Moving and Learning in Physical Education:

An Interdisciplinary Approach

Understanding a Monocultural, Student-Teaching Setting from Sociocultural Perspectives: A Video Analysis

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Sociocultural considerations play an important role in any teaching episode in our increasingly diverse society.

School is a social system in which students learn academic and social skills from teachers, and in which preservice teachers acquire professional teaching skills. The primary purpose for analyzing the video document of a preservice teacher in action was to understand the delivery of class content and the issues that unfolded as the lesson occurred in the gymnasium environment. This analysis was completed with reference to curriculum-in-action, class demographics, and the social status of the middle school. The video analysis focused on a male European American preservice teacher, who was practicing teaching at a school with 3% African-Americans, 3% Asians, 91% European Americans, 1% Hispanic Americans, 3% multiracial, and 0% North American Indians. The middle school is located close to "the most affluent residential housing" in the city. The curriculum-in-action was flag football, an activity that is closely tied to the most dominant male sport in the United States, "American football." So what sociocultural perspectives could be drawn from the video examination, given the contexts under which the curriculum unfolded? Examination of the video revealed communication to be the main theme, and it functioned in contexts of (1) language and culture and (2) space usage, culture, and power. A secondary purpose for analyzing the video rested on the social class environment as it influenced the physical education program.

Communication in the Gymnasium Environment

Language and Culture. Voice and movement are critical instruments of human communication. Examination of the video revealed that the preservice teacher used verbal and nonverbal communication to underpin movement understanding and that this communication was grounded in a European American sociocultural learning environment. Supporting evidence happened when the preservice teacher, at the beginning of a teaching episode, said, "I need three volunteers…real quick, one, you right there, and you." With words and hand motions (verbal and nonverbal communication), the

At the start of the lesson, the preservice teacher asked for volunteers to demonstrate the task.

preservice teacher selected students to serve as demonstrators of the lesson on flag football. In other cultures—Asian (S. Kim, personal communication, May 20, 2006; J. Na, personal communication, May 25, 2006) and African—one would notice an "open hand," a gesture used to motion a dog for some action (e.g., "come here"), but to the mostly European American students, it was fine. Thus, for this teaching episode, the action was culturally responsive to the large majority of students in the class. In an environment with a demographically diverse student body, the preservice teacher would have needed to use a different set of teaching and relational skills to perform the teaching episode. These skills would include, among others, avoidance of eye contact, of familial reference in feedback, and of individual-based teaching strategies for African Americans, Asian Americans, Hispanic Americans, and North American Indians. For example, according to Vasquez (1990), Hispanic Americans tend to have a strong sense of otherness, as opposed to the individualistic tendencies characteristic of mainstream United States culture. Baruth and Manning (1992) discuss strategies for including all students in teaching environments.

The female students' movements may be characterized as "tentative" for the most part in the teaching episode, which could be attributed to the curriculum (flag football), the adolescent age of the students, or lack of required background skills. For example, one notices the tentative nature of the female ball-catcher, the "volunteer." It was not clear whether the preservice teacher had had eye contact with the female student (he was off-camera), thus making her to "volunteer" when he said, "I need a volunteer." But as judged by the outcome, the female student was not enthusiastic when she performed the movement, which may signal a variety of gender-related influences, including social and cultural discourse that favors male-dominant society (Chepyator-Thomson, You, & Hardin, 2000). The female student's attempt to demonstrate the activity provoked a culturally based, negative response. She did not catch the ball, and the teacher surprisingly provided a positive comment, "That is all right," when asking her to go back to the starting place. Was it really all right? It is unclear from observation why the preservice teacher said "all right." For their part, the students laughed. A question remains. Would the response from the preservice teacher and students have been the same if the volunteer had been male? Later, students at the far corner of the gymnasium were laughing at something, and the preservice teacher said, "It is not funny by the way, it is not funny," which begs the question: why in that context?

