(Re)Thinking Sport Management, How It is Practiced, How We Teach It, and How Students Use It

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Teaching Sport Management courses to undergraduates is rife with potential issues that should concern those who are trying to create a comprehensive program of study at their University. By this we mean that there is a difficult balance that needs to be struck between preparing students to work in an industry that is increasingly concerned with the “bottom line” (cf. Frisby, 2005; Kihl, 2007; Kirk, 2006; Malloy & Agarwall, 2001; Malloy & Zakus, 1995; McKay, 1986; Zakus, Malloy & Edwards, 2007; Ziegler, 2007) while developing a critical consciousness with regard to their own and others actions “in the field”. For many sport management programs that disseminate information in a rationally technocratic (Giroux, 1988) style our way of thinking requires (re)conceptualizing sport management’s purpose, and potentially alter the way(s) we teach. Although an overly technocratic education has benefits, in that the graduate will be able to execute sales or marketing techniques, it might not prepare them to have a holistic understanding of why or how these practices affect various social groups (cf. Friere, 1970, 1972; Giroux, 1981, 1985, 1988, 1991, 2006; Kincheloe & Steinberg, 2007).

In this 60-minute forum each presenter will attempt to rethink sport management, and provide alternatives to transactional learning (King-White, Forthcoming) in order to better reach and prepare our students to be socially-conscious sport managers. The first presenter will provide an overarching philosophical review of the field, entitled “Sport Without Management”, using the work of Roland Barthes to critically consider sport management’s rise within the contemporary socio-political moment. The second presentation, “What Does it Mean to Sell Sport: ‘Feeling’ the Impact of Common Sport Management Practices,” attempts to combine the first presentations considerations with a critical pedagogical approach inspired by Henry Giroux and Paulo Friere. The second presenter offers a few examples outlining how s/he has inserted critical pedagogy and helped develop critical consciousness in the classroom with the intention of creating a more progressive, diverse, and welcoming form of sport management. The third paper, entitled “Losing My Religion: Being Asked to Forget What I was Taught”, is an empirical reflection that recounts our third presenters various experiences as an intern in sporting firms. Borrowing heavily from the late-Joe Kincheloe’s concept of the “recovery movement” (2007), s/he compares what s/he learned in sport management classes with what s/he was confronted with as an intern. S/he then asks important questions about both the classroom experience and the field itself. Our fourth presenter takes a more practical approach in her/his discussion, “Preparing the future of an industry: Assisting in the transition from Sport Management student to Sport Management professional.” More specifically, s/he will suggest that if the problems presented in the first three presentations are unlikely to change soon, then we must come up with contingent strategies to best prepare our students to be sport managers in the present moment. Our final discussant turns a critical eye towards common practices in the sport industry with her/his presentation, “The Problem with Numbers: Sport, Management, and Athletic Labor Metrics.” Essentially, s/he points out why sport (management)’s turn toward technocratic quantification has contributed to a creeping social, cultural, and economic myopia that the first four papers outline. S/he concludes with suggestions for how to move forward in a more socially conscious manner.

Sport Without Management: This author seeks to unsettle the taken-for-granted epistemological and ontological foundations upon which most curricular and research-based activities in contemporary Sport Management are grounded. “Sport Management” as field of inquiry often assumes that sport principally emerges as a commercial activity—and that its pedagogues, students, and practitioners should concentrate their efforts on regulating organizational behaviors and sporting bodies to maximize profitability. Based on these assumptions, many scholars have focused on understanding and promulgating sport as industry, the athlete a commodity, the team as brand, the fan as consumer, and the sport facilitator as ‘manager.’ This presentation offers an alternative to such a dominant sporting paradigm. To do this, the author explains how, and why, sport came to be so management-focused and...
business-centric. Finally s/he suggests that we might benefit from taking stock of, and rethinking, the effects of the Sport Management field’s efforts to codify, rationalize, and commercialize cultural formations of play.

What does it Mean to “Sell” Sport: ‘Feeling’ the Impact of Common Sport Management Practices - Over the past several decades the Sport Management field has experienced an unprecedented growth in the United States, and throughout the world. This form of research and practice has helped define the way(s) that sport is experienced in the contemporary moment. However, while theoretical rigor has long been the norm in North American Sport Management, this presentation argues that a critical (public) pedagogical perspective is lacking in the field. The author will demonstrate how Henry Giroux’s influence in, on, and for critical pedagogy has more recently become and should be an essential component of Sport Management – particularly in our classrooms. As such, s/he will provide examples outlining how critical pedagogy informs her/his classroom practices in order to begin the dialogue about what constitutes good pedagogical work in Sport Management.

Losing My Religion: Being Asked to Forget What I was Taught - Following Kincheloe (2008), many of the normalized and, indeed celebrated, behaviors in sport management are actions that are part and parcel of the ‘recovery movement’. These behaviors often (re)inscribe new forms of colonization, sexism, racism, classism and so on. Given that these performances are often considered “good business practice,” it is now more important than ever to challenge these conventions in the face of a collapsed (sports) economy. This paper, therefore, analyzes and explains how the mundane recycling of borrowed thought has seeped into America’s collegiate educational system – particularly in sport management programs. It does so through a critical examination of my educational and pre-professional experience as an intern for various sporting constituencies. Further, s/he will examine the disguised precedence and obligatory requisites of the sporting industry, which use exploitative and manipulative marketing tactics to fabricate a hyperreal milieu of sporting production and consumption. Given this context, the project at present seeks to (re)evaluate the sport management intern experience, as well as provide some insight as to what should be done in the future.

Preparing the future of an industry: Assisting in the transition from Sport Management student to Sport Management professional - This presentation will question the Sport Management professor’s role with regard to helping students traverse an academic program, progress through practical experiences, and secure a position in the (sport) labor industry. The author believes that for a sport management program to be truly comprehensive we have a responsibility to understand the industry's complex nature. In so doing, we can provide a curriculum that reflects the various knowledge(s) needed to be successful industry leaders now and in the future. As such, a (if not the) key component in our students’ pedagogical experience is the field experience and/or pre-professional internship. The crux of this presentation will reflect on the following three questions: What happens when the ethics that we teach our students are not reflected in the site? What is unique about our current students that poses potential issues with possible employers? How do we ensure that the result of this experience allows the individual to reach their potential?

The Problem with Numbers: Sport, Management, and Athletic Labor Metrics - This presentation argues that through the quantitative turn in sport management athletic laboring bodies become alienated from the geographic, cultural, and physical context upon which they are produced. More to the point, the extreme focus on common sport metrics like 40-times, BMI, and WAR, actually serves to decontextualize athletic performance rather than explain it. The author concludes that while this form of numeric, scientific reductionism creates a practical system for identifying and capitalizing upon perceived market inefficiencies, it also acts as a new form of colonization; whereby the historical conditions, cultural pluralities, and socio-economic contexts within which these athletes play the game are negated or washed away by labor metrics.