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Practicing Culturally Responsive Pedagogy in Physical Education

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Abstract: As a result of continuous global immigration to the United States, several microcultures coexist within the country. Today's classroom should provide an interface where individuals from different cultural backgrounds have the potential for sharing a rich place of learning–a place where the teacher embraces and celebrates individual differences, fosters the development of positive self-concepts, provides meaningful and relevant learning experiences, and insists on high expectations for everyone. Facilitating this kind of learning environment is the result of practicing culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP). A culturally responsive teacher acts on knowledge about cultural differences, and implements, as habit, pedagogical skills that foster a meaningful and relevant education for all of her/his learners. The call for cultural responsiveness extends to all dimensions of the school experience, including physical education. Physical education presents unique needs and opportunities to practice cultural responsiveness. Presented here are principles of culturally responsive teaching, applied through the lens of physical education.

Key words: culturally responsive pedagogy; culturally responsive teacher; physical education

1. Introduction to Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

Diversity in the United States has continuously increased over the last few decades, with 23.1 million people, or 11% of the population, speaking a language other than English in the home in 1980, 31.8 million people, or 14%, in 1990, and 47 million people, or 18%, in 2000 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2003). The macroculture of the U.S. is largely determined by European-American traditions, which have significantly influenced the social norms and patterns of formal institutions. But as a result of continuous global immigration to the United States, several microcultures coexist within the country, characterized by factors such as ethnicity, language, and socioeconomic status. While at one time the national expectation was for these many cultures to assimilate into one homogenous shared culture characterized as a melting pot, the more modern, culturally responsive metaphor is that of a salad bowl: "…a mix in which the individual ingredients are not melted but, rather, retain their flavor and texture" (Diaz-Rico and Weed, 2010; p. 214). This orientation embraces the notion that there is inherent value in retaining traditions and distinctions among cultural groups.

In response to this growing diversity, many state teaching certification standards specifically address competency in accommodating English learners. For example, in California, all credential candidates must

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demonstrate proficiency in meeting related Teacher Performance Expectations (TPEs), most notably, *TPE 9: Instructional Planning*, which states: "Candidates connect the content to be learned with students' linguistic and cultural backgrounds, experiences, interests, and developmental learning needs to ensure that instruction is comprehensible and meaningful" (California Commission on Teacher Credentialing, 2010; p. A-12), and *TPE 7: Teaching English Learners*, which states:

> Candidates for a Teaching Credential know and can apply pedagogical theories, principles, and instructional practices for comprehensive instruction of English Learners.... They draw upon information about students' backgrounds and prior learning, including students' assessed levels of literacy in English and their first languages, as well as their proficiency in English, to provide instruction differentiated to students' language abilities. (California Commission on Teacher Credentialing, 2010; p. A-11)

Today's classroom should provide an interface where individuals from several different cultural backgrounds have the potential for sharing a rich place of learning–a place where the teacher embraces and celebrates individual differences, fosters the development of positive self-concepts, provides meaningful and relevant learning experiences, and insists on high expectations for everyone sharing that intersection. Facilitating this kind of learning environment is the result of practicing culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP), beyond simply having an attitude of acceptance of cultural diversity. A culturally responsive teacher acts on knowledge about cultural differences, and implements, as habit, pedagogical skills that foster a meaningful and relevant education for all of her/his learners.

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP) (Ladson-Billings, 1995), or Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) (Gay, 2002), draws from the literature on Multicultural Education of the early to mid-1990s, especially the work of Banks (1994) and Delpit (1995). In *An Introduction to Multicultural Education*, Banks argues that pre-service teachers need a deeper understanding of culture, its impact on schools, and the increasingly diverse student population they are asked to teach. In *Other People's Children: Cultural Conflict in the Classroom*, Delpit resonates with Banks' charge, stressing that teachers must confront their own cultural biases and recognize minority students' cultural backgrounds not as deficits or disabilities, but as valuable sources of knowledge that can enrich the school experience for all.

