A Different View: How a Wheelchair Basketball Documentary May Shape Student Attitudes Toward Disability Sport

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Teaching/Learning - Teaching strategies/methods (Disability Sport) Saturday, June 9, 2018
20-minute oral presentation (including questions) 2:20 PM
Abstract 2018-363 Room: Acadia B

Using film in the college classroom employs a blend of visual and audible learning opportunities for the student (Miller, 2009) that brings abstract concepts to life (Kuzma & Haney, 2001). Furthermore, film offers an appealing and enjoyable pedagogical approach for Millennial students to learn (Donahue & Miller, 2016). This appeal has been used in multiple academic disciplines.

Educators have used science fiction movies to examine how students learn science (Barnett et al., 2006), used education films to examine future teachers’ perceptions of their careers (Kontas, 2016), and used film in classrooms to examined students’ multicultural awareness (Rorrer & Furr, 2009) and attitudes toward race relations (Loewen, 1991). Additionally, films have been and can be used as stimulating means of teaching students about disability (Safran, 1998).

Using film as a pedagogical methodology can have a “profound impact” on perceptions of disability (Schwartz et al., 2010, p. 846). Graduate students have recognized their own professional development from viewing films on disability because the portrayal of real people engaging in daily living activities (e.g., school, work, relationships, and entertainment) dispels stereotypes (Schwartz et al., 2010). Goldenberg, Lee, and O’Bannon (2010) found that most college professors who use film for educational purposes also require student reflection so they can carefully consider the knowledge learned in a safe and thoughtful environment. Interventions such as discussions, written activities, demonstrations, and simulations have improved knowledge, attitudes, and acceptance of disability (Ison et al., 2010; Lindsay & Edwards, 2013).

It is important to examine students’ attitudes toward disability sport as this is one sector of a broad industry, and sport management graduates are likely to face disability issues within their careers (e.g., parking, seating, programming). Thus, the purpose of this study was to explore the attitudes toward disability sport after viewing a film documentary on wheelchair basketball. The researchers collaborated with producers of the film documentary The Rebound: A Wheelchair Basketball Story to explore how viewing the film may shape attitudes toward disability sport. The current study implemented an intervention in a graduate sport leadership classroom by showing the documentary and examining student attitudes toward disability sport through reflections in a focus group.

Convenience sampling was used to recruit focus group participants from a graduate sport leadership course. Students viewed the film as part of a regular class, and those who consented to participate in the study stayed in class to participate in a focus group led by the researcher who was not the instructor of record. In addition to demographic questions, the researcher guided the focus group conversation toward student reactions to the film (e.g., “How did you feel at the end of this film?”), attitudes toward disability sport after viewing the film (“How does watching the film shape your attitudes or actions toward disability sport and athletes?”), and impactful moments from the film (“What parts of the film stood out to you positively or negatively?”).

The final sample for this study was nine graduate students studying sport leadership at a large university in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States. The average age of participants was 25.2 years with a range of 23–37 years. There were five males, four females. Eight of the participants identified “white” as their race; one identified “mixed.” None of the participants identified with having a disability, but five said they know a friend or family member who has a disability.

This study is in the data analysis stage with completed anticipated by December 2017. The constant comparative
method will be used to analyze the focus group transcript, beginning with open coding to search for basic concepts and categories within the data. Analysis will continue with axial coding where the researchers will re-read the text to confirm open codes are accurate and examine how concepts are related. Similar concepts will be grouped together and assigned an axial code that best describes the grouped concept. From there, the data will again be examined to construct themes. Researchers will conduct data analysis independently, then compare with each other. If discrepancies arise during coding, the researchers will discuss the differences until an agreement has been reached on the appropriate coding category.

The researchers anticipate the findings from this study will inform sport management educators on ways to address disability sport through film in the classroom and offer insight on learning outcomes of disability sport topics covered in the sport management classroom.