Verbal and nonverbal forms of communication between teachers and students are pronounced in the physical education environment, thus cultural phenomena are more heightened than in other learning environments. Consider an eye-contact action, which is a culturally responsive act for most European Americans; however, for other ethnic groups, the act is considered rude when students use it in interactions with parents or adults in the community (Chepyator-Thomson, 2001a; Chepyator-Thomson, 2001b). The use of a monotone voice was also detected in the examination of the video, but that again was fine given the majority demographic make-up of the student body. Lack of clear familiarity with the students was evident when the preservice teacher asked for students' names, which implied distant relationships, at least with some students. "What is your name?" The student answered, "Jake."

The preservice teacher's verbal interaction with the female students revealed two types of communication. One, a commanding style, was used when the preservice teacher said, "Let's go, guys," in reference to a group of girls who were participating reluctantly in the flag football activity. Similarly, to a different group of female students, the preservice teacher said, "Come on, girls." Yet, to another group, the preservice teacher used an encouraging or complimentary style when he said, "Good job, girls." These forms of interaction indicated two different means of motivating or encouraging the students to participate or to be physically active in the class. One form of feedback given to a female student, "Nice hands, Whiney," was a culturally appropriate way to respond for most European American students. For interactions with other ethnic groups, however, a deferred feedback is preferred—"Your mother/father will be proud of you for your great performance"—or a group-based feedback—"Your performances have been perfectly executed."

Space Usage, Culture, and Power. The preservice teacher and students invoked cultural meanings and demonstrated power-laden behaviors in their use of gymnasium space and in the interactions they displayed, which clearly showed how teaching and student participation can serve as a means to understand responsiveness to culture and power. In the video, students occupied either a central or peripheral location in reference to the preservice teacher, who had asked the students to form a line so he could put them into groups for flag football participation. The last student, peripherally located, was a female, who moved to the inside apparently to avoid being picked last, leaving a male and another female to her left side, facing the preservice teacher. The authority

figure in the gymnasium, the preservice teacher, stood in a position where these three students seemed to be less secure, either about their skills, their relationships with other students, or with their bodies in motion, given the activity of flag football.

The preservice teacher's division of students into groups of five produced all-female, all-male, and mixed groupings, as judged from the types of feedback given to the groups when the preservice teacher moved around the gymnasium. Given that all of the groups were not clearly visible for the analysis, a group of five students close to the camera was used for examination. The group consisted of one African American male, three European American females, and one European American male. The female students appeared to exercise their power in numbers, as observed from their communication with one another during the activity. The three female students walked together towards the place of play, while the European American male, off-camera shortly and to the left, walked separately. The African American male also walked alone to the place of play. The women played first, followed by the males. In this episode, the females stayed together and appeared to control the play tempo, and the males also stayed and interacted together during the game participation.

Social Class Environment

The middle school had a well-to-do facility, school attire, and gymnasium flooring. The school's location was near an affluent residential neighborhood, which could be determined from the analysis of the video, because the students wore school uniforms and very nice sport shoes. The gymnasium appeared very new, with shiny floors, bright lighting, and great-looking equipment. Given that the curriculum-in-action was flag football, the students' exposure to this activity—gladly or reluctantly—could be attributed to the school's glorification of male sport, which would not differ much from many physical activity programs in the United States, where male sports reign supreme. This is just an assumption, because the video had limited information about the nature of the curriculum in the middle school. The teaching force, 76 percent of them with master's degrees, indicated a well-staffed school that would have plenty of expertise in curriculum and instruction in physical education. Another indication of social class is the number of students in the preservice teacher's class. About 20 students were recorded present in the class, whereas in other schools this number would be much higher.

The sociocultural perspectives derived from analyzing the video were responsive to European American students' cultural background (or mainly European males), given the nature of the curriculum. However, when afforded the opportunity, the European American female students empowered themselves in game play because they assumed a play position first. Marginalization of students, according to their spatial position with reference to the preservice teacher, was clearly apparent. This highlights that predicaments associated

Exerting strength in numbers, three girls assume the lead positions for the drill, while one of the two boys in their group stands off to the right.

with feelings or actions of being "left out," which do not embody happiness or actions of fulfillment, can occur regardless of the ethnic or social make-up of the class. However, ethnic students, particularly from the nondominant groups that include African Americans, Asian Americans, Hispanic Americans, and North American Indians, would need to be taught by preservice teachers who have the knowledge, attitudes, and demonstrative skills to be culturally responsive to all students placed in physical education programs across the country.

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