Understanding the complexity of cultural diversity, and the effects of school culture on the learning of students, is a first step toward accomplishing CRP. It is important to recognize that cultural elements (beyond food, dress, and celebrations) such as values and beliefs, family structures, verbal and nonverbal communication, and expectations of individual roles, are the fundamental and deeper elements of culture that significantly impact learning (Diaz-Rico and Weed, 2010). Based on a synthesis of the related literature, Diaz-Rico and Weed define culture in the following way:

> Culture is the explicit and implicit patterns for living, the dynamic system of commonly-agreed-upon symbols and meanings, knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, customs, behaviors, traditions, and/or habits that are shared and make up the total way of life of a people, as negotiated by individuals in the process of constructing a personal identity. The important idea is that culture involves both observable behaviors and intangibles such as beliefs and values, rhythms, rules, and roles. (pp. 236-237)

The Education Alliance at Brown University has synthesized the characteristics of culturally responsive teaching into seven principles, including the following: "(1) positive perspectives on parents and families, (2) communication of high expectations, (3) learning within the context of culture, (4) student-centered instruction, (5) culturally mediated instruction, (6) reshaping the curriculum, and (7) teacher as facilitator" (2010, para. 3).

Through these seven principles, an orientation of cultural responsiveness in the context of physical education is illustrated below.

2. Applying Culturally Responsive Pedagogy in Physical Education

The call for cultural responsiveness extends to all dimensions of the school experience, including physical education. In 1995, the National Association for Sport and Physical Education published *Moving into the Future: National Standards for Physical Education*, since revised in 2004, which serves as a guide for physical educators and their agencies in the development of curricula, instruction, and assessment. The standards were developed in response to an education climate underscored by the federal law, the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB), which called for the closing of the achievement gap that exists markedly between advantaged and disadvantaged students, predominantly delineated by ethnicity and economic status, and which stimulated a movement of assessment and accountability throughout education in the United States. Acknowledging the research indicating the dire and pervasive effects associated with physical inactivity throughout the country (United States Department of Health and Human Services, 1996), and the many health and wellness benefits of engagement in regular physical activity such as reduced risk of heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure, and cancer, and improved musculoskeletal health, weight management, and psychological wellness (United States Department of Health and Human Services, 1996), NASPE has cultivated a vision for physically educated persons:

> All children and youth will display the skills and practices of a physically active lifestyle, knowing the benefits of their choice to be involved in physical activity. They will be physically fit and have a mindset that values physical activity and its benefits in sustaining healthy lifestyles. (National Association for Sport and Physical Education, 2004; p. 4)

This vision is grounded in a belief that physical education is a critical part of all children's comprehensive education, enabling all students to engage in physical activity safely, competently, and with personal satisfaction for a lifetime.

While the vision and beliefs held by NASPE provide a powerful and important conceptual framework, it should be acknowledged that the framework is emergent from our country's mainstream culture. In the United States, the field of health promotion has predominantly been driven by the White middle class (Gottlieb & Green, 1987; Keitel, Kopola and Georgiades, 1995). To support the overarching national goal to "develop physically educated individuals who have the knowledge, skills, and confidence to enjoy a lifetime of healthful physical activity" (National Association for Sport and Physical Education, 2004; p. 11), it is important for teachers to be culturally responsive while aspiring to that goal. In a country rich in cultural diversity, with many different views about the human body and health and wellness, it is important for instructors to be aware of the cultural diversity among those students in our classes, and to make the physical education experience meaningful and relevant to all.

Physical education presents unique needs and opportunities to practice cultural responsiveness. Because teaching and learning physical education heavily exist in the psychomotor domain (Harrow, 1972), issues such as body language, personal space, physical contact, and dress become particularly important factors to consider. Additionally, physical education provides a unique stage from which diversity can be incorporated into the curriculum, with opportunities for learning a variety of activities, contextualized in their cultural and historical roots, from around the world (Harbin, 1964; Jernigan & Vendien, 1972). Presented here are the Education Alliance at Brown University's seven principles of culturally responsive teaching, through the lens of physical education.

2.1 Positive Perspectives on Parents and Families

A review of years of research on parental involvement indicates that when parents are involved in school, their children, from all ethnic and economic backgrounds, do better in school (Henderson and Mapp, 2002). Research further suggests a strong relationship between student success and teacher-parent communication (Bazron, Osher, and Fleischman, 2005). Essentially, these findings suggest that involving students' families in their education is beneficial, perhaps for even more reasons than one might initially consider. When parents from diverse backgrounds participate in school, they have opportunities to share in their "funds of knowledge" (Moll, Amanti, Neff, and Gonzalez, 1992). Further, children learn lessons in community participation and citizenship when they see their parents contributing time and effort towards accomplishment of their school's mission and goals (Berkowitz & Bier, 2005). Further still, through strong teacher-parent communication, teachers can help increase support for student success by facilitating parent acquisition of cultural capital–knowledge and skills necessary for effectively negotiating the educational system (Bourdieu, 1977; Briscoe, Smith and McClain, 2003; Delpit, 1995).

