The Holland and Andre Study on Extracurricular Activities: Imbalanced and Incomplete

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The Holland and Andre study on extracurricular activities is imbalanced and incomplete—imbalanced in that because the authors fail to provide a theoretical framework as well as definitions of key terms, both of which would guide their presentation, the inclusion of research studies is skewed heavily toward one aspect of extracurricular activities; incomplete in that the authors fail to provide a literature review comprehensive enough to support the conclusions they draw. These shortcomings make it difficult to understand the relationship between extracurricular activities and student development and, thus, to have confidence in the authors' recommendations for future research. We agree, however, on the importance of a research effort in this area.

In their paper, "Participation in Extracurricular Activities in Secondary School: What Is Known, What Needs to Be Known," Alyce Holland and Thomas Andre (1987) direct attention to an aspect of education that has been somewhat eclipsed by the emphasis on academic achievement over the past decade. More recent consideration of a variety of extra-academic factors that may affect that academic achievement has led educationists to examine the ways in which student participation in extracurricular activities influences student performance. It is to this end, toward the "developing [of] a more complete understanding of the role of extracurricular activities in adolescent development" (Holland & Andre, p. 456), that the Holland and Andre paper can make a contribution. That contribution, however, remains only potential: The authors fail to provide us with adequate information about "what is known" and, as a result, provide an inadequate analysis of "what needs to be known." They have also been remiss in providing us with a theoretical framework that would both give structure to the presentation of the studies they review and establish a context for the conclusions they draw.

Holland and Andre state at the outset that their paper focuses "on the relationship between extracurricular activities and adolescent development" (1987, p. 437), but that focus is, at best, weak. Although some of the research discussed in the review of literature (Section 1) does focus on various aspects of such a relationship, the paper itself does not. A primary reason is the authors' failure to define terms that are central to the topic—reflection of an assumption that there is but one operational definition (an assumption that seems to obviate, for them, the necessity for clear and cogent explanations) and, more important, indication of the absence of a theoretical framework.

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The failure to define "extracurricular activities" and "adolescent development" are cases in point. Most of us are in agreement that school athletics, all of which take place after school or on weekends, are "extracurricular activities." Are we also in agreement that social and service clubs/organizations are similarly "extracurricular" if they meet when school is out? What about student government activities that often take up a part of the school day? And what about clubs/organizations that are adjuncts of academic courses, such as Latin or French clubs, marching bands or orchestras, computer clubs, and debate teams? The absence of parameters for the term implies an inclusiveness that needs, at least, to be categorized if one is to gauge the ways in which "participation" (again, not defined) will affect adolescent development. The absence of parameters for the term also gives the authors license, as it does in their literature review, where the emphasis of "extracurricular activities" is skewed heavily toward athletics. Of the 32 studies included in the Appendix, the authors indicate that 21 deal with athletic participation; in comparison, only one deals with student government participation, and 10 fail to name the type of extracurricular activities in which the samples participated.

Furthermore, because the authors never tell us what constitutes "adolescent development" (physiological development? psychological development? intellectual development? social development?) and because they do not offer a conceptual framework that explains the inclusion of any of the five "areas" (the subsections in Section 1) that presumably constitute aspects of adolescent development, we are left to draw our own conclusions about the ways in which school size, for example, or socioeconomic status contribute to or hinder the "adolescent development" that is supposed to be affected by extracurricular activities and are asked, at the same time, to accept on faith the authors' contention that the variables are, in fact, valid. The focus on any "relationship" between extracurricular activities and adolescent development necessarily suffers.

In the absence of such key definitions, the authors' approach to their study reflects an imbalanced and incomplete point of view of high school extracurricular participation. This point of view can be seen in the abovementioned emphasis on student involvement in athletics. Taking that emphasis as a cue, we will, in our critique, consider only issues that pertain to research on sports.

With respect to "what is known," Holland and Andre's coverage of what they call the "extant research" appears not to be comprehensive enough to substantiate the conclusions that they draw. Their discussion of the research on race relations, in which they contend that "if in-class cooperative activities can facilitate race relations, then it is reasonable to conclude that cooperative extracurricular activities may have similar effects" (1987, p. 440), is an example. To support that contention, the authors cite research conducted by Aronson, Bridge-man, and Geffner (1978), Slavin and Madden (1979), Slavin (1980), Crain (1981), Crain, Mayhard, and Narat (1982), and Scott and Damico (1983) but fail to mention the more recent Chu and Griffee (1985) study, which uses some aspects of the 1979 Slavin and Madden study to come to the somewhat different conclusion that "increased contact [in athletic participation] is not always correlated with positive race relations" (emphasis ours) (Chu & Griffee, p. 331). Holland and Andre also fail to mention the fact that a number of studies that precede the Slavin and Madden (1979) study (e.g., studies by Braddock, 1980, Czula, 1978, Kraus, 1977).
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1968, and Sargent, 1972) as well as reviews of literature by McPherson (1976) and Coakley (1982) have found little or no relationship between racial attitudes and behaviors and participation in athletic activities. This rather one-sided presentation of issues makes it difficult for the reader to have confidence in the contention that Holland and Andre make, particularly as that contention raises questions about whether the authors have considered such variables as the mandatory/voluntary nature of classroom and extracurricular activities.

