Background

For over twenty years, I have worked in the fields of education and therapeutic recreation with people with disabilities. During this time, I have taken a keen interest in the areas of higher education, wheelchair sports, and social interaction. In higher education, I have observed an increased enrollment of people with disabilities in large enough numbers to command attention. At several municipal wheelchair tennis events, I have seen how social benefits can be gained by players with physical disabilities. Through participation, these adults, were able to acquire a sense of belonging, make friends, play with friends, find a forum for communication, learn new skills, and most importantly, acquire an opportunity to enjoy an activity. While most postsecondary institutions offer a wide array of intramural sports programs for able-bodied students, unfortunately, few advance wheelchair sports. By limiting opportunity, an avenue of social interaction for individuals with physical disabilities is blocked (Bedini, 1990).

Studies begun on veterans with disabilities by Guttmann (1976) at the Stoke Mandeville Hospital during World War II found that recreational sports played an important role in social rehabilitation. To show society that these veterans were not willing to remain hopeless invalids, as many in society believed them to be, Guttmann established the 1948 Stoke Mandeville Games. The games served two purposes: (a) to display sport, as not the exclusive right of the nondisabled society; and (b) to provide the idea of sport as an aid toward social restoration. Because of Guttmann's research, the idea of sports as an aid to social inclusion began to be explored by researchers such as Kennedy (1980), and Szyman (1980). They saw that social benefits can be gained through sports participation. Therefore, sport as a social vehicle, can provide a gateway to acceptance and social integration in the community.

Wheelchair Sports Within a University Setting

The word community, usually defined as a group of people living and/or working together in the same environment or location, takes on significant meaning in a university setting. In most university communities, the campus is composed of members of society bonded together by social norms, values, academic policies, and a mission. The major groups comprising a campus community are administrators, faculty, and students. They come to the university as members of society at large having been socialized into their society's values and biases. Thus, many bring with them already ingrained societal perceptions about people with disabilities.

Studies by Babbitt, Burbach, and lutcovich (1979), Turnbull, Raper, and Mesibov (1978), Babbitt and Thompson III (1981), explored how students with physical disabilities oriented themselves to college life. Several respondents in Babbitt's et al. study indicated that within the social context of college life attitudes have changed for the better. Many more, however, pointed toward administrators, faculty, campus service personnel, and peers without disabilities as seeing students with physical disabilities having an undesired differentness because of their impairment. Turnbull's et al. respondents found university staff showed a lack of personal concern, lumped all types of disabilities together, and offered a limited and inappropriate choice of sports programs. Babbitt and Thompson III, and Burbach and Babbitt concluded that the campus
environment continues to present many of the same social problems for students with physical disabilities that are found in the larger society. Thus, many times, students with physical disabilities arrive on university grounds only to find that their handicap sets restrictions on participation in many facets of campus life. One part of this life includes intramural recreational wheelchair sports activities.

For university students with physical disabilities to no longer be prejudged as different by the able-bodied campus community, they must receive support from that community in a setting that emphasizes ability and normality. Since administrators are the key links in their university's communication network (Burlingame, 1979), they play an important role in helping those students with physical disabilities overcome their social problems. Thus, the degree to which these students will be accepted and receive full educational benefits depends to a large extent on an administrator's ability to influence the hierarchy above and faculty below. It also hinges on how the administrator sees the needs of students with disabilities fitting in with the university's policies and mission. When attitudes of the able-bodied become more favorable, then programs that encourage social interaction can be considered.

Wheelchair Tennis

As administrators explore ways for increasing social interaction for students with physical disabilities, they need to weigh the beneficial effects associated with various intramural recreational wheelchair sports programs. Within such a program wheelchair tennis offers three opportunities. It is a sport that many people with a permanent physical disability can play. Even a class for those classified as quadriplegic is included. With assistance from a bandage applied in the shape of an 11811 to the hand and wrist that holds the racquet firmly in place, quadriplegics can hit most of the basic strokes. Because official game rules, bounded playing area, and single and double formats require no changes from regular tennis, the potential for increased play between those with and without disabilities is possible. The only rule exception is the two bounce stipulation. In wheelchair tennis, the wheelchair player is allowed two bounces, the first must land inside the court lines (Parks, 1988; Rafter, 1995). For players with a physical disability, these game factors can function as a social vehicle by displaying social ability and skill dexterity—not disability.