2.1.1 Applied to physical education

These rewards can certainly be manifested within the context of physical education. If the overarching national goal of physical education in schools is to enhance in students "…the knowledge, skills, and confidence to enjoy a lifetime of healthful physical activity" (National Association for Sport and Physical Education, 2004), sharing this information, in ways that are meaningful and relevant, and within cultural contexts for all students, is vital. Physical education provides unique opportunities for parents and family members to share their wealth of knowledge, which in turn can increase the meaningfulness and relevancy of the PE experience for all. Culturally-based games, dances, and other physical activities, can be presented by family members, allowing for class engagement in discussions about geography, culturally based values, beliefs and practices, ceremonies and/or celebrations, and clothing, and can provide exposure to various languages. Culturally responsive teachers can take advantage of the wealth of knowledge their students' families can bring to the class, providing a richer experience for everyone.

2.2 Communication of High Expectations

To provide a culturally sensitive environment, it is crucial that there be a clear and pervasive message that all students are expected to, and are able to, learn and succeed (Delpit, 1995; Gay, 2002; Siedentop and Tannehill, 2000; and Tomlinson, 1999). Lowering expectations for individuals from diverse backgrounds is a disservice, as it withholds access to the culture of power. Stemming from Merton's (1948) early work, in which he initially identified and characterized the concept of the self-fulfilling prophecy, Jussim (1986) has delineated a theoretical framework characterizing the self-fulfilling prophecy phenomenon between student and teacher. Initially, teachers establish expectation levels for individual students based on characteristics such as student reputation, previous performance, or stereotypes of particular cultural groups. Once established, these initial expectations are often resistant to change, and they result in differential treatment of students. The students, in turn, respond to this differential treatment accordingly, rising to the individualized level of the bar prescribed by the teacher's expectation for each student. Therefore, student perception of the teacher's expectations contributes to the shaping of the student's effort and persistence. Both early as well as recent research (Rosenthal and Jacobson, 1968; Tyler and Boelter, 2008) supports this theory.

Therefore, it becomes paramount for a culturally responsive teacher to express high expectations for all students. But those high expectations should coincide with individualized instruction coupled with the necessary support for each student to realize those high expectations (Siedentop and Tannehill, 2000). Examples of that kind

of support include practices such as clearly articulating to all students specific learning objectives so that there is a clear goal for which to strive, and providing appropriate and sufficient specific feedback, both from the teacher, as well as from self-assessment techniques. It is the responsibility of culturally responsive teachers to recognize cultural differences, and be caring and compassionate towards their students, while demanding the best from all of them (Weinstein, 2002).

2.2.1 Applied to physical education

Grading on skill competency and fitness performance, rather than on attendance and participation, is one way to demonstrate a high expectation of learning and performance for all students (Siedentop and Tannehill, 2000). Holding all students to performance standards to earn grades in physical education conveys a message that physical education is important, and that all students are expected to invest the effort necessary to improve and excel. Coinciding with this expectation should be quality instruction that includes clear verbal explanations and instructions, well-executed visual demonstrations, plenty of opportunities to practice skills, and opportunities to put their skills to test in situations that allow for authentic assessment, such as game play. Providing high expectations, with this corresponding support, can foster intrinsic motivation (Siedentop and Tannehill, 2000), improved self concept (Rist, 1971), and an environment which reaches toward equity and justice (Chartock, 2010; Delpit, 1995).

It is also important to recognize that physical education is a realm within which disparity in performance capabilities can be quite obvious. Performance is often outwardly evident, for example, how fast a person can run, how skillfully a person can dribble down a court, or how gracefully a student can move across a dance floor. But it is important to consider that the physical performance observed in physical education class may be driven not by physical capabilities alone, but by cultural guidelines regarding appropriate behavior. For example, Weinstein, Tomlinson-Clarke, and Curran (2004; p. 26) point out that Pacific Islanders strongly value intrapersonal harmony and that many teachers may “conclude that these students are lazy when they are reluctant to participate in competitive activities”. Understanding students’ backgrounds can help teachers individualize instruction to allow students to participate in ways that are acceptable within their cultures, and still provide opportunities to meet the overall goals and objectives of the physical education teacher’s program, while fostering a learning environment that connects physical education and culture for individual students, rather than creating dissonance.

