

## Creating a Culturally Relevant Curriculum for Disengaged Girls

By: [Catherine D. Ennis](#)

Ennis, C.D. (1999). Creating a culturally relevant curriculum for disengaged girls. *Sport, Education, and Society*, 4, 31-49.

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### **Abstract:**

Findings from physical education research conducted over the last two decades suggest that girls' experiences in and perceptions of physical education in many team sport-based programs are less than satisfactory. Team sports taught within a traditional multi-activity format often permit dominant aggressive male players to control the game, marginalizing and alienating low-skilled girls and boys. This paper critiques the circumstances often found in sport based physical education and reports the use of an innovative approach to team-sport curriculum entitled, 'Sport for Peace', to enhance girls' levels of engagement and satisfaction in urban high school physical education. In this research, seven teachers and 15 girls were involved in the curriculum innovation in three urban high schools. Teachers trained and mentored using the curriculum implemented the program in two classes in each school. The implementation process was described using observation protocols and the teachers and girls were interviewed formally at the conclusion of the observation period. Data were analysed using constant comparison. Findings suggested that the Sport for Peace curriculum improved the sport environment for girls by enhancing their perceptions of success, promoting ownership of the sport content and the class processes, creating authentic cooperative environments for boys and girls, and encouraging the use of second chances to promote understanding and learning. Boys' attitudes towards girls' ability and motivation became more positive and girls indicated that they enjoyed participating with boys in these sport programs. The findings were analysed within Ladson-Billings' conceptualization of culturally responsive pedagogy.

### **Article:**

#### ***Creating a Culturally Relevant Curriculum for Disengaged Girls***

Thinking reflectively and critically about girls' experiences in physical education is essential as we work to create spaces where they can overcome traditional societal role constraints and construct an identity that includes an active, healthy lifestyle. This is particularly true for adolescent girls who are members of oppressed minority ethnic groups (Ogbu, 1994). These girls may not have access to information regarding activity and health and may be unwilling to cross boundaries of expectations constructed within their culture and reinforced by adolescent female and male peers (Connell, 1996).

Over the past decade my research has focused on examining the context of physical education classes taught in urban schools in the United States in which the majority culture was African-American. The purpose of this line of research was to investigate how well these physical education programs promoted learning and met the needs of adolescents from diverse cultural backgrounds. Our extensive ethnographic studies examined student and teacher experiences in middle and high school physical education programs in a large urban school district in the eastern United States (e.g. Ennis, 1994, 1995, 1996, 1998; Ennis *et al.*, 1997). We began each study with extensive periods of observation investigating numerous classes encompassing a variety of team and individual sports. We followed the observations with in-depth interviews with teachers and both male and female students. We analysed data from more than 20 urban middle and high schools using constant comparison in an iterative process that continually updated and elaborated the themes and conclusions (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; LeCompte & Priessle, 1993).

The curriculum in most high school classes we observed was a multi-activity approach to physical education. This is consistent with Bain's (1988) analysis of the most prominent physical education curriculum from nearly a decade ago. The multi-activity approach is characterized by curricular structures that produce multiple, short-duration units consisting of limited instruction and numerous opportunities for highly skilled participants to engage in physical activity. To the untrained observer it appears that students are involved and participating in a variety of sport and exercise opportunities. A closer look, however, reveals several curricular structures that promote inequality and (re)produce gender segregation and low-skill levels in both boys and girls. Because girls often have not experienced adequate skill instruction or have been socialized to reject the subjective value of physical participation (i.e. Nilges, 1998; Vertinsky, 1992), they often demonstrate low-skill levels and high levels of reluctance and rejection of sport. Girls' marginalization and alienation in sport-based physical education is a particularly insidious problem that has been documented extensively (e.g. Griffin, 1983, 1984; Hastic, 1998; Vertinsky, 1992; Wright, 1997). No curriculum in physical education has been as effective in *constraining* opportunities and alienating girls as that found in co-educational, multi-activity sport classes. Specifically, the multi-activity model is notorious for the following characteristics:

1. Short units of activity with minimal instructional periods.
2. Weak or non-existent educational sequences across lessons, units, and grades that limit learning.
3. Little or no accountability for using skills strategically in game play.
4. Little or no instruction or coached supervision of game play.
5. Few if any policies to equalize playing opportunities for low-skilled players.
6. Required public displays of playing ability.
7. Class control exercised by central authority figure(s), minimizing student ownership and leadership opportunities in large classes and constraining learning.

It would be unfair, however, to say that it is impossible to teach effectively using a multi-activity sport approach. Highly competent, motivated, and energetic male and female physical education teachers have used it successfully in the United States for over 50 years. Nevertheless, the curricular structures utilized by the model require teachers in co-educational classes to intercede continuously, advocate for low-skilled players, and overtly control the level of competition and the tenor of social relationships. Teachers work constantly to keep students focused on instruction and create situations in which girls and low-skilled players have an opportunity to participate. Not only does the teacher *not* receive educational assistance from the curricular scaffolding or structure of the model, she or he must be vigilant to counteract the *negative* forces created by the curriculum that encourage highly skilled players to dominate, rewarding them socially for aggressive game behaviour. Further, based on an analysis of the curriculum, itself, it is questionable how effective it is in enhancing the engagement and ability of low-skilled players even when taught by competent, committed teachers (Ennis *et al.*, in press).

The current research examined girls' experiences in multi-activity team sport classes in which they chose voluntarily to enroll or, in some instances, were placed involuntarily due to insufficient course offering in their preferred activities, such as personal fitness or dance. Research reported in this paper was conducted as part of a larger, comprehensive study that used a variety of research methods to analyse the effectiveness of a curricular innovation entitled, 'Sport for Peace', to enhance the engagement and satisfaction of students with the physical education curriculum (Ennis *et al.*, in press). In my part of the research study focusing specifically on girls' experiences, I asked, 'How did girls' experiences and willingness to engage in physical education change within this innovation' and 'How did the curriculum influence the nature of boys' and girls' interactions in sport-based physical education'.

