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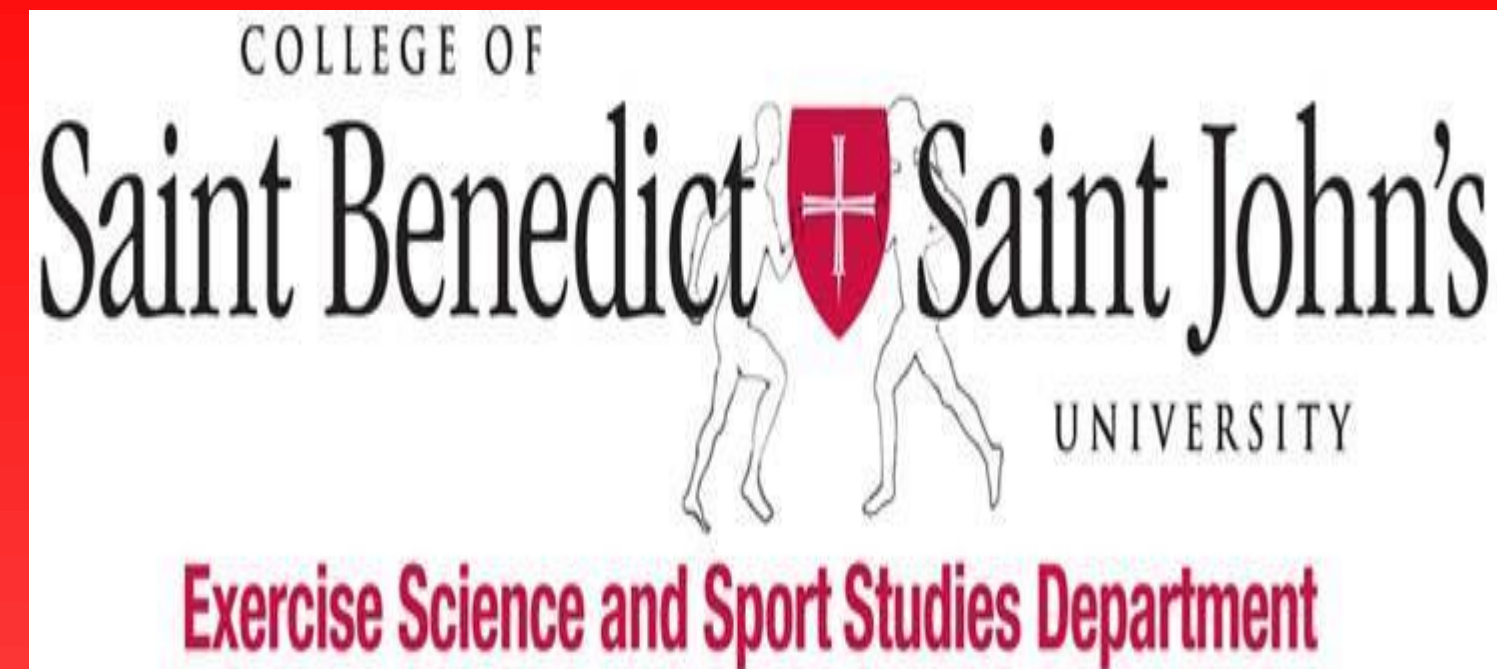
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Teaching Sport Ethics Concepts through Service Learning

Janna LaFontaine

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Background/Purpose

- The goal of the service learning component within a collegiate Sport Ethics course was to use physical play as a basis for learning ethical concepts.
- Through review of journal entries submitted by each student, a snapshot of their experience and application of ethical concepts can be found.

Methods

- 20 college students
- 20 hours of service learning within the local community was required
- SL placements were primarily in after school programs.
- Each student wrote a journal entry after each experience and were asked to:
 - apply course concepts
 - respond to specific prompts: what is fair, who decides what is fair, what is cheating, is it acceptable sometimes, what is fun, who decides if an activity is fun, what is the role of authority figures, and what ethical perspectives relate to your setting?
- Journal entries were reviewed, and coded into themes.

Analysis/Results

4 general themes emerged:

Cheating

Win at all cost mentality

Moral Education

Authority Figures

Responses indicated that the win at all cost mentality starts young, and cheating is constant and reduces the enjoyment of physical activities. Many children involved in sport practice psychological egoism through selfish play or outright cheating. However, moral education can be emphasized through teamwork, where individuals find ways to maximize happiness for the larger group or Utilitarian thinking. As authority figures, the students learned that keeping drills and activities simple increased the chance of success, and thus overall personal pleasure, a hedonistic concept. The college students believe that emphasizing social values is not enough to foster moral values, but can help lead participants in that direction. Finally, they stated that learning good moral behavior is more important than teaching sport skills.

Conclusions

Service learning can potentially enhance understanding and appreciation of moral concepts and behavior related to sport activities. It can help bring abstract ethical concepts to life and foster further exploration of personal morality. The college students, as future fans, coaches, parents and athletes have learned that sport without moral values decreases the enjoyment. This can be a resource for continual discussion and exploration of moral behavior within the sporting world and beyond. This experience also emphasizes the need for continual ethical education and discussion among sport participants and leaders.



Quotes

CHEATING: "These kids clearly feel that cheating is a necessary advantage they need to use in order to make the competition more equal, I just hope that they don't learn that it ok to cheat when you are the losing team."

WINNING AT ALL COSTS: "I noticed that most of the younger kids take the egoistic approach to dodge ball because they are so focused on winning and doing whatever it takes to win against the staff in dodge ball."

MORAL EDUCATION: "This proved to be an exceptional surprise in my eyes because these children were open to everyone, no matter the skill level, the gender or the race of one another. Each player was open to passing to their teammate or giving other teammates a chance to throw the ball in. This was exceptional and I was pleasantly surprised to see this aspect of the kids, since most had just met the week previous."

AUTHORITY FIGURE: "The kids were extremely competitive and tried to bend the rules any way they could. The fact that I was there certainly held them back, as they saw me as an authority figure. I found that if I would say something to them about not cheating, they would seem to listen. It made me feel good knowing that I may have set a good example for the kids to go forward and not cheat."

MORAL EDUCATION: "It is important for us as coaches, students, and role-models to recognize the impact we have in these kid's lives. They look up to us and watch our every mood. To me being an ethical role model is taking the time to hang out with someone even though you have to put something else on hold."