# Examining the Culturally Responsive Practices of Urban Primary Physical Educators

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## Abstract

*Recent changes in the demographics of urban public schools have presented an opportunity to assess the instructional strategies of teachers of culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) learners. Given that ethnic minorities represent more than 75% of the student population in 50 of America's largest public school systems, research on teachers of these students is warranted. This study reports data from a survey designed to gauge urban elementary physical educators' use of culturally responsive pedagogy in their instruction. Results suggest that a greater focus should be placed on teaching culturally responsive practices in PETE programs and in current teacher training.*

The social landscape of the United States has changed drastically in recent times. As of the year 2000, ethnic minority groups constituted more than 35% of the total U.S. population, (United States Census, 2010), making diverse learners representative of the present demographics in schools. Banks and Banks (2009) note that culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students in public schools are postulated to represent approximately half of the public school population in the year 2020. Immigration also factors into the aforementioned demographics, with nearly a thousand students each day entering school for the first time (Rong & Preissle, 2008). Thus, it is presumed that as the makeup of the current American public school system changes, the promotion and maintenance of culturally inclusive practices in education should be compulsory. Providing a free and just education for all is not only responsible practice but is an inalienable right outlined by the Constitution of the United States (Brown, 2004; McColl, 2005).

These changing demographics point to a shift in the social and cultural landscape of American education, presenting the opportunity for the assessment of existing programs and instructional strategies, and the extent to which they are responsive to CLD learners. In keeping with changes in these demographics, academic scholars advocate for culturally responsive programs and instructions in schools (Gay, 2000; Grossman, 1995; Villegas & Lucas, 2002) and in practices specific to physical education (Culp, 2010; Culp, Chepyator-Thomson & Hsu, 2009; Chepyator-Thomson, 1995; Ennis, 1999, Hellison, 2010). With respect to creating physical education experiences where students feel accepted and are engaged in appropriate cognitive, affective, and psychomotor outcomes, it is important to discuss culturally responsive pedagogy and note previous scholarship on this topic in our discipline.

**A Meaning of Cultural Responsiveness in Pedagogy and its Importance**

According to Ladson-Billings (2009), culturally responsive pedagogy is "a pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically (p. 17-18)." Pedagogy of this type builds upon students' cultural and linguistic resources through various methods such as high standards, restructured student-teacher relationships, community involvement, culturally mediated instruction, culturally congruent curriculum, and cultural sensitivity (Powell, 1997; Tatum, 2000). Culturally responsive pedagogy also facilitates and supports the achievement of all students in a culturally supported, learner-centered context whereby the strengths students bring to school are identified, nurtured, and utilized. Richards, Brown, and Forde (2007) give a comprehensive description of the three dimensions of culturally responsive pedagogy: institutional, personal and instructional:

> The institutional dimension reflects the administration and its policies and values. The personal dimension refers to the cognitive and emotional processes teachers must engage in to become culturally responsive. The instructional dimension includes materials, strategies, and activities that form the basis of instruction. All three dimensions significantly interact in the teaching and learning process and are critical to understanding the effectiveness of culturally responsive pedagogy (p.64).

Pewewardy (1994) discussed the psychosocial implications of this pedagogy for diverse learners in educational settings and expressed that:

> Culturally responsible pedagogy involves providing the best possible education for children that preserves their own cultural heritage, prepares them for meaningful relationships with other people, and for living productive lives in the present society without sacrificing their own cultural perspective (p. 83).

Gay (2000) also expresses that while improving academic achievement and developing a sense of community and camaraderie is of critical importance, shared responsibility is equally important as a goal of cultural responsive pedagogy, making this type of education multidimensional. This type of teaching involves a study of cultural knowledge, experiences, contributions and perspectives. Emotions, beliefs, values, opinions and feelings are also evaluated so that curriculum and instruction are more responsive to ethnic diversity. Despite the commitment to these initial assessments, Gay warns that there are challenges that persist in learning environments as it relates to ethnic groups:

> … every conceivable aspect of an ethnic group's culture is not replicated in the classroom. Nor are the cultures included in the curriculum used only with students from that ethnic group. Cultural responsive pedagogy focuses on those elements of cultural socialization that most directly affect learning. (Gay, 2000, pp. 31-32)

Given the context of this statement, culturally responsive pedagogy can be considered transformative, in the sense that it recognizes the existing strengths and accomplishments of students and then enhances them further during instruction (Gay, 2000, p.33). Dually, Gay espouses that culturally responsive practice is emancipatory, in that it "releases the intellect of students of color from the constraining manacles of mainstream canons of knowledge and ways of knowing" (p.35). Also, a sense of community can be fostered among all involved in the process, with students being ex-

pected to work together and be accountable for one another's success (p.36). It is of note that contrary to what is often considered by those unacquainted with culturally responsive instruction, the inclusion of the experiences of ethnic minority groups is not done at the expense of deposing existing curricula, but performed to enhance the overall teaching and learning process (Gordon, 2001).