In this paper, I will begin by presenting an overview of the nature of girls' experiences in sport-based, multi-activity physical education from our previous research, followed by methods and findings from the current study. I will then discuss the impact of the 'Sport for Peace' curriculum within the concept of culturally relevant pedagogy proposed by Gloria Ladson-Billings (1994, 1995). I will conclude by critiquing the limitations of the Sport for Peace curriculum as an avenue for socially reconstructing gender equity in physical education.

### **Girls' Experiences Within a Context of Alienation and Disengagement**

Although physical education programs have been co-educational since the mid-1970s in the urban school district in which we conduct our research, a critical examination of these contexts confirmed the findings presented by numerous feminists scholars (e.g. Griffin, 1985; Nilges, 1998; Vertinsky, 1992; Wright & King, 1990), that girls were not permitted to participate equitably in most multi-activity, team-sports curricula (Ennis *et al.*, 1997). In fact in most high schools we examined, girls enrolled in low numbers in team sports, were selected last for teams, and either chose not to exert effort or were not included in the play by the dominant male members of the class (Cothran & Ennis, 1997; Ennis, 1995, 1996; Ennis *et al.*, 1997). In most instances, teachers made some efforts to teach high school girls skills that they had not previously acquired and to encourage them to engage in the game play. Unfortunately, this support was relatively short lived because both teachers and girls were quickly and effectively discouraged and alienated by the dominant, exclusive play of the African-American boys. This was particularly true in basketball, but was also evident in other team sports, such as football, soccer, volleyball, and softball. Other lower skilled boys most of whom were either physically small in stature and/or represented white, Hispanic, Asian, or Middle Eastern cultures were also excluded. One female student explained:

I used to like to play sports with the boys. When we were younger we all played together at home or in gym class. The boys were hot dogs, you know, practicing their Michael Jordan moves, but they let us have a turn. Now, in high school they're like maniacs or something.... They throw the ball so hard you can't catch it and push and knock girls down if they're in their way. I don't want to play that way. I want to have fun like we used to. (Ennis *et al.*, in press)

Other African-American girls commented on the boys' intense level of competition and eagerness to prove themselves on the court or field. They explained that the boys saw girls as a problem on their team and intimidated them by criticizing their efforts and yelling at them:

They call us lame ... they say we're not trying, but we are. I don't need boys yelling at me when I make a mistake. I would rather sit out and take my F than have to play in the same games with them (Ennis *et al.*, in press)

Teachers, likewise, were frustrated by the boys' insistence on dominance, but often felt powerless to disrupt the behaviour (Ennis, 1995). They lectured the boys and required that particularly aggressive players sit out, change teams, or explain why their play should include girls. Although boys could provide appropriate behaviour and rhetoric when required to convince the teacher to let them play, they often continued the same aggressive behaviour when they returned to the game. This behaviour was clearly encouraged and rewarded by other male players. Boys believed that to be selected for future teams and respected by their male peers, they had to demonstrate their aggression and cool moves, regardless of the impact on less able classmates:

You gotta be in there fighting for the ball or the other guys won't want you. If you don't they be saying stuff like, 'You be sorry ... you play like a mother I try to drive around the girls and not hit or hurt them, but sometimes they're in my way. I can't be backing down to no girl ... no matter what. I would never be allowed to play on Scan's team again. And you know that's real important to me.

Team play in these classes was almost always dominated by a group of physically mature boys who accommodated the teachers' wishes to the extent that they were allowed to select team members and play without close supervision. The style was purposefully dominating, intimidating, and directed mainly toward

establishing themselves as competent players and people to be respected by peers. Most boys explained that they did not intend to hurt or harass the girls during the game. Girls simply got in the way of their mission to gain and maintain respect. Girls did not pose a threat to their dominance and were seen more as a nuisance to be avoided or to be dispensed with quickly through intimidation. This permitted them to take on more worthy opponents who often represented different neighbourhoods, crews, and gangs. Game play presented a socially acceptable means to mark and defend psychological territory (Cothran & Ennis, 1997).

An analysis of the curriculum in place in these programs, suggested that the multi-activity model used in these schools was ineffective in controlling aggressive play and in providing a physically and emotionally safe environment for all students (Ennis, 1995). In fact, it appeared to encourage boys, who individually were considerate of others, to accept the dominant culture of aggression necessary to protect and maintain their own space and status within the male peer group. The curriculum nurtured a subtle level of violence that was difficult for teachers to disrupt and often alienated them and contributed to their dissatisfaction, frustration, and eagerness to retire from teaching (Ennis, 1996; Ennis & McCauley, 1998). One veteran male physical educator with 29 years of high school teaching experience explained:

It has taken me a long time to realize what was occurring in my classes after we went coed. At first I just blamed it on the girls' lack of skill and their lack of motivation. But one day I agreed to participate in a game when one team was a man short, and boy did that make me see it from a different light! I have played a lot of basketball and always felt I could hold my own on most courts. But I guess now I am getting a little older and slower ... and suddenly I found myself playing 'left out'. I was too slow to play this style of basketball. Sure, I could shoot more accurately than the kids, but only from the outside because the blatant fouling limited driving with the basketball in the paint. Calling fouls only frustrated the situation. I began to understand the game from the lower skilled, weaker students' point of view. For a brief moment I think I understood what those girls felt. It was a demeaning experience for me. ...