The number of people needed in a small group sport such as a wheelchair tennis game is two, or multiples of two. Direct interaction is enhanced due to only one existing channel connecting the two communicators/players. Therefore, in this dyadic situation. Highly complementary interactive relationships have a good chance of forming (Fisher & Ellis, 1990).

Summarizing, Pooley (1984) states that sports programs can make a definite contribution to improving the quality of life for any individual. This includes people with disabilities. However, on the university level, this can only be accomplished with the support and guidance of its administrators. Therefore, this study inquired whether administrators had given thought to wheelchair sports as a potential source of social interaction. To further explore this subject, this study examined their perceptions and responses regarding wheelchair tennis as a means of social interaction.

Theoretical Framework

Social theorists Georg Simmel (1950), George Mead (1962), Erving Goffman (1959, 1967), and George Homans (1950, 1958, 1961) sought an understanding of the distinctive character of interaction as it took place between human beings. Their theories provided the framework for explaining how wheelchair users can receive social interaction benefits through participation in wheelchair sports. This will be specifically illustrated through wheelchair tennis.

Simmers (1950) theory on the significance of numbers for social life examined combinations of
interactions among individuals within small groups. Using numbers, Simmel showed how a two-person group or dyad could fulfill certain interaction qualities for its members that larger gatherings could not. For example, dyads require the expenditure of a great deal of energy to keep a relationship going, and have a direct effect on each individual's opinions and needs. Thus, in a sport such as wheelchair tennis, the significance of a two-person relationship plays an important role. Without a common agreement that each two must cooperate toward achievement of the task, the game cannot be played.

Simmel’s research influenced Mead's (1962) theory on Symbolic Interactionism. Mead saw symbols functioning as a communication medium, verbally or nonverbally. These symbols, which include body language and appropriate dress, tell two people how to interact with each other. Four aspects of interaction that Mead focused on were: How to keep the interaction going; if disrupted, how to manage to get it going again; the rules that govern those interactions; and interactions of considerable duration. Wheelchair tennis illustrates Mead's four points. The game is kept going by mutual consent of the players. The activity requires interaction between opponents and/or partners, and requires governance by its written and unwritten rules. These interaction factors heighten participation and enjoyment of actual play, and enhance symbolic identification for each participant.

Goffman (1959, 1967) created a dramaturgical model that detailed the social interaction roles people play in everyday social settings, one of which was the realm of sports. Goffman believed that games could show in a simple way the structure of real life situations. Games, like social life, have sets of rules that tell the players what should and should not receive relevance. The roots of a game, like society, lay in the interaction and controlled adherence to the rules. Thus, a game, like wheelchair tennis, has representative aspects of some parts of society.

Homans (1950, 1958, 1961) studied the social interaction of individuals by breaking down complex behaviors into simple components. Homans posited that the economic formula--profit equals reward minus cost--explained the underlying motives used by individuals continuously pursuing their goals in everyday life. Using wheelchair tennis to illustrate Homans’ theory, the official game rules of wheelchair tennis are modified as little as possible from regular tennis. This increases the potential for recreational play between wheelchair users and able-bodied players. Perhaps then, an underlying motive for a wheelchair user wanting to maximize his or her potential for social interaction on campus would be participation in a wheelchair tennis activity. Joining for that participant might have aversive consequences as well. It could require too much expended effort in relation to the social reward received.

**Organization and Management Theories**

Like many institutions, universities have adopted various organizational principles of business management. These principles evolved from Taylor’s (1911) Scientific Management, Follett's (1941) Human Relations Movement, and Weber's (1947) Neoscientific Approach.

Taylor (1911) believed that the workers in industry could be programmed to function as productively and effectively as the machines they operated. His approach to organizational management did not take into account the human aspects of administration such as mutual respect and teamwork.

Follett (1941) responded to the rigidity associated with Taylor's theory by stating that one supervisor should not give orders to a group of workers. Instead, all involved in a project ought to mutually be guided by the situation itself.

Weber (1947) saw bureaucracy as the key to a well-run administration. He also saw the dangers, however. Weber realized that the dynamics of organizational life could only be understood if in addition to the formal structure characterized by top-down authority and control, informal pattern of rules, groupings, and sanctioning systems were recognized.
The incompatibility between the three organization and management theories can be evidenced in the university's bureaucratic and professional administrative areas. Many times, administrators are forced to choose between their responsibility of executing the rules and policies of their organizations, or interest in their clients and professional authority stemming from expertise (Hoy & Miskel, 1996).