### The Actions of Culturally Responsive Teachers

Qualities that culturally responsive teachers possess have been represented in the literature. Ladson-Billings (2009) indicates that teachers who are responsive to the needs of their students focus on individual students' academic achievement through the use of clear goals and multiple forms of assessment. These teachers demonstrate and maintain cultural and sociopolitical consciousness, while developing these same characteristics in students. Gay (2002) stressed that teachers of diverse learners should develop a diverse knowledge-based curriculum that is culturally relevant. It has a focus on care, learning communities, establish cross-cultural communications, and congruity in classroom instruction.

Villegas and Lucas (2002) espouse that affirming views of students from CLD backgrounds should be promoted by teachers, instead of viewing differences in students as problems to overcome. The teacher should work as an agent of change in school systems, which may be slow to respond to the needs of diverse learners. To this end, Wlodkowski and Ginsberg (1995) state that the role of the culturally responsive educator is to include all students in learning atmospheres, which foster respect and connection to one another. Additionally, meaningful, challenging, and competent learning experiences should be the outcome of what all students should have when they leave school. Similar sentiments have been echoed in physical education literature in respect to addressing multicultural issues (Sparks, 1994; Tritschler, 2008), eradicating bias (King, 1994), celebrating differences (Wessinger, 1994), establishing appropriate classroom management procedures for diverse learners (Culp, 2006a), and providing successful outcomes for CLD students in physical education, despite language barriers (Saffici, 2001).

### Purpose

Duarte and Reed (2004) espouse that teachers need to develop strategies by which to better meet the challenges of teaching a diverse student population. Failure by teachers to use multiple teaching strategies which are dynamic in scope could cause educators to ignore their students' ethnic identities and subsequently their unique, perceptions, values and worldviews (Irving, 2003; Weiner, 2003). The purpose of this study was to discern methods of instruction used by physical educators in a public school system, and uncover possible implications of these strategies for CLD learners. In order to facilitate this, a survey was created with the help of a pilot study in order to record these methods, attitudes regarding culturally responsive pedagogy, and add to existing physical education literature.

## Method

### Participants and Setting

Fifty-two elementary physical educators from 59 schools in a large urban public school system in the southeastern section of the United States were contacted for the study. Seven of these teachers taught in multiple locales in the district. Thirty-one out of 52 teachers decided to participate in the study, yielding a 60% response rate. Of these 31 teachers, 23 were female and eight were male. Caucasian teachers comprised 18 of the respondents (15 female; three male) while African American teachers comprised the remaining thirteen respondents in the study (eight female; five male). Of the 31 teachers who the survey, 19

of these teachers (61%) attended college or universities in the southeast area of the United States. Six of these teachers (19%) held a specialist degree in education (Ed.S.), while 14 of the respondents (45%) had master's degrees. Only four of the participants attended a private college or university. Teacher's years of service at the elementary level was considered, with seventeen out of 31 of the teachers (55%) reporting "ten or more" years of service. Six teachers had 1-4 years of service. Five teachers had "20 or more" years of service. Three teachers reported years of service as "30 or more."

Upon considering the perspectives of Banks (1993), Polite and Saenger (2003) and Sutliff and Perry (2000), elementary education, known to most outside North America as primary education, was chosen as the focus for this inquiry. The aforementioned authors espouse that students from the age of four to eight are aware of racial differences, in many cases before reaching their first formal classroom experience. Therefore, it is essential that realistic images of ethnic and racial groups should be included in curriculum and teaching as well as promoted in a consistent, natural and integrated fashion to help cultivate more positive racial attitudes. This type of equity pedagogy helps to facilitate the academic achievement of students from diverse racial and ethnic groups and from all social classes. Thus, the elementary arena has the potential to influence future attitudes of students in regards to race and bias.

An urban southeastern school system was chosen due to the effect of the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision of 1954 on the current demographics represented in these schools. In short, the Brown decision explicitly outlawed segregated public education facilities, creating a system by which educational opportunities could be equal for black students. Brown was also a landmark decision which was a catalyst for integration and the American Civil Rights Movement of the mid-1950s through late 1960s. Hunter and Donahoo (2003) postulated that the desegregation of big-city schools in the 1960s and '70s caused schools with predominately White student enrollments to shift to predominately minority student populations due to what was termed as "White flight."

To further clarify this term and its meaning, a significant proportion of Whites chose to move away from the city instead of attending schools with other students of color, leaving a disproportionate number of minorities in urban schools. Thus, "White flight" was a direct result of federal legislation that required schools to desegregate. The impact of this legislation is relevant currently, with African Americans, Hispanics, Asian Americans, and other non-white students consisting of 76.1% of the student population in fifty of the nation's largest public school systems (Council of the Great City Schools, 2000).