Once the class play is set up within a multi-activity format, it appears more difficult to convince students, especially physically successful male students, to modify their behaviour to accommodate and facilitate others. The structure of the model, itself, with a participation emphasis and a teacher-directed format is conducive to instructional neglect when teachers become physically tired and emotionally frustrated. Further, the model may also *contribute* to teacher burnout and withdrawal from instruction by requiring constant vigilance, confrontation, and advocacy for low-skilled, small, timid, or female players. Even the most aware and committed teachers have difficulty sustaining this level of effort when confronted constantly by committed, physically and vocally aggressive male adolescents. Coupled with the school principals' and supervisors' insistence on maintaining at least an appearance of control and management in physical education, it is not surprising that the interests and needs of low-skilled players, many of whom are girls, were neglected.

Over the last two decades, researchers and teachers, such as Griffin (1985), have attempted to enhance the awareness, ability, and commitment of physical educators to intervene and disrupt negative sport practices. Efforts to create safe, respectful places for girls in team-sport physical education have pivoted on the willingness and ability of the physical education teacher. These efforts have been most successful when specific strategies (e.g. Griffin, 1985) have been taught to committed educators. Even in these situations, however, teachers have had to be constantly vigilant and to have 'eyes in the backs of their heads' to maintain at least an overtly consistent and equitable playing environment. This is quite demanding, and it appears that most teachers are unwilling or unable to maintain this vigilance throughout an extended career, thus compromising the quality of the experience for their female students. Students' use of covert behaviours to promote dominance has been reported occasionally in the literature (e.g. Chepyator-Thomson & Ennis, 1997; Loftus & Ennis, 1996), and is now increasingly a focus of radical feminist critiques of physical education (e.g. Nilges, 1998).

## Methods

The comprehensive study of which this specific research was a part was conducted in three phases by a team of six researchers (Ennis *et al.*, in press). In Phase I teachers taught a multi-activity soccer unit using traditional

methods and procedures. A member of our research team was assigned to each school and collected observation and interviews from students and teachers. In Phase II, teachers voluntarily attended a weekly 90-minute session for five weeks to update their teaching strategies and to explain the Sport for Peace curriculum. Research team members taught the sessions and continued to visit the school weekly to coach the teacher in the use of the teaching strategies and the curriculum and to answer questions or address concerns. In Phase III, teachers taught a different class of students using a teacher-designed unit based on the Sport for Peace curriculum.

### *Characteristics of the Sport for Peace Curriculum*

Rather than depend solely on the good intentions and perseverance of the physical educator to disrupt the multi-activity curriculum's tendency toward inequality, our research team with the cooperation of the urban school district, created and implemented the Sport for Peace curriculum. Based on peace education theory (Carson, 1992) and the Sport Education model (Siedentop, 1994), Sport for Peace functions to enhance students' opportunities to participate within an equitably structured environment. Research by Hastie (1996, 1998) suggested that reluctant and low-skilled players, many of whom are girls were willing and able to engage in Sport Education. The Sport for Peace curriculum utilizes the basic curricular structures described by Siedentop (1994) and includes an additional focus on conflict negotiation, self and social responsibility, and care and concern for others that school officials believe are particularly important in urban schools (National School Boards Association, 1994).

Like Sport Education, Sport for Peace is based on the creation of teams of relatively equal skill and playing ability. Teachers appoint student coaches to assist players in improving their performance and to monitor the team environment to enhance the engagement and affiliation of every team member. Players rotate through team positions taking a regular turn at the duties of statistician, scorekeeper, and official. Unlike short, multi-activity units, sport units or 'seasons' extend seven to nine weeks (daily 50 minute lessons; 35-40 + classes) to enhance students' skill development and affiliation with team mates, promoting care and concern for others.

Sport for Peace extends the basic framework of sport education to include a focus on conflict negotiation, care and concern for others, and self and social responsibility. Conflict negotiation and alternative dispute resolution (Girard & Koch, 1996, p. xxi) focuses on strategies for settling conflicts that do not involve force. It includes teaching students to use negotiation, conciliation, mediation, arbitration and fact finding. Students are taught ways of analysing conflict, words that lead to conflict, and ways to improve communication, manage anger, and build consensus.

The concepts of care and concern for others (Noddings, 1992) were taught explicitly through several specific strategies and task structures. For example, teachers explained caring strategies and stated expectations for fair treatment of all team members. Caring was equated with strong, resilient, persistent individuals who worked toward goals that were beneficial to the team and the class. Teachers and coaches consistently reminded students that the team and the class were theirs and worked to establish trusting relationships with students. Students were not graded competitively and were encouraged to work within their team to help others. Expertise was defined more broadly than skillfulness. Low-skilled students were given roles of high status such as statistician and score keeper, while simultaneously receiving skill instruction within the small team environment. Coaches and players were encouraged to evaluate themselves to determine how well they were meeting their goals.

Although Sport Education includes many team structures and routine duties that enhance social responsibility, the Sport for Peace curriculum extended these to situations in which students were responsible for creating an emotionally safe environment for team-mates and opponents (Ridley & Walther, 1995). Students were encouraged to be self-directed when making choices and exercising responsibilities in order to provide opportunities for all students to play on the court effectively. Students described this as pawning team-mates to 'get their stats'. Skilled students accepted supporting roles periodically to permit less-skilled students to rebound, shoot, and move effectively with the ball. Consistent with the strategies for conflict negotiation and

caring, students accepted responsibility to work within their team or work with their opponents to resolve disputes, facilitating a peaceful, non-violent environment.

