked with sponsors of available school- and community-sponsored activities to see which study participants took part in these activities during the previous six months (Denault & Déry, 2014; Denault & Poulin, 2009). Students were then coded as fitting one of the four extracurricular portfolios (Blomfield & Barber, 2009, 2011; Kort-Butler & Hagewen, 2011). Each student was also coded demographically in terms of race/ethnicity, sex, and grade level.

To measure the dependent variable of self-concept scores, the Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale, Second Edition (Piers-Harris 2) was used (Piers & Herzberg, 2002). The scores for Intellectual and School status for academic self-concept, Popularity for social self-concept, and Total Self-concept for overall self-worth were utilized. The Piers-Harris 2, a self-report measure consisting of sixty items, was created for use with 7-18-year-olds and written at a second grade level (Puckett, 2008). The instrument has been used extensively and is "the most frequently used and highly recommended instrument for the assessment of self-concept" (Remine, Care, & Grbic, 2009, p. 122).

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Procedures

Necessary approvals were obtained prior to conducting the study. To recruit participants, each site was visited by the researcher, and information about the study in parental consent/student assent letters was distributed. The researcher returned on another school day to administer the self-concept scales to participants. Once scales were scored per instructions in the Piers-Harris 2 manual and profiles coded by extracurricular participation portfolio, students were assigned a random identification number in place of their names.

elementary students?



Discussion of Results

This causal comparative study tested the interactional framework of self-concept theory and Gibson's ecological theory of perceptual development with Erikson's theory of psychosocial development by investigating the overarching research question, Is there a statistically significant difference between mean scores for self-concept (academic, social, and overall) based on extracurricular participation portfolio (sports only, non-sports only, mixed activity types, or no participation) in rural elementary students? Once the above steps were taken, data screening and analysis were completed. The result of the ANOVA for each null hypothesis was statistically significant, consistent with similar previous studies of older student populations from rural and other environments. Following is a discussion of the importance of these results with regard to research, theory, stakeholders, and the current practitioner.

Contribution to Empirical Literature

This study adds to the body of empirical literature on extracurricular participation and related socioemotional variables in the understudied population of rural elementary students (Denault & Déry, 2014; Metsäpelto & Pulkkinen, 2014). While one study cannot correct imbalances in the literature, this study represents a step in that direction. The results here were generally consistent with prior research (Blomfield & Barber, 2009, 2011; Denault & Déry, 2014; Ferris et al., 2013; Guèvremont, Findlay, & Kohen, 2014; Knifsend & Graham, 2012), indicating

that extracurricular participation may contribute to higher self-concept in children as well as adolescents, and that rural children may benefit from participation as well as children from urban and suburban areas.

Specifically, sports only portfolios were significantly higher than no participation for all types of self-concept. This result could be due to the emphasis on teamwork and peer interactions found in many sports programs (Blomfield & Barber, 2011; Covay & Carbonaro, 2010). For social self-concept and overall self-worth, a mixed activity types portfolio was associated with significantly higher scores than no participation. This may in part be due to the exercise aspect of both portfolios, as high overall self-worth has been tied to increased physical activity in previous research (Haugen, Säfvenbom, & Ommundsen, 2011). For practitioners in the area of physical activity for children, such as physical education and extracurricular sports or dance, for example, this is good news that could inspire them to conduct research on their own programs.

Contribution to Theory

The results of this study also contribute to theory by supporting its conceptual model positing an interaction of self-concept theory, Gibson's ecological theory of perceptual development, and Erikson's theory of psychosocial development. The association of significantly higher academic and social self-concept, as well as overall self-worth, with extracurricular participation supports an interaction of self with environment.

In addition, this study's findings for children indicate that Erikson's industry versus inferiority stage is relevant to extracurricular participation research (Coatsworth et al., 2005).



Guidance for Practitioners

To prevent such poor decisions from being taken, practitioners must play a role. Today, the climate in education and, by extension, other activities involving children, requires data for decisions. Fairly or not, those who sponsor programs for children or work with them directly are often expected to provide such data. Rather than viewing this as an additional burden, it may behoove the modern practitioner to look at this expectation as an opportunity. Data may be relatively easy to obtain, and the information can mean that good programs continue to get financial backing. It is much easier to keep funding when one can say that a program is correlated to high self-worth or less problem behaviors, for example, than if all one can say is vague statements like, "the kids really seem to enjoy the program" or "get a lot out of it."

This article has described an example of a study that practitioners might conduct. Ideally, practitioners would partner with a university. Such a partnership

would garner several benefits for all involved. First, university students could largely carry out the studies, saving practitioners time and effort while still getting needed data. Second, such studies would have to be approved by the partner university's Institutional Review Board. This way, studies are considered ethical, a paramount consideration when working with children. Third, with prior IRB approval, studies may be published and contribute to the overall body of knowledge.