Given this information, an urban school system which served approximately 50,000 students was chosen to be the focus of this research because of the greater likelihood of a diverse population of students being available. Urban in the context of this study refers to all populations and territories within the boundaries of urbanized areas and the urban portion of places outside of urbanized areas that have a decennial census population of 2,500 or more (Moskowitz & Lindbloom, 2004). Of the 83 schools in the system, approximately 45% of the teachers had advanced degrees and averaged 15-20 years of classroom teaching experience. Two-thirds of the administrators in these schools had either a specialist or doctoral degree, with the average experience in the field of education being twenty-five years. The racial demographic of this particular school system was 58% African American, 32% White, 5% Latino and Hispanic and 3% Asian, with Native American, Pacific Islanders and other races comprising the remainder of the students attending school in the district.

After approval by the Institutional Review Board, participants were found using an initial search of the school systems' electronic database to determine if the schools had teachers and classes that met the criteria for the research. These criteria were (a) current teaching in an elementary school (b) state certification of the teacher in physical education and (c) a primary or terminal degree in physical education teaching. From this information, a preliminary list of target schools was created and a packet of ancillary materials was written and sent to physical education teachers of the 59 elementary schools in the district.

**Research procedures: Measuring IMPACT**

Data was collected using the Infusing Multicultural Physical Education Attitudes in Curriculum for Teachers (IMPACT) survey. Instrumentation of the survey was initially piloted in the summer of 2004 among urban teachers attending a summer workshop which taught methods of teaching in physical education (N=23). The goal of the survey was to serve as a tool to gauge teachers' use of culturally responsive pedagogy in instruction, express their own attitudes toward culturally responsive practices, and reflect upon their practices. Fifteen closed-ended items comprised the first section of the survey, which focused on general demographic questions related to age, gender, and race. Other questions in this section asked participants about the location and ethnic makeup of the schools they received their degree(s) from, how they classified the area they were raised in, their level of education, and any awards or outstanding citations they received in their profession (see Table 1).

The remaining twelve questions were reflective in nature (see Table 2). These items were used in order to allow the respondent to express an opinion or a perspective without being influenced by the researcher (Foddy, 1993). Reflection in physical education serves as a means through which educators can prepare for multiple educational scenarios (Gore, 1987; Hellison & Templin, 1991; Schempp & Templin, 1989; Schon, 1983). As expected, responses to open-ended items varied more than closed-ended items in the survey. However, the amount and quality of the information obtained justified the use of this instrument.

**Data Analysis: Validating Reflection While Monitoring Bias**

For this study, grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), utilizing constant comparison methodology (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) guided the examination of themes from the IMPACT survey. Strauss and Corbin (1998) state that the function of grounded theory is to provide a description of the data before conceptually ordering the data using discrete categories based on their properties and dimensions (p. 19). Finally, theorizing shapes concepts that emerge from the aforementioned analyses into a logical, systematic, and explanatory scheme (p. 21). This type of inductive analysis (Patton, 2002) prevents themes from being imposed on research prior to data collection. Comparison of the data from these teachers involved a process of separation to find possible variations and similarities within the surveys. As these variations and similarities were put into preliminary categories, they were again evaluated, and then placed into additional sub categories, before a consensus was formed regarding the findings.

The struggle for "objectivity" while examining data is as another important method in adhering to the principles of grounded theory (Patton, 2002, p. 93). Each piece of research, whether quantitative or qualitative in nature, has certain subjectivities associated with it. The important aspect of this is to recognize that subjectivity is an issue, and researchers should take appropriate measures to minimize its intrusion into their analyses (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 43).

**Table 1**

*IMPACT Survey Demographic Questions*

1. Gender
2. Number of years teaching public school elementary physical education?
3. What level of students are you currently instructing?
4. Please indicate your highest educational level attained.
5. What type of college/university/institution did you obtain your first degree/certification?
6. What type of college/university/institution did you obtain your second degree/certification?
7. What type of college/university/institution did you obtain your third degree/certification?
8. Please indicate the area of the United States that this institution is located.
9. At the time of your attendance, what was the approximate ethnic makeup of the school population? (by percentage)
10. Please indicate your race/ethnic origin.
11. Please indicate your age range.
12. What would be your best estimate of the total number of students currently in your class and the percentage (%) of students of color among these students?
13. Please indicate any awards and/or achievements that you have received related to physical education/education.
14. What type of area were you raised in?
15. What type of area represented the school(s) that you attended?

Social research is a reflexive entity (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1996). The principal researcher was an African American male deeply committed to education for Black students. As one raised in a predominately Black neighborhood and urban public school system, his experiences and identities gave him a lens by which to critically examine issues related to this demographic and other marginalized racial groups (Alridge, 2003; Banks 1993; Morris, 2004; Tillman, 2002). While confident of the ability to demonstrate neutrality in reporting the findings of the research, the principal investigator chose to enlist the help from an accomplished researcher versed in qualitative research methodology to assist in maintaining objectivity.