In our research conducted using the Sport for Peace curriculum, students quickly realized that success depended on positive team relationships. Student coaches worked to solve problems and smooth disagreements within their teams. Teachers assisted student coaches by providing examples of drills and strategies that coaches implemented with their teams. Disagreements were resolved through conflict negotiation with a focus on enhancing every individual's self and social responsibility and nurturing care and concern for others. The teachers assigned coaches to teams and provided a structured pre-season of instruction and a viable round-robin tournament. Students learned quickly that less skilled or inexperienced players were more willing to help the team when they were nurtured and taught skills and strategies. Low-skilled players learned to value their skilled colleagues (both girls and boys) as mentors and willingly accepted instruction from these valued peers. In turn highly skilled players gained status and respect through legitimate educational efforts rather than through aggressive acts of dominance (Ennis *et al.*, in press).

Of course, a curriculum alone cannot guarantee equitable relationships, but it can be used proactively to put structures in place, such as conflict negotiation, student coaching, a family environment, heterogeneous teams, and an inclusive tournament format, that increase the likelihood that all students will have opportunities to participate in a positive, educationally focused setting. These structures relieved the teacher of many of the most onerous monitoring and confrontational duties inherent in the multi-activity, team-sport curriculum, making the class environment more satisfying for the teacher and more conducive to female success. A detailed, comprehensive report of the methods and findings can be found in Ennis and colleagues (in press). The current 'paper focuses on girls' experiences during the Phase III implementation of Sport for Peace in the high schools to which I was assigned.

### *Participants, Data Collection and Analysis*

During Phase III, I visited two classes at three high schools each week to monitor the progress of the Sport for Peace units and to answer teachers' questions regarding the implementation of the curriculum. Teachers strongly encouraged us to begin teaching the Sport for Peace curriculum within a basketball unit. They explained that basketball is the most compelling content for African-American boys. It is their life; it is inextricably part of their identity. 'To avoid basketball or to remove it from the physical education program is to say that who you are, what you believe, and how you construct your identity is not valued. Anti-violence curricula must address the oppressive and exclusionary practices that are constructed within basketball. The problems of oppression and exclusion were not nearly as definitive in other sports, because these boys did not really value or want to play 'white' sports. Our research has documented repeated instances in which boys refused to dress and participate in these sports. Because we were attempting to change the curriculum, we needed students to *want* to participate and to try to make this format successful. Further, girls also indicated to us that they would like to *learn* to play basketball with boys. Our experiences with multi-activity sport indicated that African-American boys perceived physical education to be free-play basketball. Efforts to change both the sport and the class framework were unlikely to be successful. African-American boys and girls and their teachers were willing to try the Sport for Peace curriculum if students could participate in their favourite activity. All teachers agreed to conduct a basketball unit during this time, thus assisting our research efforts to compare the curricular implementation across high schools.

At the conclusion of these units, I conducted extensive interviews with the teachers and 15 girls (five at each school) who had participated regularly in the classes. The interviews were audiotaped and transcribed for analysis. While three of these girls described themselves as athletic and eager to participate, the remaining 12 self-identified as reluctant participants. Girls ranged in age from 14-17 and represented lower and middle class families. All were African-American, except for four white students. The teachers who participated in Sport for Peace in these high schools were African-American. Data were analysed using constant comparison (LeCompte & Priessle, 1993) with the help of the QSR.NUD\*IST computer software. Themes identified with teachers and

students in particular schools were challenged and triangulated with data from other participants at the same and different schools. Trustworthiness was supported using peer and participant review.

### **Enhancing Girls' Success in Sport-Based Physical Education**

Findings from this research focusing on girls' experiences in physical education suggested that, in addition to the importance of skill instruction provided by the student coach, student ownership, authentic cooperative team environments, and second chances enhanced girls' feelings of success in the Sport for Peace curriculum.

#### ***Student Ownership***

A multi-activity curriculum creates an environment in which an authority figure or figures controls and constrains the environment. Ideally this individual creates a positive learning environment where all can participate safely and positively. Unfortunately, in the high schools I observed, the authority typically held by the teacher was usurped by dominant, aggressive male students who asserted their control with negative effects on low-skilled, weaker players, many of whom were girls. The introduction of the Sport for Peace curriculum appeared to disrupt this behaviour and encouraged and assisted the physical educator to delegate authority to several student coaches (both boys and girls) who, in turn, were monitored by their players and the teacher.

Authority was dispersed horizontally throughout the class rather than vertically through a few influential students. Students were given responsibility for many decisions they considered important such as how players rotate through positions, how disagreements would be solved and conflict negotiated, and what adjustments would be made in player personnel and team strategies to increase opportunities for success against particular opponents. Because the curricular structures in Sport for Peace require all players to participate in every aspect of the team, both boys and girls, regardless of skill level were involved in the ownership of their teams. One girl explained:

I really like playing on our team. I got to learn how to keep statistics and after each game everybody on the team would come to the table and look at their results. It was very important to pay attention because you know that the players were proud of what they did.

Another girl on a different team explained how her basketball skills had improved during the nine week unit:

We played basketball before in middle school, but the boys were rough and they didn't give us much time to play. When we did get in the game, they stole the ball away from us or told us we be 'sorry'. In Sport for Peace basketball Derek, my coach, spent time with me every day to teach me how to shoot and how to dribble around people. He was really patient and nice. I still lose the ball sometimes, but my team tells me 'that's okay, try again'. I'm working really hard, because I know they're counting on me and want me to be successful. I want to show Derek that his hard work with me is really paying off.

Girls and low-skilled boys willingly affiliated with the team and took responsibility for the team's success. They understood how their own performance contributed to the team, both in playing and supporting roles. They used the team practice time effectively and responded positively to the coach's instructions and drills. Students who reported they had been unwilling to participate in drills when required to perform in front of ridiculing classmates, were more eager to practice in the relative privacy of their teams, surrounded by supportive, nurturing team-mates.