Federal Mandates
Legislation such as PL 90-480 the Architectural Barriers Act (1968), PL 93-112 Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act (1973), and the Americans With Disabilities act (ADA) (1990) have improved physical access to university facilities and provided better educational opportunities for students with disabilities. However, these efforts are insufficient to constitute a barrier-free environment. Attitudinal barriers remain that still limit the social chances of students with disabilities.

The able-bodied campus community needs to remember that the fundamental importance of the university is not simply as an instructional site. The means of instruction needs to go well beyond the classroom. The university must represent a place that introduces its students to various views of the world and to particular social relations (Giroux, 1988).

Institutional Change
Recently, educators like Sergiovanni and Starratt (1993) have begun to help shift the vision of school toward a more enlightened supervision. The key component of this human resources approach is that administrators and teachers together make use of their experiences and creative abilities. Using this approach on the university level, the administrator's role then becomes that of an expediter; supporting, assisting, and sharing, rather than directing (Wiles, 1967). The administrator is now concerned with helping people to accept each other, by providing an open climate for growth and development, "eventually the improvement of society" (Burton & Brueckner, 1955, p. 88).

Starratt (1990) believed that people's insights and commitment are an organization's most critical resource. This is where the crucial link exists between formal goals and individual needs meet. This is where human requirements are served. For university students with physical disabilities to no longer be prejudged as different by the able-bodied on campus, they must receive full administrative support in a setting that recognizes their abilities and talents.

Research Questions
Six research questions shaped this study. Collectively, they sought to uncover the direction and extent of university administrators' perceptions and responses toward wheelchair sports as social interaction, specifically inquiring about wheelchair tennis. These research questions included:
1. How are students with disabilities generally integrated into campus life?
2. Are there intramural sports programs for students with physical disabilities? If yes, what kind and what data is available?
3. Are administrators aware of the existence of wheelchair sports, and their potential for integrating students with physical disabilities into campus life?
4. Do administrators perceive socially beneficial effects from participation in a wheelchair sport such as tennis?
5. What do administrators believe the potential problems in setting up a wheelchair sports program are?
6. Are administrators familiar with federal mandates regarding the civil rights of students with physical disabilities?
Research Design

The literature collected for this qualitative study shaped the initial list of questions. An interview guide included further semi-structured and open-ended questions relating to each of the six initial research questions.

This study included within its sampling five universities, one located in the Midwest, four on the east coast. Three were private, two public. Of the five, Universities X and Y had intramural wheelchair programs, and Universities A, B, and C did not. In total twenty-five administrators were interviewed. They included vice presidents, directors/assistant directors, and admissions officers. Universities that did and did not have wheelchair sports programs were asked the same questions. This comparison gave the researcher deeper insight into contrasting administrator perspectives and responses.

Data was collected through a process of triangulation involving personal site visits where the researcher conducted in-depth interviews with administrators, observed on court wheelchair sports, and gathered existing documents.

The Findings

Findings to the six questions provided insights into the general concepts, specific ideas, and possible reservations that the twenty-five administrators had regarding wheelchair sports programs, specifically wheelchair tennis, as a means of promoting social interaction. Responses are summarized together below.

The Means of Integrating Students with Disabilities into University Life

Administrators at universities with wheelchair sports programs talked about community, teamwork, and networking in an effort to integrate students with disabilities into campus life. Their endeavors toward furthering inclusion expanded to finding new ways to collaborate and share resources such as staff and facilities. These administrators provided the kind of open climate that promoted growth and development for all members. They believed that their recreation centers played an important role in bringing all students, including those with disabilities, together. "This is a student recreation center; this is their building" (Interview, University X, Administrator 1).

A majority of informants at universities without wheelchair programs were so caught up in the bureaucratic aspects of their departmental responsibilities that they failed to see the human side of administration which builds community and trust. These administrators were not aware of any programs for wheelchair users, nor did they believe it part of their obligations.

The Kinds of Intramural Sports Programs Available for Students with Physical Disabilities

Half the respondents at universities with wheelchair programs gave the researcher documents showing the kinds of intramural wheelchair activities available for students with disabilities. Offerings included basketball, tennis, repelling, horseback and tandem bike riding. All held in high regard not only their wheelchair activities, but the variety of programs advanced.