The principal investigator thought that this step was a necessary measure by which to ensure a higher level of reliability and validity for the study. These procedures helped to depict methods of instruction used by physical educators in the school system, providing a critique of their practices and possible ramifications of their actions for diverse student learning.

## Table 2

*IMPACT Survey Reflection Questions*

1. List several reasons why you chose to become an elementary physical education teacher.

2. (a) What is your idea of teaching?
   (b) Please identify three elements that define your idea of teaching.

3. (a) Briefly comment on if you feel your life experiences have had an impact on the development of your philosophy.
   (b) Do you feel that your background experiences influence your teaching methods and relationships with students?

4. Please identify three successful teaching strategies.

5. (a) What types of multicultural teaching styles/methods did you receive while obtaining your certification/degree(s)?
   (b) Do you feel these experiences aided you in helping to meet the needs of students from different backgrounds in your physical education learning environment?

6. To what extent are your lesson plans and curricular outcomes impacted by the ethnic makeup of the physical education environment?

7. Are you aware of certain ways to take into account communication, cultural or ethnic differences in teaching students in your physical education environments? Please share one or two ways.

8. a) Please list in order of 1 through 6 how you present a new lesson, skill, or task:

   Begin with history or background____
   Refer to activities that may be similar___
   Teach skills___
   Teach rules___
   Apply skills and rules to the game___
   Other:_____

b) Please provide additional information as to why you chose this particular order.

9. Please describe how you use verbal and non-verbal communication in your classes to interact with your students.

10. What do you consider the best and worse feedback approaches you use in your physical education classes?

11. What have you used in your physical education classes or other related settings to handle misbehavior or unwanted traits? Please describe one example.

12. Please share any other strategies that you have implemented in order to enhance your teaching and maximize student success in your classroom.

## Results and Discussion

In examining the data taken from the IMPACT survey, three major themes emerged that related to specifically to culturally responsive practices: (a) creating foundations for successful teaching, (b) multicultural training and the effect on instruction, and (c) verbal and non-verbal communication techniques. These themes are summarized as narratives with associated subthemes found in the text and underscored using direct quotes from the open-ended responses of the physical education teachers involved in the study. Ethnic backgrounds of the respondents were included to emphasize the findings from the data.

### Creating Foundations for Successful Teaching

The first major theme to emerge from the data concerned these teachers' reflections on what they considered appropriate practice in enforcing class protocols. Designing, posting, and consistently enforcing rules and guidelines were provided as being an effectual method for developing and maintaining success for students in their programs. Many of the responses stressed a view of allowing students a measure of responsibility and accountability for their own actions:

> For me, what works is that students have a combination of direct instruction with particular emphasis on rules and guidelines that are created at the beginning of the year and enforced regularly. –Tina, African American female

> Rules and guidelines need to be noted for students. It serves as a sort of contract for the class that students are responsible for. –William, Caucasian male

> I have found that letting students be responsible for their behavior works well. I design rules at the beginning of the year and students from different classes compete to see who follows rules the best during the set time period. This form of competition between classes, allows me to get more done. –Susan, Caucasian female

> Using consistent rules across grade levels in the school works as a strategy for me. Teaching younger classes translates into the older classes, because they already know the rules and the consequences for breaking them. –Justin, Caucasian male

> I keep rules and consequences posted throughout my gym so that students can't say that they haven't seen them. Other teachers see the rules and are aware that I mean business and don't just let our students play. –Cindy, Caucasian, female

These physical educators understood the importance that rules had for successful outcomes in class, particularly in regards to levying appropriate consequences (Lavay, French, & Henderson, 2006) and providing elementary learners a means to symbolically identify with the routines of the class (Culp, 2006b). While this observation seems apparent, poor teachers when frustrated in urban settings, often enforce rules in an inconsistent manner regardless of the subject area, which leads frustration and negotiations that undermine the educational environment (Brown, 2004). With the additional challenges often involved in maintaining an urban classroom, including the lack of resources, inconsistent or no involvement from parents, and students' awareness of these complexities, respondents thought that they could ill afford to create

haphazard situations for themselves and their students.