Unlike Griffin's (1985) effort to teach teachers how to confront and disrupt boys' dominant, aggressive behaviour, the Sport for Peace curriculum was designed to teach students to identify, modify, and monitor the environment. Student ownership of the curriculum appears particularly important to students who have limited control over many aspects of their economic and family situations. Having an opportunity to make decisions that were relevant and meaningful to them and to experience both the positive and negative consequences of those decisions seemed to be influential in students' willingness to engage in the curriculum.

### *Authentic Cooperative Environments*

Historically, physical educators have pointed to team play as a naturally cooperative environment. Careful analysis and critique of these environments in physical education, however, suggested that team play structured within multi-activity curricula can easily digress to negative, competitive environments where winning and losing is more than just a game (Ennis, 1994). It can become an environment where self-concepts are crushed and intimidation and alienation are commonplace. Authentic cooperation requires the individual to look beyond her or his own self-interests to work on behalf of others. These behaviours, while serving the team, also benefit the individual.

Authentic cooperative environments were created deliberately in the Sport for Peace curriculum by extending the length of the unit to promote affiliation, creating a family atmosphere (Ennis *et al.*, in press), assigning positive, group-oriented responsibilities to the coach (often a formally dominant, aggressive participant), and providing a sense of ownership to all team members. Players understood that they were responsible for resolving team conflicts and providing opportunities for all students to improve and enhance the success of the group. Consistent with effective cooperative learning strategies, each team member was held accountable to his or her team to complete assigned duties, to care for team members, and to enhance the performance of others on the team by providing opportunities to practice and instructional cues to improve (Ennis *et al.*, in press).

Girls reported that they noticed the change from a competitive to a more cooperative environment. They were willing to contribute to the team-oriented competitive playing effort, secure in the knowledge that many (if not all) aspects of team life (e.g. practice, skill improvement, managerial responsibilities) would be conducted in a positive, cooperative atmosphere. One girl explained:

Our team really learned to work together during the season. At first we argued and complained about everything Leon [coach] made us do. Our team went and complained to our teacher and Leon complained to him, too, that we wouldn't listen and obey him. But our teacher said we had to work it out amongst ourselves. No one could be traded to another team so we had better sit down and talk it out. We spent an entire class period. At first we yelled a lot, but after awhile we started listening more to each other. We told Leon he was being too bossy and we were not his servants. He looked at us kind of funny, and then he said, 'Okay he would chill'. Then he said that the girls weren't trying hard enough; that, 'we didn't want it as bad as he did ...' and you know he was right. The next practice went much better. Leon acted more like a gentleman with us. He really did! And we worked to cooperate more with him and the other boys on our team and tried more to do what he wanted. We ran through his drills and listened to him when he explained things. I mean we still talk too much to suit him, but, you know, he got used to it. We played much better and guess what? We won the tournament! Leon was so proud we thought he would split. We are all really good friends, now.

Authentic cooperative environments provided a welcomed alternative for girls to the competitive environments they experienced in the traditional multi-activity model. Although a few skilled girls were selected as coaches and could compete effectively in the competitive environment, they, too, reported that they enjoyed the more inviting atmosphere in which they could work together with their team-mates. They explained that the Sport for Peace class reduced the pressure to 'be like the boys' and 'always do it perfectly the first time' to be accepted; instead, providing a positive, yet challenging atmosphere for them to focus on participating, while improving their skills and playing ability.

Cooperative environments appeared to be 'authentic' for girls when they permitted them to be involved in the play at a level in which they felt successful. By expanding the opportunities for girls to participate in valued roles, such as coach, scorekeeper, statistician, official, and player, girls could demonstrate to themselves and their teammates that they were productive team members. Authentic cooperative experiences in Sport for Peace also were ones in which girls felt comfortable learning and performing with boys. Often skilled boys and girls in the role of coach or assistant coach set the tone for team practices and game play. They realized, often through trial and error, that low-skilled girls would respond to encouragement rather than ridicule. The



curricular structures that required every student to receive approximately equal playing time motivated the skilled players to teach and nurture the low-skilled girls as an instrumental component of the team's ultimate success. Of course, the girls quickly realized the importance of their roles adding to their sense of worth and the authenticity of their team experience.

### *Second Chances*

Girls, regardless of skill level, commented with appreciation on the educational environment in the Sport for Peace classes. Higher skilled players, both girls and boys, were charged with creating a practice environment to enhance their players' skills and playing ability. They learned quickly that low-skilled girls required a more patient approach than boys, including careful instructions and frequent instructional feedback. Girls responded more positively to a supportive, nurturing climate. One low-skilled girl described her coach's practices:

Patrick was very patient with us girls on the team. He showed us what to do and then helped us do it. You just wanna work for him. If you don't do it right, he don't get mad. He say okay, try this or keep working at it. You can do it. And you know, during the season, we gotta lot better. We still make mistakes, but Patrick, he's a good teacher ... he never gave up on us.

Many students described the Sport for Peace environment as a place for second chances. They saw this as different from school and work where a mistake received a low or failing grade. Teachers worked with coaches and players to learn the Sport for Peace curriculum and to create an environment where student decisions had both positive and negative consequences. They helped players realize that they controlled their own behaviours and that their actions were influential in their team's success. One coach explained:

At first I didn't think the lineup mattered. If you had too many girls in the game, you weren't gonna win. But then we started talking about it and trying to figure out what the girls' could do. We changed the lineup a few times and finally got the right people on the floor. We changed a little bit for different teams, but we sorta figured out how to get the most out of everybody. Ms. Andrews said that's what winning coaches do. You can't get mad at your players, you have to figure out what they like and what they can do, and you go from there.