With or without university partners, however, other important steps to keep in mind are to get written permission from any involved agencies and parents for any sort of data collection, to try to use surveys and questionnaires that are reliable and valid, and to make certain that children are not put at risk as part of data collection. Their participation should be voluntary. For those not well versed in statistics, even simpler methodologies than that employed for this article's study could be used. One might simply report percentages of how children answered questions on an anonymous survey, for example. Giving a survey as part of a study need take only a few minutes. The important considerations are that one conducts research ethically and can provide data when asked. Having such data to hand can mean the difference between having a program cut to the detriment of its participants and growing a program so that it can benefit even more community members.

- Other designs besides causal-comparative should be used. Studying younger students opens the possibility for more longitudinal research on extracurricular participation and related variables. Starting research with younger children could help to clarify whether the potential benefits of extracurricular participation are pertinent to more developmental stages than those of adolescence. Qualitative studies could lend significant insight regarding the reasons for some of the



quantitative findings, as well as opening even more lines of inquiry for further study.

Conclusion

Herein is described an example of a study which might be conducted to provide data on the relationship between extracurricular activities and positive variables in rural elementary students. It is hoped that other practitioners will be inspired by this to consider doing research on their programs, particularly those in rural areas where

funding can be an issue in keeping extracurricular programs available. In today's climate, conducting research and having data could determine whether such programs continue to exist.

About the author:

Donna Sexton is currently a school counselor at Gilmer High School in Ellijay, Georgia.

For more information pertaining to this article, contact Donna at donnasexton889@gmail.com



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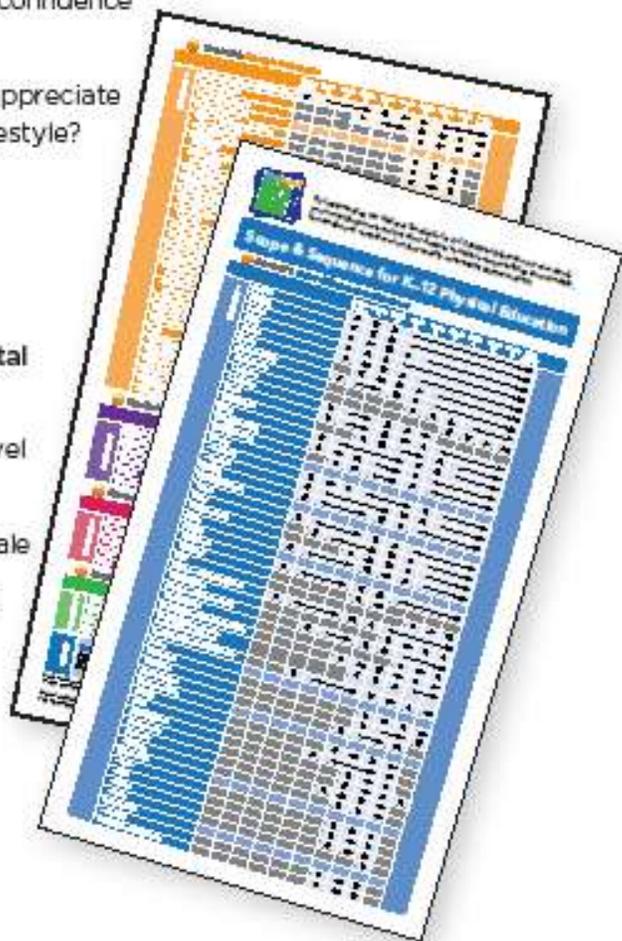
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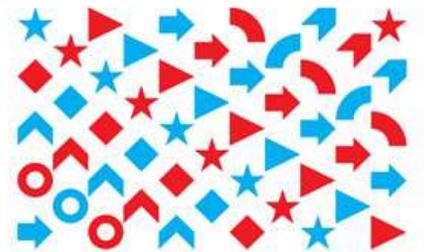
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Potential district workshops in Georgia—More information will be provided.

Membership

Are you interested in health, physical education, recreation or dance? Do you have passion and commitment for physical activity and wellness? Do you believe we can do more to help others and better prepare students for a lifetime of health and physical activity? Do you want to join the advocacy efforts of other dedicated professionals to pave the way toward a healthier generation of individuals? Do you believe in the power of numbers?

Join GAHPERD!

For more information, visit www.gahperd.org, contact Kim Thompson, Executive Director of the Georgia Association for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance (kthompson.gahperd@att.net).

Mission Statement

GAHPERD, Inc. is a non-profit organization for professionals and students in related fields of health, physical education, recreation and dance. GAHPERD, Inc. is dedicated to improving the quality of life for all Georgians by supporting and promoting effective educational practices, quality curriculum, instruction and assessment in the areas of health, physical education, recreation, dance and related fields.