Teachers in this study stressed the importance of modeling and demonstration as another foundation for effective instruction. Demonstration was discussed in terms of allowing students to practice what they learned from the teacher with an assessment following the episode. These assessments measured the effect to which the original instruction assisted in the retention of skills. A sampling of the responses from participants in the study included the following:

> Teaching strategies for me utilize different types of instructional modeling based on what was being taught for the day. For first introducing an activity to be modeled by students, I try to use as much direct instruction as possible, because listening to the directions and getting the rules down is the most important for me in teaching. –Gloria, African American female

> I have my students demonstrate new skills/themes learned in class during my introduction and closure to each lesson. This also allows time for review and gauges whether students met the objectives and purposes of the lesson. –Lisa, Caucasian female

> With the amount of students I have, one of the techniques I use is peer modeling. I will pair students who model the correct movements with those who do not. This way, I can spend more time moving around to give feedback to everyone. –Randy, Caucasian male

Social cognitive theorists like Bandura (1986) postulate that people learn a vast majority of their behaviors through a combination of personal experience and modeling. Thus, the practices of these physical educators serve as a valid means by which to examine instruction in physical education. For CLD learners, mimicking the appropriate actions of peers and teachers is a helpful way to assist these students in meeting the most important goal that these students have as learners in the classroom: acclimatization. For new learners, particularly the elementary age populations, the idea of having a "sense of belonging" in classes becomes more comfortable in the routines and protocols of the class, thereby increasing their confidence.

Participants also thought that inclusion of students in activity was a relevant method for effective teaching. Responses from these teachers reflected the position that all students needed to participate in individual or cooperative activities and "class leaders" should be implemented to assist with this:

> I utilize "class leaders" when possible. This tends to keep students attentive more often and the leaders have to make sure they are instructing correctly so they will not be embarrassed being in front of their peers. –Patricia, African American female

> Cooperative grouping allows me to plan ahead by getting small groups of students in as many activities as possible. Rotating them from activity to activity keeps them moving and utilizes possible "down time", which is unproductive". –Melody, African American female

> Students need to be involved in a fair amount of individual and group work. There must be appropriate balance in this so that students can understand benefits and detriments to both. My classes however, typically emphasize group work more than individual work". –Jason, African American male

Research studies have indicated that certain cultural groups in the United States respond to different methods of achievement in classroom tasks. First Nation/North American Indian learners indicate a preference for group work, as it typically promotes cooperation among members of the group (Boseker, 1991; Boseker & Gordon, 1983). African Americans students conversely, show a propensity to be more effective in activities that do not involve large amounts of sedentary time (Grossman, 1995). Hispanic students, have been postulated to favor "hands on" activities, which engage their interest in lessons (Vasquez, 1990). Asian American students demonstrate an affinity toward structured class environments, and often choosing to refrain from volunteering for tasks unless asked (Baruth & Manning, 1992). The strategies for inclusion that these participants used were a mixture of different types of learning methods, which appeared to resemble practices that held promise for diverse learners.

**Multicultural Training and the Effect on Instruction**

As discussed in the introduction, diverse learners entering public schools in the United States have drastically changed what is considered as standard in relation to the classroom dynamics between teachers and students. It has been proven that urban schools have statistically higher rates of diverse learners, prompting the researchers to pose questions which gauged the participants' previous multicultural training, its relevance to diverse learners, any effects that multicultural training had on teachers' instructional styles and strategies. When asked about multicultural training prior to accepting their current teaching position, participants expressed responses ranging from little to no training, to training that was given relative to advanced degree attainment.

Multicultural? The only cultural type teaching styles consisted of different learning styles: auditory, sensory and visual. Plus adaptations for students with physical and educational needs were part of classes. –Tanya, Caucasian female

Only the basics: I received multicultural training in the city at [school deleted]. –Cindy, Caucasian female

Maybe two or three classes maximum: and even with that it was on how to be sensitive toward the poor or lower class. –Heather, Caucasian female

The only thing I have had in this school system dealt with African Americans in an infusion workshop. –Sarah, Caucasian female

We had courses that addressed issues through its focus on developmentally appropriate practices and how to develop an anti-biased environment. Issues of multiculturalism and diversity such as awareness of cultural influences and diversity of the students will be part of the classes of the future in my opinion. –Scott, Caucasian male

While getting my bachelors degree, I was well trained in working with students who had disabilities. Once I started my master's degree pursuit, I learned how to work with student of different nationalities. For these students who do not speak English, I would use hand gestures or have someone who spoke their language to sit next to them and translate for me. –Napoleon, African American male

Generally, teachers who had one to five years of teaching experience participated in multicultural training and were exposed to concepts regarding culturally responsive practices. Sarah's response however, highlights what can be the negative and positive effect of workshops, which focus on teaching to the traits of diverse learners. While it is commendable that differences between cultural groups are a focus of study for teachers wanting to better reach their students, it is equally important that infusion workshops and teacher preparation courses avoid a focus solely on one group of learners.

In this case, having African Americans as the only subject of importance in an infusion workshop for individuals who may already hold a certain amount of apprehension about the workshop is problematic. This action suggests that this group is the lone minority group represented in every urban school system in the country. Latham (1997) recommends that teachers be able to understand the differences between all cultural groups in the class as much as possible, in lieu of isolating one group. This produces dangerous outcomes by which content is derived from culture instead of emphasizing culturally responsive teaching.