The emphasis on second chances, caring environments, and conflict negotiation by the teachers, coaches, and players changed the class atmosphere from an intense, frantic game, to a deliberate, more educational approach. The use of the extended round-robin format in which teams played each other several times encouraged the use of team strategies, specific player match-ups and the understanding that 'if we lose this game, we play them again next week'. This perspective relieved the pressure for immediate success, promoting an educational perspective *on* sport. The girls welcomed this atmosphere and many appeared to engage and participate willingly in the team-sport activities.

### *Boys' Responses to Girls' Participation*

Of particular interest was the boys' responses to girls' participation and interest. In the initial weeks of the sport unit, boys who were intermediate or advanced-skilled players often expressed frustration with low-skilled players, especially girls, on their teams. During the first two weeks of the unit, teachers stopped the lessons often, reminded both boys and girls of the goals of peaceful play and a caring environment and then required players to sit down and discuss the problems they were having. Boys initially complained that the girls would not play with intensity, while the girls reported that, if they were not treated with respect, they would not play at all (thus causing the team to forfeit). After frustrations were aired, teachers reminded players that every team consisted of players with different skill levels and thus every team had to learn to adjust to this situation. Teachers also emphasized that the team membership would not be changed and that championship teams found ways to work cooperatively and to use players strategically. Over the next weeks, most players gradually affiliated with their team, teaching and coaching low-skilled players who, with support, became more eager to listen and exert effort.

Boys received a new and different message about girls' potential for skill development, their level of motivation, and the positive and important contributions that girls could and would make to their teams in an appropriate setting. Rather than the teacher constantly controlling, supervising, and motivating boys to include girls in the game, the curricular philosophy of the Sport for Peace approach encouraged students to support and care for others and required students to participate in all positions both on the court and in supportive roles. This required the most highly skilled players to take a turn at keeping statistics, officiating, and score keeping, while the low-skilled students were educated to contribute to the team on the court or field.

Boys were required to share ownership of the sport with girls. Although girls continued to accept willingly many of the caretaking chores, such as the paper work and equipment management responsibilities, boys also took their turns in these roles and girls took turns on the court in every game. Further, boys cooperated with girls, treating them as respected members of the team. They taught, encouraged, and supported their efforts. Most boys quickly learned the value of passing the ball to girls on strategic plays. In a few situations, in which boys did not play cooperatively, teacher manipulation of the curriculum structures, game rules, and class policies required boys to make these changes. Specifically, policies were created that required all players to receive a pass before a shot could be taken, changed the game format from three-player to two-player, co-educational teams, and provided bonus points for total team participation. Generally, however, by the middle of the unit, boys willingly accepted the responsibility to share ownership of the sport, worked cooperatively with girls, and nurtured their female team-mates by providing encouragement and second chances. These strategies combined to create a different, more educationally and socially positive environment, for all students in physical education.

### **A Culturally Relevant Pedagogy for Girls in Physical Education**

While much has been written by feminist scholars in physical education about the context of girls' experiences (e.g. Nilges, 1991; Vertinsky, 1992; Wright, 1996, 1997), the development and examination of curricular alternatives that provide access for girls to positive sport-based physical education have been less prevalent. Both Vertinsky and Wright suggested that alternative movement forms, such as lifetime wellness (Vertinsky, 1992) and dance (Wright, 1996, 1997) replace sport-based physical education to prevent girls' marginalization and alienation. Although it is important that girls who view sport as masculine and inappropriate have alternatives, it would be unfortunate if girls were further socialized to reject sport because it was reserved for boys or because boys refused to let them participate. In the school district in which this research was conducted, girls have physical education curricular choices in high school. They may choose among team sports, individual sports, personal fitness, weight training, physical training, and dance classes. Girls who choose sport classes or who are placed in sport classes because of scheduling constraints deserve to find activity that provides an educational experience taught within a socially positive environment. Although it is inappropriate and highly unlikely that sport will be eliminated from physical education programs in the United States, it is possible to improve the girls' experiences in sport-based classes.

Gloria Ladson-Billings (1994) proposed characteristics of teachers and teaching that nurture both cultural and gender relevance in educational programs. In her book, *The Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African American Children*, Ladson-Billings compares assimilationist and culturally relevant teaching practices to emphasize opportunities for curricular reform. Assimilationist practices require students to reproduce traditional gender, ethnic, and academic stereotypes associated with learning essential to maintenance of the social, economic, and political *status quo*. Culturally relevant teaching practices provide opportunities to develop multiple identities that are consistent with personal and social constructions of self. When used as a screen from which to view curricular reform in multi-activity, sport-based classes, characteristics of culturally relevant pedagogy assist us to design and implement a pedagogy that is more meaningful and nurturing to girls in physical education. I will discuss how three characteristics proposed by Ladson-Billings, (a) conceptions of self and others, (b) the nature of social relationships developed within the classroom, and (c) teachers' conceptions of knowledge, were used in the design of the Sport for Peace curriculum to create a more culturally relevant pedagogy in physical education.

### *Conceptions of Self and Others*

Ladson-Billings (1994) argued that a culturally relevant pedagogy is one in which individuals believe in the potential for themselves and others to create a positive educational environment. Griffin (1985) provided an excellent example of this in her research in which the student teacher, Ray, who had recently completed a course on equity, worked to create an equitable environment in his physical education class. Ray was aware of several strategies that could be used to change the environment to create positive gender relationships. Yet, he continued to use a curriculum that was constructed from a masculine focus on sport with an underlying emphasis on competition, winning, and dominance. He used his personal commitment, equity strategies, and intense effort to influence boys' behaviour. Although it was difficult, Ray was able to disrupt, at least temporarily, some of the boys' behaviours and provide positive opportunities for girls' participation.

Over a decade later, we are still experiencing similar problems and attempting to address them by changing the teachers' behaviour (Nilges, 1998). Although teacher change is essential, I would suggest that by itself, it is inadequate to create sustainable reform. The use of curricula such as the Sport for Peace program is more likely to create an environment that *helps* the teacher to change and sustain a more equitable focus. The curriculum can *assist* teachers by providing 'taken for granted' curricular structures that set policy and provide clear, defensible rules to promote more positive images of girls in every aspect of the program.