Forty percent of the administrators at universities without wheelchair sports programs were not familiar with the kinds of extracurricular activities available to wheelchair users. In conversation with one administrator at a university with no wheelchair program, the issue of uncomfortable feelings came up. This prompted the researcher to ask other administrators whether there had ever been any discussions regarding faculty emotions toward students with disabilities. Five participants cited fear and societal misconceptions. Two examples follow: (a) an able-bodied student did not want to sit next to a student with a disability at a meeting for fear that the able-bodied students would label him disabled just by association, (b) an administrator stated that "They're perfectly free to go there (to a dance), but it's very difficult for a quadriplegic to dance, obviously" in response to a question regarding social activities on campus.
Awareness of Wheelchair Sports for Integrating Students with Disabilities into Campus Life

An interesting similarity between administrators at universities with and without wheelchair sports activities was that in the first group, one hundred percent held them in high regard, and in the second group, one hundred percent thought that having such a program would be a great idea. However, when the question of barriers getting in the way of continuation or their reaching fruition was asked, the following patterns emerged.

Owing to smaller numbers of participants in proportion to the able-bodied population, administrators at universities with wheelchair sports constantly had to justify this program's need and worth at budget time. Fifty percent of the administrators believed that these activities were an important quality of life component for wheelchair users. Therefore, they fought to keep them. "Students who have physical limitations should not be any less equipped, prepared, supported to accomplish their dreams" (Interview, Administrator 10, University X).

Regardless of the fact that one hundred percent of the participants at universities without wheelchair programs were open to the idea of a wheelchair activity, many stated that it was not feasible. Issues of not enough interest or resources, insignificant numbers, and departments working alone, were obstacles to program fruition.

Social Benefits Which May Result from Wheelchair Sport Participation

A majority of administrators in universities with wheelchair sports programs, 70%, as well as, those without such programs, 66.66%, recognized that sports activities contributed to social experiences. Their responses included friendship, integration, and social opportunity as high ranking social benefits. When it came specifically to wheelchair tennis, some administrators in both groups maintained that it offered communication, teammate interaction, and friendly competition. Only one administrator at a university without a wheelchair sports program had not thought about the social benefits that could be derived from sports participation, and that it was not an issue ever discussed.

Potential Problems That May Arise in Making Sports Available for Wheelchair Users

All respondents at universities with wheelchair sports programs indicated that their campuses and facilities were accessible. Many pointed out that students with disabilities did not need to identify themselves because accessibility was not a problem. One administrator emphasized the interdepartmental support and coordination that went into making sure that their campus was totally accessible.

At two universities without wheelchair sports programs, eight out often administrators believed that their campuses were in the forefront of accessibility. However, the five administrators at the third university would not state whether their campus was accessible or not.

When it came to liability exposure, five administrators at universities with wheelchair programs stated that it was not a problem. These informants communicated with risk management about what they were doing and about any new programs they were considering implementing.

At the three universities without wheelchair sports programs seven out of fifteen administrators had no idea whether having a wheelchair activity would increase their insurance costs. Four more weren't certain. One administrator believed that it would lower costs because those in wheelchairs do not get ankle and knee injuries.

Federal Mandates

All respondents at universities with wheelchair sports programs stated that they were familiar with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act (1973) and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) (1990). Most believed that regardless of these edicts, their policies and mission on including diverse groups in their university community and programs supported integration, and was just as important as the laws.

In those universities without wheelchair sports programs, twelve out of fifteen administrators stated that they were familiar with Section 504 and the ADA. The three that were not familiar with these mandates abruptly said so. Nine administrators also said that no special programs were offered to students with disabilities. One
administrator believed that it was enough that programs were offered to the general student body.

Conclusions

Based on an analysis of the data collected, a number of conclusions could be made about administrator perceptions and responses regarding wheelchair sports as social interaction. Administrators at the two universities with wheelchair sports programs exhibited characteristics of a community bound together by common interests, policies, and a mission. These common interests allowed colleagues to explore together innovative ideas, support ongoing programs, share meaning, and receive satisfaction from their work. While aware of their organizational responsibilities, these administrators, took a professional interest in their students, and shared in the responsibility of preparing them for productive and satisfying futures in a multi-cultural society. These respondents imparted the feeling that they knew what schooling was really for, what it was about, and what primary purposes it did serve (Starratt, 1990). All seemed to have bought into the vision of what their universities were about. In fact, two specifically mentioned their founders and former presidents, whose visions helped shape present policies. Moreover, as one administrator stated we "are not operating in a vacuum." This was evident from the top-down, horizontal, and bottom-up flow of information between administrators, faculty, and staff. For these reasons, as several administrators stated, they could justify the need for continuance of their wheelchair sports programs.