When asked as to the relevance of this training, a few of these teachers noted that during the time they matriculated in their PETE programs, concepts related to culturally responsive pedagogy were not seen as very important and was mentioned almost solely in terms of multicultural education.

> Multicultural classes only left me with the understanding that everyone is different. Personally, [I feel] multiculturalism is just a buzzword that will be left alone in three years. –Ronald, African American male

> It wasn't very relevant in school. Now I try to plan activities that facilitate understanding across cultures and respect cultural differences. The history and meaning of different traditions and their value system is something I cover in class. –Justina, African American female

> I had some training, but I really did not see it as helpful. Our school at the time was primarily White and honestly, I don't think that many of us at the time would have been ready for it. –Sarah, Caucasian female

> Multicultural education was not that much of an issue that we discussed. I really do not see much relevance now, particularly since we have become more global. –Brenda, African American female

> We briefly covered multicultural education in my classes, but a class can only go so far. There are a lot of nationalities today and I don't know how we are going to keep track of them all. –Roy, African American male

Still, many of these teachers commented that despite the lack of relevance of multicultural concepts in their teacher preparatory programs, being introduced to these concepts aided in their transition to urban teaching, although not necessarily readily:

> The experiences I acquired in college helped me, but I learned even more when I began teaching and working with the students first hand. They taught me to be careful not to leave anyone out because of a language barrier. –Latisha, African American female

> Most definitely: I had no experience with African American students. I grew up in [deleted] County and went to very rural schools. I had no idea of all the games and traditions of their

> culture. I am now able to infuse their culture in my P.E. classes. –Cindy, Caucasian female
>
> Being introduced to multicultural education in my student teaching gave me a better understanding about the type of commitment I would be making if I decided to teach students from different nationalities in the city. –Mary, Caucasian female
>
> Concepts taught in the textbook styles were very different from actual experience. You need experience dealing with the challenges of lower income communities in an urban setting. –Kimberly, Caucasian female

Respondents spoke of the relevance of culturally responsive methods of teaching in terms of multicultural concepts in terms of race (African American), class (lower income community), and language differences, and not much in terms of fostering appropriate practices for all students. This is a common flaw noted by Gomez (1991), given that a focus on multiculturalism has been present for much longer than an emphasis on culturally responsive teaching, an offset of multiculturalism. Still, it is important for teacher training programs to note this distinction, as it has implications for how future practitioners view these concepts, assess their applicability to their teaching and follow through in implementing them.

While their comments may be indicative of the schools where these teachers worked, their comments also imply that the multicultural training they did receive was poor. These comments and the statements from their peers failed to reference the impact of history and pre-existing social structures which could account for these differences, a crucial aspect of understanding the identity of cultural groups in the United States. This is an unfortunate failure of many multicultural training programs and courses in which culturally responsive pedagogy is discussed (St. Clair, 2008).

Teachers in this era of education need information on how culturally responsive practices relate to the construction of lesson plans and curriculum outcomes. Villegas and Lucas (2002) in reflecting upon current demographic statistics of the United States point out that "preparing teachers to teach children of diverse racial, ethnic, social class, and language backgrounds is a pressing issue in teacher education today and will continue to be for some time to come" (p. 20). Banks (2007) echoes these sentiments, stating that at the very least; teacher preparation courses which focus on learners from diverse backgrounds will help teachers challenge and expand their repertoire of teaching that is overwhelmingly dominated by Eurocentric thought.

It was clear after examining further, that the curriculum and cultural demographic of students in the class had an impact on the design of the teachers' lesson plans. The extent to which these factors impacted lessons was also discussed:

> My lesson plans are the reflection of the [deleted] public school system's elementary physical education objectives. I include lead-up activities to reinforce learned skills and allow students to implement skills as they are being introduced to new games that reflect other cultures to broaden their horizon. –Patricia, African American female
>
> A few of my students speak a second language and don't understand a lot of English. I work one on one with them when doing written assessments. I also have an ESOL teacher that gives me advice about demonstration when teaching, which I do anyways. –Tony, African American male

> I have always thought that you need to teach to the learners in your class. I have a large percentage of minorities that I teach. It is important to keep students interested by infusing their culture into some of the lessons. –Kara, Caucasian female

> I serve all in this school and offer many sports from different parts of the world. For example, we play hockey, kin ball and lacrosse from Canada, cricket and shuffle board from England, as well as most of the traditional "Olympic" sports". It has more to do with the curriculum that I had in Canada and the adjustment that I had to make to this curriculum here in the U.S. –Aaron, Caucasian male

> The curriculum dictates what I present in class. If it were more representative of ethnic concepts, then I would teach them. I don't feel comfortable yet introducing it in my lessons. –Tessa, African American female

The set of statements by Brenda, Natalie, and Michael respectively, had curious racial overtones.