In this research, the Sport for Peace curriculum was used to transform the teacher's role from one of micro-manager into that of a 'sport commissioner' or facilitator. As commissioner, the teacher was able to monitor the large, diverse sport program and make decisive decisions to either alter the setting or permit players and coaches to resolve their problems in a mutually beneficial manner. Highly skilled players, both girls and boys, were elevated to the position of coach, taught to use care, responsibilities, and conflict negotiation, and given meaningful roles that bestowed respect and status they had previously sought through dominance and aggressiveness in multi-activity sport activities. Other skillful players were given a central role by the coach assisting lower skilled participants.

Low-skilled participants also were given responsibilities. Some of these showcased their competence and organizational ability in off-the-court supportive roles. Simultaneously, they were taught skills by effective peer teachers and given positions of responsibility on the court within the team plan. Together these small changes combined effectively to create a cumulative change in the way that individuals conceptualized their identities within sporting contexts. Although both teachers and highly skilled players relinquished control of the environment, both groups received respect and status based on the legitimate and valued knowledge they possessed. Girls were no longer ridiculed and marginalized by boys and teachers. Instead, they were taught, supported, and nurtured as viable team players who had the potential to make a significant positive contribution to the team's success. Most class members responded by perceiving themselves as positive, contributing members.

By changing the curricular structures and teacher rhetoric, class members observed a consistency that permeated all classes and was connected less with the teacher's energy level and overt management system (Powell, 1997) and more with an enjoyable, educational sport environment. The Sport for Peace philosophy carries an intuitive connection to the educational premise espoused by Ladson-Billings and other curriculum reformers that, 'All students can succeed'. When examining the level of failure in traditional multi-activity approaches to sport in physical education (Ennis *et al.*, 1997), it is not surprising to find that many teachers believe that substantial numbers of students cannot become skilled, will not dress and participate, and ultimately will fail in physical education. When all of the responsibility is placed on the high school teacher to motivate diverse students to participate in an alienating curriculum, failure is often the rule, not the exception. Conversely, a curriculum in which students are gradually initiated into the team community and treated with respect contributes to their perceptions of success while simultaneously developing positive conceptions of self and others necessary to create culturally relevant pedagogy. This is essential for all students, but particularly for girls who experience alienating and marginalizing environments in many multi-activity, co-educational team sports settings.

### *Developing Positive Social Relationships*

Ladson-Billings (1991) explained that a culturally relevant pedagogy encourages a community of learners. The community concept assumes a level of collaboration in which 'students teach each other and are responsible to each other' (p. 55). The collaborative effort is designed to enhance student achievement of both low- and high-skilled students. The group 'rises' together (p. 55) and is committed to work for the benefit of others, enhancing the likelihood of success for all.

In multi-activity, sport-based curricula, the team concept works best for highly skilled players, most of whom are boys. Others in the class are excluded from the sense of affiliation and community that team participation can create. Although highly skilled students may practice skills, they rarely receive instruction on more advanced techniques. When they do learn, it is often through observation of others and emulation of techniques valued by the group. Conversely, low-skilled students are excluded from both instruction and play. If the teacher provides segregated instruction in which low-skilled players (often girls) are separated from the high-skilled players, low-skilled players rarely have the opportunity to practice skills at game pace necessary for refinement (Hastie, 1998). In many urban high school physical education programs, little learning occurs. The physical education teacher may have little control over the educational environment and often may not choose to confront dominant males or motivate alienated students.

In models such as Sport for Peace, the curricular structures guide the development of positive social relations by creating an environment in which both high- and low-skilled students participate in a team community. Both girls and boys receive instruction on conflict negotiation, caring for others, and self and team responsibilities. They are encouraged to think reflectively and negotiate constructively. They are taught skills and playing ability by the teacher or the coach as well as instruction on how to play with others and help everyone contribute to the team's success. The curricular structures overtly conspire to prevent a single individual, alone, from winning the game and receiving the personally desired accolades. These structures are implemented at *the* beginning of the unit through the vehicle of the curriculum, itself, not later by a punitive teacher after aggressive players demonstrate their desire (and ability) to control the game. Even when one or two highly skilled players are influential, the rotating position format contributes to all players viewing their accomplishments as part of the team community. Self-worth and self-concept are promoted within a community of learners.

The sense of community is strengthened and reinforced further by the collaborative roles that the higher skilled players accept as they teach and encourage lower skilled players. Often many of the lower skilled players have never experienced success and are hesitant to exert effort. Skilled players who become their mentors begin to understand the effects of negative socialization and learn how to present positive, encouraging alternatives. Authentic collaboration becomes an expected result in a Sport for Peace curriculum because it is an *essential* component of team success. Team members connect with this concept gradually over the first three to five weeks of the unit. They may realize the benefits quickly or may experience negative interactions on the path to this discovery. It is clear, however, that students who aspire to be a part of winning teams work to assist and promote the achievement and positive success of each of their team members.

### *Conceptions of Knowledge*

Scholars have come to recognize that knowledge is a social construction (Vygotsky, 1978). The concept of truth and reality constitute a point of view or a belief system that is individually meaningful. The construction of a definition of feminism and girls' place in sport within a multi-activity, team-sport physical education program has been constrained by boys' competitive efforts to maintain sport for themselves, by teachers' low expectations for girls, and by societies' conceptualization of feminism often (re)produced by girls, themselves (Nilges, 1998; Vertinsky, 1992). The multi-activity sport program leaves these assumptions unchallenged and reproduces inferior representations of girls' sport practices. It sets curricular structures in motion that are difficult for teachers and girls to challenge and successfully overcome. This curriculum constructs sport as monolithic, unchanging, and male dominated. It does not construct a space for the culturally relevant perspective that 'knowledge is continuously recreated, recycled and shared by teachers and students' (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p. 81) central to a culturally relevant pedagogy for girls.