2.3 Learning within the Context of Culture

Utilization of a variety of teaching strategies, overlaid with cultural sensitivity, can foster a learning environment that provides meaningfulness and relevancy for all the students in the class (Banks, 1994; Nieto, 1999; Tomlinson, 1999). When contemplating implementation of instructional styles, culturally responsive teachers will consider the cultural contexts from which their students have come. Approaches to teaching and learning vary by culture, and when children feel that they must abandon the approach that has been primary for them, there may be interference with cognitive development and success (Sheets, 2005). When teachers learn about their students’ cultural backgrounds, with its practices, rituals, and common approaches to teaching and learning, they can consider ways to incorporate methods of teaching in their classrooms that allow opportunities for students to engage in those varied approaches, which can help all students access content.

Triandis (1995) has identified an important difference between cultures, which of the individualist versus collectivist value system, which is manifested in different student preferences for approaches to learning in school. Cultures such as African American, Latin American, Asian, Arab, Native American, and Native Hawaiian subscribe to a collectivist value system, which is practiced by about 70% of the world’s population, whereas the

European-American mainstream culture of the U.S. cultivates a dominant orientation of individual competitiveness in U.S. schools. Therefore, Tileston and Darling (2008) suggest that teachers find a balance in teaching strategies that respect collaborative preferences of students from collectivist-oriented cultures as well as the individual competitive-oriented preferences of students from the mainstream culture. Learning about the cultures represented in the classroom, and offering a variety of opportunities to access content using those approaches, among others, can provide all students opportunities to learn in ways familiar to them.

2.3.1 Applied to physical education.

Collectivist-oriented activities could include parachute games, in which the whole group has to work together to accomplish common goals, or perhaps small groups working together to choreograph a dance. Individualist-oriented activities could include a unit on individualized fitness, in which students have the opportunity to apply concepts and principles in ways that allow them to design and implement their own individualized fitness plans, tracking improvement in personal logs.

2.4 Student-centered Instruction

Opportunities within lessons for students to control learning provide meaningfulness and relevancy, and allow teachers to observe student preferences for approaches to learning that emerge from home and cultural influences (Chartock, 2010; Gay, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Nieto, 1999). These opportunities can be achieved through use of several different strategies, such as reciprocal teaching scenarios, allowing for student input and choice of lesson content, cooperative learning, sharing times, and student-led segments of lessons.

2.4.1 Applied to physical education.

These strategies can be incorporated in the physical education setting, by, for example, providing choice of activities at various stations, allowing students to self-select into particular classes or groups focused on particular activities, or pairing students to allow for reciprocal teaching, where students observe each other executing skills and provide each other with performance feedback.

2.5 Culturally Mediated Instruction

Culturally mediated instruction involves culturally-valued curricular content, while also including congruent social situations within the classroom context (Chartock, 2010). Culturally valued curricular content relates to knowledge useful in students' lives (McCarty, Lynch, Wallace, and Benally, 1991), while congruent social situations refers to fostering an environment where relationships between students and with their teacher resonate with social norms within the students' cultures.

2.5.1 Applied to physical education.

Incorporating culturally valued curricular content can be accomplished by learning about the students in class and their corresponding cultures. Incorporating games, dances, and other activities from their cultures can provide meaningfulness and relevancy to all. Culturally-based games could include *Mulambilwa*, an African bowling and running game, *Kho-Kho,* a chase game originating from India, *Yemari*, a Japanese handball game, and *La Pelota*, a Mexican ball game (Harbin, 1964).

Providing congruent social situations in physical education may require especially careful thought and consideration. Physical education is a context within which differences in cultural practices can be quite pronounced. For example, hand signals commonly used in the physical education setting in the U.S. could be construed as offensive in other cultures and make students uncomfortable. For example, a "thumbs-up" gesture in Nigeria is an insult, whereas here in the U.S., within the context of physical education, it is considered a sign indicating a job well done. Another common gesture used in physical education, the "OK" sign, with the tip of the

thumb and index finger meeting to form a circle, also used to indicate a job well done, is quite the opposite in some Latin American cultures, where the gesture is considered an aggressive insult (Axtel, 1991). Another gesture teachers may be accustomed to using in physical education is patting students on the head. While this gesture is a sign of affection or indicates that a teacher is pleased with a student's performance, in many Southeast Asian cultures, patting a child on the head could cause distress, as it is believed that a person's spirit resides in the head, and touching the head places him or her in jeopardy (Dresser, 2005).