> Looking at my lesson plans, one could not tell which ethnic group is being taught with the exception of African American History Month. –Brenda, African American female

> Nearly all of my lessons involve dance. I had been used to teaching square and circle dances. To get the African Americans [students] interested, I have to add in their types of dances. It can be a little intimidating for a Caucasian teacher to teach dance to African Americans when you yourself are not the greatest. –Natalie, Caucasian female

> My lesson plans are directly impacted by ethnic make-up. They are often simple and have to be of lower expectations because if they are too complicated or hard, lessons result in chaos and major behavior problems in the class, which usually lead to physical altercations. –Michael, Caucasian male

These previous statements were a few of several that singled out ethnic groups, primarily African Americans, in reference to planning lessons. To be diplomatic, African American students constituted the majority of students in the schools where this research was conducted, so it would not be unreasonable to consider the fact that the perspectives of this cultural group would be of focus. Still, other ethnic groups comprise these schools, and there is question as to what impact the teacher, in the first instance Brenda, had on what is presented in classes.

If we presume that Brenda has African Americans making up the majority of students she teaches, is she marginalizing other students in her class by only presenting lesson plans which speak from the African American perspective? Similarly, are African American students in her class being marginalized by only being of focus during the month of February? The hope is that teachers like Brenda will recognize the accomplishments of all groups in classes, and highlight these contributions so that each of her students will develop a strong sense of identity with themselves and with others in their peer group.

Natalie's remarks illuminate a unique perspective of dance. She expresses that nearly all of her cultural activities involve dance, and feels that this is the only method African American students will be involved in dance

related activities. While dance is certainly a product of culture and a means of social interaction and expression, it is also an activity of movement, which can be performed with practice proficiently regardless of race. Her viewpoint is likely representative of her own discomfort and deficiency in teaching dance, which needs to be rectified.

Michael invokes a negative view regarding the students in his classes, implying that his students do not possess the cognitive skills by which to be responsible participants in his physical education classes. Standards and expectations for his classes then, in his opinion, should be lowered. What is most damning is that his statements imply that his ethnic learners are inferior students, which in his mind, validates his lesson choices. Michaels' opinions stand in direct contrast with the positions of Brookhart and Rusnak (1993), Brophy (1999), and Zeichner (1996), who state that successful teachers of diverse learners have high expectations and communicate these to students while being sensitive to the problems of urban youth.

Additionally, Michael also fails to consider that his learners in class may acquire knowledge in a different manner that he is accustomed to. Vasquez (1990) espouses that teachers who recognize this among students should focus on (a) content-what is taught, (b) context-the physical and psychological environment of the classroom, and (c) mode-how the information is treated or presented. It is clear that Michael's philosophy on teaching the learners in his class is in need of revision.

**Verbal and Non-verbal Methods of Communication**

An undercurrent for the hypothesis for this research was to uncover methods of communication used for diverse learners, which had relevance for urban physical education classes. With differences in students reflected in the demographics of the school system, it was deemed appropriate to review communication techniques to uncover if there were any unique practices used by these teachers:

> I don't use a whistle in my classes. I have a countdown from 5 to 1. The students know on one they are to freeze and sit where they are. When they are talking when I am trying to talk, I remind them "My time, your time." –Kevin, Caucasian Male

> Discussion is always short to maximize class active time. I raise my hand and they raise their hands with the understanding that they need to be quiet and listen for directions. –Cindy, Caucasian female

> Verbal feedback I use includes giving directions, closure, discussion and discipline. This seems to work faster and lessens any miscommunications. –Brenda, African American female

> I am constantly moving around the gym. I talk a lot in the beginning then taper off considerably the last half of class. I physically show students skills. I help them move (physically) to attain success in a skill. –Collin, Caucasian male

> Most of the verbal feedback that I use besides my voice is by utilizing other students who model appropriate behaviors well. This actually helps me to not lose my voice and students tend to listen more to a peer depending on what is being presented. –Cynthia, African American female

Participants were also asked about non-verbal practices that they routinely used in teaching.

> Nonverbal feedback I use are high-fives, pats on the back, eye contact, the "teacher-look" (the ones mom's give when their child is not doing what they are supposed to do), and standing close to a child who is off task (proximity). –Cameron, Caucasian male
>
> I use hand signals to make sure students are looking at me while giving out instructions. I also have rules on when to listen, especially when handling equipment and leaving the gym. –Sarah, Caucasian female
>
> I use eye contact, facial expressions, body posture and often I will change my dictation of voice to a mild one but yet firm when I need a desired response from students. –Alexandra, Caucasian female
>
> Props are useful if they are done correctly. Students can get an idea of what is supposed to be happening. –Greg, Caucasian male
>
> I often have a set of stares and facial expressions that I will use to get my point across. By the time students get to the point of almost matriculating out of school, they know what the stares are for. Most of the time, I don't use any non-verbal communication unless I mean business. My gestures are not always negative however. –Tracy, Caucasian female

It was concluded from the general responses from the 31 teachers that direct, command style methods of verbal communication encompassed their methods of communication. Non-verbal methods of communication generally were reflective of physical reinforcements (i.e., handshakes, pats on the back) and facial expressions (i.e., smiles and frowns). While there were no methods of communication that differed from what would be considered as acceptable practice in many physical education classes, it is important to provide discourse on how these practices may relate to the teaching of diverse learners.

