Evaluating Student-Athlete Emotional Intelligence Development Due to Participation in College Sport

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At the vast majority of National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) institutions, there exists a debate over the place of sport within higher education (Emerson, Brooks, & McKenzie, 2009). The academic-athletic divide has been highlighted through descriptions of disturbing trends toward greater differences between college athletes and other students in their academic achievement and admissions standards (Shulman & Bowen, 2001). Proponents of sport have championed its ability to contribute to a holistic notion of education and develop an array of competencies that are often touted in institutional missions (Vella, Crowe, & Oades, 2013).

However, according to Feezell (2015), “tenets of the debate are oft repeated… little towards exploration of the continuing conflict” (p. 86). There is a dearth of empirical data examining the educational impact of sport participation at the college level (Emerson et al., 2009). This ongoing research initiative is an attempt to add to the dialogue and provide empirical evidence of the educational ability of sport. In order to assess such impact, the authors have selected the construct of Emotional Intelligence (EI) as a proxy for student development. While the construct has not been previously used to explore the educational impact of athletics, instruments to measure EI have focused on many of the competencies that are typically voiced in the rhetoric surrounding sport.

Scholars have suggested that EI may be important to the context of sport (Meyer & Fletcher, 2007). Yet, rather than explore the development of EI through sport, the scant research that has been conducted has focused primarily on the relationship between EI and performance (e.g., Crombie, Lombard, & Noakes, 2009; Pensgaard & Duda, 2003; Perlini & Halverson, 2006; Zizzi et al., 2003). Studies in higher education have however explored whether or not certain educative practices can develop student EI (Pool & Qualter, 2012; Schutte & Malouff, 2002). Positive links have been found between EI development and academic achievement, student retention, and a host of health indices (Schutte, Malouff, & Bhullar, 2009), indicators that are commonly measured in evaluations of athletic programs.

The total student bodies of five small, private institutions in the Midwest were sampled for this analysis. Approximately 6,000 students were invited to complete the instrument through Qualtrics. Participation in college sport served as a natural intervention. Winter sport athletes functioned as the experimental group with non-athletes acting as a control group. Utilizing a Pretest-Posttest Nonequivalent-Group Design, pretest measurements were taken prior to the natural intervention. Nearly 600 students completed the pretest (approximately 40% of which were student athletes in the experimental group). The treatment (a season of sport participation) is currently underway. The posttest will be administered after the conclusion of the competitive season in early April.

Data analysis for the present study will be conducted with a Three-factor Split-Plot Repeated-Measures ANOVA. The mixed-model will include one repeated factor (time) and two non-repeated factors (institution and sport + control). The researchers utilized a pre-established instrument, The Emotional Intelligence Scale (Schutte et al., 1998).

Study results will indicate one of three things: (1) sport, in this particular population, does not develop EI any differently than a typical college experience; (2) development of EI due to sport participation is not consistent in all settings (differences occur based on institution or coaching staff); or (3) there will be new empirical evidence to defend the rhetoric surrounding sport participation. Results from the study will provide a new form of assessment of the educative ability of sport in a collegiate setting. They will indicate whether or not sport, in its current form, is helping to fulfill the academic missions of institutions in the study population. At this juncture it is critical to provide new empirical evidence to the dialogue surrounding the place of sport within institutions of higher education.

References