Differences among cultures with respect to physical contact should also be considered in physical education, where some activities, such as dance or self defense, may inherently require it. For example, some Asian cultures avoid public physical contact, particularly between members of the opposite sex. It may be necessary to offer modifications or alternatives to activities that require physical contact.

Some ethnic and religious cultures have different dress and modesty expectations, which should also be a consideration in the physical education setting, where common physical education uniforms of t-shirts and shorts may be contrary to other cultural norms. For example, many Asian and Muslim cultures require dress that covers the majority of the body. And changing in front of others in locker rooms may be especially uncomfortable for individuals from those cultures. Allowing flexible dress codes in physical education and providing private places to change are accommodations for a culturally responsive teacher to keep in mind (Dresser, 2005).

2.6 Reshaping the Curriculum

Four primary characteristics of culturally responsive pedagogy have been identified in relation to the reshaping of the curriculum: (1) it is interdisciplinary in nature, (2) it is reflective of students' real lives, (3) it elicits higher order thinking, developing advanced knowledge and skills, and 4) it celebrates and capitalizes on students' cultural richness, rather than diminishing and overriding it (Chartock, 2010).

2.6.1 Applied to physical education

Physical education provides virtually unlimited possibilities for making connections across curricular areas, offering opportunities for interdisciplinary experiences. For example, a physics lesson can take place on a long jump runway on a track, as students explore through physical activity concepts such as inertia, acceleration, momentum, flight paths, length of levers, and centripetal force.

Certainly physical education offers opportunities to connect to students' real lives. Games, dances, and other activities from their communities can be incorporated into the curriculum. One way to accomplish this integration could be to assign homework that requires students to prepare to teach a group of students in class a game or dance from their cultural community.

Higher order thinking can be incorporated in physical education. An inquiry approach, such as guided discovery or problem-solving (Darst and Pangrazi, 2006) can offer students opportunities to experience physical education in ways that allow flexibility to gravitate toward preferred approaches to learning, and explore content in ways that require students to investigate, analyze, and hypothesize. For example, in a guided discovery long jump lesson, students could experiment with take-off angles to determine the angle that elicits the longest distance jump. The teacher has a predetermined solution, but takes students through a guided set of experiences so that the students can arrive at the solution themselves–rather than being told. An example of a problem-solving approach could be to challenge students in small groups to devise several defense strategies for a particular offense in basketball. In this activity, there is no one predetermined best answer, rather, the students are challenged to devise and justify their solutions on their own.

Another aspect of reshaping the curriculum to make it more culturally responsive involves capitalizing on the

richness that the students and their families can bring to the class. Inviting students and their families to teach activities from their cultures, and weaving those experiences in as a regular part of the curriculum, provides meaningfulness and relevancy for all the students, and makes a powerful statement that diversity is something to celebrate, rather than diminish.

2.7 Teacher as Facilitator

A teacher who serves as a mediator, guide, or information consultant represents central characteristics of a culturally responsive teacher (Banks & Banks, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Villegas, 1991). Rather than assuming the orientation that the teacher is the gatekeeper of all the essential knowledge, the teacher in the role as facilitator or consultant allows students to direct their learning in ways that increase meaningfulness and relevancy for them, yet still accomplish learning objectives delineated by the teacher.

2.7.1 Applied in physical education

Incorporating methods shared above, such as cooperative learning situations, reciprocal teaching, guided discovery, and problem-solving scenarios, can be accomplished in physical education. Students working together in pairs to help improve each other's tennis serve, small groups working together to choreograph a dance, or an individual allowed to apply theory, principles, and laws learned in class in the design of an individual fitness plan , are ways that remove the teacher from a central role to a supportive one. Utilizing a variety of teaching styles helps ensure that students from a variety of cultures, with a variety of preferred learning styles, will be reached.

3. Conclusion

As our country strives to meet our national goal, to "develop physically educated individuals who have the knowledge, skills, and confidence to enjoy a lifetime of healthful physical activity" (National Association for Sport and Physical Education, 2004, p. 11), we must be mindful of the need for cultural responsiveness in our physical education programs. Being a culturally responsive teacher, whereby cultural differences are recognized, embraced, and woven into the curricular and instructional fabric of the physical education experience, will help ensure that all students find physical education to be meaningful and important, and will help them attain our overarching goal of physical education in ways that respect and allow students to retain cultural identity.

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