Intercultural communication has unique implications for urban physical education classes because of the demographic of learners found in these environments. Lustig and Koester (2009) define intercultural communication as a "symbolic, interpretive, transactional, contextual process in which people from different cultures created shared meanings" (p. 51). Communication of this sort relies on expectations for appropriate behavior when interacting with others and having predictions about how others will act (Gudykunst & Kim, 1997). These expectations can be seen in observing how members of cultural groups respond to proximity, rules about punctuality, the degree of detail included in messages, and choosing topics of conversation (Chamberlain, 2005).

Banks (2009) holds that communication of this sort is an important concept in discussing culturally responsive practices because it helps to explain many concepts and misunderstandings that often occur between ethnic groups in the United States. Further, he indicated that individuals who are socialized in the same culture or microculture are more likely to have shared meanings or symbols than are individuals who are socialized within different microcultures, cultures, and nations. The wider the differences in cultures or microcultures between individuals, the more ineffective communication is likely to be (p. 82). For physical educators to teach with the considerations of the diverse learners in their class in mind, they need to be aware that communication with their students encompasses

more than sets of standard phrases found in their teacher preparation texts. If issues arise regarding communication, teachers need to reflect upon the reasons for these issues and take steps to clearly identify to all of their students what is to occur in their classes.

## Summary and Conclusions

We surveyed the perceptions of primary physical education teachers in an urban setting to find strategies that could be of benefit in teaching culturally and linguistically diverse learners in these environments. We found that the majority of the teachers had appropriate routines in place, which mirrored successful practices for physical educators in any setting. Second, these teachers reported little exposure to culturally responsive practices in their teacher preparation, bringing about a sense of regret. Finally, teachers in general indicated that they practiced culturally diverse teaching in their classes for all learners, but their comments tended to focus on only the needs of African American learners. Our findings support the view that PETE programs, multicultural training sessions for practicing teachers, and literature in physical education should include more discourse in regards to relevant teaching strategies, which promote the success of CLD students in physical education (Culp, Chepyator-Thomson & Hsu, 2009).

It was pleasing to find that teachers in this study were able to demonstrate knowledge, albeit written, of correct routines to use for students in their classes. What can be inferred from the comments of the participants is that their PETE programs did an adequate job of instilling a foundation for teaching effectively in physical education. This is a mark of good teacher preparation, and if nothing was gained by their participation in this study, these teachers can at least be confident in their recognition of these constructs.

However, participants' comments regarding their perceived lack of exposure to culturally responsive practices show a deficiency in their teacher preparation programs and in-service training courses. Indeed, Burden, Hodge, O'Bryant, and Harrison (2004) stressed this as an area of emphasis for PETE programs, along with Wallace (2000) who points out that this should be provided as standard practice in training on how to deal with issues of culture, race, and language in schools. Given the climate of the 21st century and the many ethnic groups that are represented in the United States, issues that are multicultural and diverse in nature are not exclusively the issues of just one population, nor are they confined to just one area. Halper (2001) in discussing the growth of Los Angeles, California, over the past two decades stressed that the sharp distinctions between traditionally urban and suburban areas have become blurred due to population changes. These "boombergs" as he termed them, have made issues once associated with a specific locality issues for everyone.

Urban schools and the challenges within them are visible. These institutions can no longer afford to fall victim to the *island paradigm,* which is a term we use to express the opinion that urban areas should cease to be viewed from afar as separate, remote, and treacherous isles away from the mainland. Teachers and students on these urban islands are stranded in disproportionate numbers, and methods by which to assist them in connecting back to the mainland should be proposed.

Contrary to the dissenting opinion of D'Souza (1998), culturally responsive pedagogy does not demand an overhaul of existing curriculum, but at least a review of its application to the learners which comprise the class. Responsive pedagogy of this type is not withheld for just one group of learners. As the actions in the years after Brown versus Board of Education have demonstrated, racial demographics in urban schools have been impacted by a host of federal, state, and municipal issues which have impacted the availability of

resources for these areas. Much work remains to be done in this area, and physical education exists as a viable method by which to aid in these tasks because sport is one of the most easily recognizable characteristic of a groups culture. To end, we believe that a focus on culturally responsive practices is an investment on a just pedagogy, which has implications for the present learners we are entrusted with and the future learners yet to follow.

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