In the Sport for Peace curriculum, the teacher and the students work within curricular structures that require all individuals to participate in a number of roles and assume a variety of community-oriented responsibilities. The dominant role of men and boys is open to challenge by both males and females. Opportunities to liberate and emancipate girls are available and encouraged within the team's internal collaborative, educational structure and the team members' need for externally visible competitive success.

The social construction of knowledge in Sport for Peace also includes a strong and influential focus on achievement found through physical skill development and playing ability. All individuals focus on enhancing achievement as a means to further team goals. Individuals are held accountable for skill improvement by teammates and through both an individually- and cooperatively-oriented grading system. Instruction is essential to enhanced individual and team success and is the responsibility of every class member. Ladson-Billings (1994) explained that achievement is an essential element of effective schools and should be a central criterion for evaluating school reform initiatives. Conceptions of knowledge and criteria for achievement that are inclusive of girls' needs and interests and equip them to be contributing members of a sport-based curriculum are essential to the development of positive perspectives on physical activity.

### **Improving the Sport Climate for Girls in Physical Education**

Although the Sport for Peace curriculum provides enhanced opportunities for girls to participate positively in sport, receive instruction, and be valued by boys as contributing members of the team, it does not provide a sport environment in which girls and boys participate as equals. Most sports that currently hold status in society were created by adult men for men and are played using men's rules, equipment, and definitions of success. It is unlikely that most girls and women will play these sports with skill and strength equal to that of men. Thus, attempts to create an equitable sport program may be impossible. Yet, girls and women enjoy sport participation and like to participate with boys and men in sporting environments. It is not sport itself that makes the experience negative and repressive, but the ridicule, exclusion, and lack of feelings of contribution that often accompany these experiences. Facilitating the opportunity for girls and women to participate in active, healthy lifestyles that involve positive sport experiences is certainly possible, although creating truly equitable co-educational environments appears to be much more difficult.

Sport for Peace provides an opportunity for girls to participate, to improve their skills and to interact positively and purposefully in a sporting environment. It does not claim nor deliver an equitable sporting environment. It is fair to argue that Sport for Peace represents a 'neo-liberal framework of equality, a framework that retains a masculinist subject [sport] at its centre' (Foster, 1996, p. 196). Physical success is still defined in male terms, despite the additional opportunities or entry points for girls. This is true for most physical education and athletic sport programs in which females participate in sports valued and protected by males. Because many girls continue to enter sport as low-skilled, second-class citizens, this curricula, like the multi-activity approach is unlikely to be successful in providing girls with opportunities to participate as boys' equals. Although Sport for Peace enhances girls experiences in sport, like other co-educational sport models, it fails to overcome repressive social constraints on girls' construction of their subjective identity as an active, engaged mover. Boys and girls construct girls' roles, at best, as caretakers of the sport environment and contributing, but unequal, participants. Many girls begin Sport for Peace lacking in skill, status, and respect as a mover and complete the Sport for Peace unit in essentially the same place, albeit better skilled and with more positive feelings of sport efficacy, but clearly not equal to their male peers.

Unfortunately, Nilges' (1998) call for a social reconstructive approach to sport-based physical education does not provide us with sufficient practical help to restructure the daily operation of high school physical education in urban schools. Her suggestions to use the multi-activity, sport-based physical education classes as a place for a critical gender dialogue to 'reconstruct gender ideologies' may not be welcome by many high school students or their neo-conservative parents (Apple, 1996). Without expert training and careful political groundwork, teachers' efforts to use strategies such as these can erupt into negative and confrontational encounters. The strategies that work effectively in respected school subjects, such as English, may be quite difficult to replicate in multi-activity physical education where male-dominated sport is highly protected.

Rather than eliminate sport from the curriculum as suggested by some radical feminists (e.g. Nilges 1998; Vertinsky, 1992; Wright, 1997), it seems worthwhile to continue to examine more inclusive curricula, such as Sport for Peace, that provide us with a forum from which to have thoughtful, relevant student discussions of gender ideologies such as those suggested by Nilges (1998). Although girls are rarely able to compete equally with boys after the middle grades in male-valued sports, our research along with Hastie's (1998) confirms that girls relish continued opportunities to be taught skills, treated with respect, and nurtured as viable contributors.

The Sport for Peace curriculum represents one model for disrupting male dominance of sport in physical education. It provides elements that directly address issues of ownership, collaboration, and multiple opportunities for success that high school girls argue are necessary for their safe and enjoyable participation. Further, it enlists and rewards the assistance of skilled male peers in enhancing girls' sport skills and in providing legitimate and meaningful opportunities for practice and contribution to team efforts. The Sport for Peace curriculum appears to enhance peaceful, productive, and authentic collaborative relationships that are essential for girls to become viable mainstream participants in physical education. It promotes girls' achievement within a construction of sport that is inviting for all participants. This curriculum can provide a culturally relevant pedagogy in which girls and boys can participate in sport that is physically and emotionally safe and nurtures the positive self-concept and identity development of each team member. Through curricular models such as these we can come one step closer to positive sport environments in physical education for girls.

## Note

[1] A earlier version of this paper was presented as the Margaret Paulding Lecture at the annual meeting of the Eastern District Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance, Baltimore, MD, 20 February 1998. My sincere thanks to Melinda Solmon, Barb Satina, Susan Loftus, Jim Mensch, and Terri McCauley for their contributions to the development and implementation of the Sport for Peace model.

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