Administrators clearly perceived sports to be an effective socializing agent for forming friendships and providing a forum for communication. Many spoke on a personal basis relating stories of friendships that have lasted a lifetime. Others saw it as a great esteem builder for those with disabilities. Further, administrators clearly understood Federal mandates such as Section 504 and the ADA. They emphasized that in spite of these laws, their universities had long histories of working with minority groups, including those with disabilities. These administrators believed that their universities would always include everyone, and that everyone's group belonged.

Administrators in universities without wheelchair programs revealed a lack of knowledge about activities for students in general, and for those with disabilities specifically. Five out of the fifteen interviewed stated that programming was not their area of responsibility. Several stated that their major concern was physical accommodations such as accessible ramps and parking spaces. While some did indicate a willingness to help in any way they could, the majority could be characterized as impersonal and insensitive toward others.

Eleven administrators did not have any knowledge nor were they certain whether a wheelchair sports program would increase liability exposure. Many, again, said that it was not their area of responsibility. Their responses demonstrated concern only with their specific obligations.

Interesting notes to this research were found in four different remarks at the end of the interview hour. At universities with wheelchair activities one administrator seemed glad that someone was looking into how administrators perceived students with disabilities, and the fact that eyes still needed to be opened. The other felt worried because five years from now there could be no guarantee that these programs would still be here. Many, such as the taxpayers and trustees, may not want to continue supporting a program they consider a luxury. One administrator at a university without a wheelchair program questioned why more students with disabilities were not attending, then wondered whether possibly there were more attending than realized. The other appeared saddened that opportunities for those with disabilities were limited, and felt that it was incumbent upon the able-bodied to help level the playing field in the future.
Recommendations

This preliminary study was intended to gather information on the perceptions and responses of university administrators regarding wheelchair sports as social interaction. In light of the findings, two recommendations for further research, and four recommendations for future practice were offered.

Further Research
1. Using the same set of interview questions, broaden the focus of the study by increasing the number and variety of subjects with and without disabilities.
2. Because their firsthand knowledge on wheelchair sports could prove invaluable for future qualitative or quantitative studies, employ administrators at universities with wheelchair programs as co-researchers.

Future Practice
Due to the lack of wheelchair sports knowledge exhibited by administrators at universities without these programs, provide in-service instruction on the subject. Such in-service instruction should offer exposure to the activities and the players with disabilities. This could start with a small group sport such as tennis. Holding the classroom on court could serve two purposes:

1. Increase awareness of the game, and two, reduce the fears and discomforts of administrators by putting them in contact with the wheelchair players. They could receive additional sensitivity training by actually sitting in a wheelchair and trying to rally the ball. This may not only increase their personal level of comfort, but better prepare them to give direct assistance to their students with disabilities.
2. Administrators at universities without wheelchair programs demonstrated that they could benefit from courses and/or in-service instruction in school law. Class(es) should include Federal mandates such as Section 504 of the RHA (1973), and the ADA (1990).
3. More than half the administrators interviewed at universities without wheelchair sports programs did not appear to comprehend liability issues in conjunction with such activities. A course that includes estimating liability risks and available resources on liability issues is important for them to have and understand.
4. As was evident from the interviews, many administrators tended to organize their perceptions and evaluations of students with disabilities around the impairment. They ignored the many valued aspects the student with a disability brings to the campus. Therefore, in-service workshops on topics relating to disabilities were suggested.

Summarizing, in many respects. Higher education poses as a last frontier in preparing young people for society. This preparation would be incomplete if they were not taught the deeper lesson of being human. As Babbitt and Thompson III (1981) stated "A university climate supportive of all its members requires the commitment of all its members" (p. 313). Therefore, the involvement of its administrators is crucial to maximize the ease and quality of social interaction on campus for students with disabilities. By being involved, a greater understanding, appreciation, and sensitivity of those students with disabilities may develop. If positive perceptions toward those with disabilities becomes an integral and ongoing part of the university, then responses to programs like wheelchair sports with resulting change in social interaction are likely to occur.
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