An Investigation of the Intended Learning Outcomes of Japanese High School Physical Education Teachers:
A Comparison of Kendo Instructors and Rugby Instructors

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Abstract:

Aim: The aim of this study was to examine the intended learning outcomes (LO) of Japanese high school kendo instructors, and compare these with the intended LO of Japanese high school rugby coaches.

Method: Data concerning the intentions of Japanese kendo instructors (n=21) was obtained through a questionnaire. This instrument was initially designed and implemented in a previous study aimed at investigating the pedagogies utilized by Japanese high school kendo instructors and their subsequent intended LO. Data concerning the intended LO of Japanese high school rugby instructors (n=21) was also acquired by questionnaire. The instrument used with rugby instructor participants primarily sought to investigate the preferred teaching styles of Japanese high school rugby instructors, however, also provided information regarding the instructors’ intended LO through participation in rugby. The comparison between each group of participants (kendo instructors and rugby instructors) presented here is a culmination of the results of these two studies.

Results: A majority of kendo instructors within the Japanese school system justified the seemingly harsh training methods such as mukaesuki and forcefully hitting unprotected areas of an opponent’s body as encompassing pedagogical importance for the development of character, concentration, and fighting spirit. Similar to their kendo counterparts, Japanese rugby instructors also highlighted ‘character development’ as an area prioritized for athletes’ learning. However, additional priorities were centered on enjoyment and decision making – areas that were not mentioned as priority outcomes in kendo.

Conclusions: Coach intentions for both disciplines were found to closely resemble the stipulated learning objectives set by the respective governing bodies. However, although there were similarities in the intended LO promoted by instructors, such as ‘character development’, the justification by some kendo instructors to develop a physical and/or mental resilience in the face of physical pain (i.e. hitting unprotected areas of the body with the shinai), is in stark contrast to the motivations of rugby instructors for the same age group. It was concluded that the differences in approach, rather than intended LO, expose some important issues in this topic. Specifically, 1) considering the reported decline in youth kendo participation, the methods used to convey intended LO of kendo educators may be out of touch with the desires of Japanese youth and/or their parents. Although there are also signs that rugby participation rates are declining, it is reasonable to assume that intended LOs such as ‘enjoyment’ are more attractive to potential ‘lifelong’ participants; 2) given the influx of negative media attention towards the training/teaching methods of budō instructors in recent times, ongoing discussion is needed regarding the infliction of physical pain to communicate intended LOs to Japanese high school students.

It is acknowledged that both disciplines differ significantly in many areas, thus being more suited to differing approaches to training methodology. Nevertheless, it is suggested here that, in the current climate of negative appraisal of teaching practices in some areas budō in Japan, and with a continued push for international dissemination, there is a growing need for kendo instructors to consider teaching approaches for young participants who are more inclined to covet ‘enjoyment’ from their physical education experiences.