A related shortcoming in the literature review is the rather haphazard and incomplete manner in which Holland and Andre present the research throughout their paper. They neglect to give us enough information about such aspects of the studies’ samples as gender, grade level/age, and race (13 of the 32 studies discussed do not mention the gender of the samples, and only 12 studies tell us the grade levels of the samples), about types of activity participation, such as whether the sport is a team/individual activity and/or is on the junior varsity/varsity level (of the 21 studies on athletic participation, only two identify the type of athletic activity), and about the degree and length of student involvement, to provide us with an understanding of how they derive their conclusions. If the studies discussed lack specificity in these variables, we feel that it is the responsibility of the authors to apprise the reader about what is missing.

A third shortcoming in the literature review (the section titled “What Is Known”) is a lack of cohesiveness in the information presented, a situation caused by the authors’ failure to acknowledge major social/political/educational changes that have influenced student participation in athletics. Three studies that pertain to the discussion on academic achievement illustrate this shortcoming. Studies by Spady (1970), Landers, Feltz, Obermeier, and Brouse (1978), and Feltz and Weiss (1984) constitute a specific line of research in that they all investigate the influence of athletic participation on educational achievement; however, Holland and Andre do not illuminate for the reader the fact that the Landers et al. study is a replication and extension of the Spady study and that the Feltz and Weiss study is a replication and extension of the Landers et al. study. Because Holland and Andre fail to establish for the reader the time context in which these studies were conducted, the significance of findings based on grade point average (1960s and early 1970s) and on standardized tests (late 1970s and early 1980s) and of findings based on gender are lost to the reader. In not acknowledging the relationships to student participation in athletics of such social/political trends as the movement to increase the use of tests to measure school effectiveness and such legislations as Title IX, Holland and Andre overlook the implications of changes in measures of achievement and the implications of a sample that changes from all male (Spady) to male and female (Landers et al.) to all female (Feltz & Weiss).

The authors fail to provide us with adequate information about “what is known” in yet another way: They fail to include, in their literature review, studies that would give more credibility to their discussion of the “areas” in Section 1. Examples of such omissions are (a) under “Personal-Social Characteristics,” research conducted by Buhrman (1977), Sonstroem and Kamper (1980), Overman and Prakasa Rao (1981), Young (1981), Chalip, Csikszentmihalyi, Kleiber, and Larson (1984), and Segrave and Hastad (1984); (b) under “Academic Achievement and Athletic Participation,” research conducted by Picou (1978), Hanks (1979), Howell, Miracle, and Rees (1984), and Picou, McCarter, and Howell (1985); (c)
under "Educational Aspiration and Attainment," research conducted by Birrell (1977) and McElroy (1979); and (d) under "Degree of Activity Involvement," research conducted by Snyder and Spreitzer (1976), Gruber and Gray (1982), Thirer and Wright (1985), and Gregson and Colley (1986). More serious omissions, however, are two important strands of research that pertain to the first of these areas, "Personal-Social Characteristics": research on the socialization aspects of participation in athletics, particularly for females, and research on achievement motivation. The first strand of research is guided by social learning theory that posits as important factors the influence of role models and of reinforcements from significant others. Studies that investigate the issues in this strand include research conducted by Greendorfer (1977), Snyder and Spreitzer (1978), Nicholson (1979), Anthrop and Allison (1983), and Butcher (1985). The second strand of research is guided by the attributional model of achievement. Studies that investigate the issues in this strand include research conducted by Scanlan and Passer (1980), as well as by Birrell, Overman and Prakasa Rao, and Butcher.

With respect to "what needs to be known," the shortcomings discussed above raise questions about the applicability of the research limitations (Section 2) that Holland and Andre ascribe to the studies included in the literature review and about the appropriateness of the recommendations they make for further research (Section 3). One can hardly accept seriously pronouncements on methodological limitations of a body of research based on various theoretical frameworks if one fails to establish a context for integrating the individual studies and to present a clear case for the methodological strengths and weaknesses of the studies discussed. Because Holland and Andre's catalog of methodological limitations makes little effort to indicate which of the studies included in the literature review have these limitations, we are left wondering where these "limitations" come from. Furthermore, we fail to see how the Dunkin and Biddle model proposed in Section 3 (Holland & Andre, 1987, p. 452) will remedy these limitations to "raise both the theoretical and methodological adequacy of research on participation" (p. 455). What is implied by the authors' suggestion that the Dunkin and Biddle model be used to structure future research on extracurricular participation is that the "extant research" is somehow inadequate. We disagree.

Also, because there is a seeming lack of correspondence between the literature review and the two sections that follow and because the literature review itself is not comprehensive, one might question the strength of the recommendations for further research. Much of what is recommended is currently being addressed, both from the theoretical perspective (e.g., McPherson, 1984, Snyder, 1983, and Theberge, 1984) and by actual research (e.g., Craighead, Privette, Vallianos, & Byrkit, 1986, Geron, Furst, & Rotstein, 1986, and Scanlan & Passer, 1980).

Recognizing that "extracurricular activities" can be defined in a number of ways, we have, nevertheless, chosen to confine our critique to studies that emphasize participation in athletics because of this particular skew in the Holland and Andre study. A clear definition of the term—one that might have included social as well as service activities—undoubtedly would have given the authors a more balanced approach to the topic. Be that as it may, we agree with them that participation in extracurricular activities play an important part in a student's total development. Others are of similar opinion: in their analyses of schooling in the United States, Lightfoot (1983), Goodlad (1984), and Sizer (1984) find that
“good” high schools, besides stressing academic achievement, offer opportunities for student participation in extracurricular activities. If the Holland/Andre study has accomplished one thing, it has brought to our attention the need for further research in this area.

References
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