

The Role of Male Physical Educators and Female Students' Physical

BY TOMISLAVA CAVAR

Fewer female students enrol within physical education classes, despite attempts by school boards to implement new policies and amend outmoded curricula to provide a more equitable environment.

L'auteure de cet article commente le rôle des professeurs masculins en éducation physique et des administrateurs qui doivent créer un environnement et une expérience équitables, inclusives qui soutiennent les femmes, parce que c'est à la fois exposer le problème et le résoudre.

Within Canadian society many transformations have taken place; however, the failure to recognise females as equals within various societal institutions continues to impede their pursuits of advancement. Within the educational system, lack of equal opportunities and the reinforcement of gendered and sexist practices compromise female students' involvements and the development of fundamental skills. Specifically, within the stream of Physical Education, gendered methods of teaching are particularly bolstered within its classes where "sport comes to embody and recreate male power and domination." (Theberge 186). Fewer

female students enrol in physical education classes, despite attempts by school boards to implement new policies and amend outmoded curricula to provide a more equitable environment. As a result, female students do not benefit from the physical, social, mental and emotional components of health that are attributed to regular physical activity, as do their male counterparts. In order to enhance female students' experiences within the physical education setting, the following analysis will examine current policies, curriculum guidelines, pedagogical approaches and provide recommendations in attempt to create awareness and help facilitate positive changes. However, in order for significant achievements to occur, men also need to assume a role in creating affirmative actions programs within the physical education setting that will positively impact females. As stated by bell hooks in *Men: Comrades in Struggle*, "until men share equal responsibility for struggling to end sexism, the feminist movement will reflect the very sexist contradictions we wish to eradicate" (586). The relationship between physical education and inequalities within the classroom setting provides insight on how our social relations are produced and rationalized through a bureaucratic framework and highlights women's subordinate status within society. The female quest for emancipation from a patriarchal system is an ongoing struggle and in order to enhance their experiences within physical education and other social frameworks, males need to pursue a collaborative role so that significant advancements may oc-

cur. The marginalization of female students within Physical Education can be attributed to the masculine hegemonic ideals reproduced within educational board policies, curriculum and pedagogical approaches; in order to provide gender equitable education, male educators and administrators must assume a shared responsibility to create positive changes.

Board policy

The educational system reflects social relations and structure. Policies are created and re-created to ensure a quality of education for its students, yet unfortunately continue "to meet the needs and learning styles of males" (Reynolds 255). There is a growing concern for the number of female youths who are not enrolling in physical education classes despite the demonstrated benefits of regular participation in physical activity. The Canadian Association for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance (CAHPERD) produced a report in 1998 entitled "Making the case for Physical Education in Canada." It asserted that in addition to the physical and social benefits, "moderate to vigorous physical activity favourably enhances skill performance in classroom functions such as arithmetic, reading, memorization and categorization" (Keays cited in CAHPERD 8). However, due to marginalized and alienating experiences where females felt either intimidated or harassed by the boys, the competitive nature of the class, or the lack of enjoyment from the physical education experience their participation within physical education classes and

Administrators in the Advancement of Educational Experiences

overall engagement in physical activity have declined. Furthermore, a report on “Challenges and Choices for Girls and Young Women,” presented to The Royal Commission on Learning (1994) stated that in comparison to males, females are more unhealthy, are more prone to eating disorders, tend to engage in smoking by the age of 15, and are less physically active (Ballon 9). In many instances, Physical Education is perceived as insignificant due to the all too common misconception that the “leisurely activities” and “playing of games” are trivial and unnecessary to the development of the individual. However, the aforementioned research highlights how regular participation in physical activity is invaluable, while inactivity may predispose certain individuals to an unhealthy lifestyle. The current educational framework has inhibited females’ participation, while fostering and promoting a haven for male students and thereby further reinforcing differences and inequalities.

The Toronto District School Board (TDSB) recognized that inequalities within the system existed and that it may be attributed to one’s race, ethnicity, sex, gender, socioeconomic status, or ability; thus impeding a student’s full potential to learn and develop the necessary skills needed to benefit and prosper within society. An initiative taken by the TDSB to promote equity within their educational system resulted in the creation of the “Equity Foundation” policy (B.03), which stated, “fairness, equity, and inclusion are essential principles of our school system and are integrated into all our policies, programs, operations and prac-



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tices” (TDSB, 1999). However, the application of these policies to the discipline of Physical Education is of concern. The policy provides for constructive methods in its approach to manage such inequalities; however, the implementation of these measures is of interest.

The curriculum of our schools

accurately reflects and uses the variety of knowledge of all peoples as the basis for instruction; that it actively provides opportunities for all students to understand the factors that cause inequity in society and to understand the similarities, differences and the connections between different forms of dis-

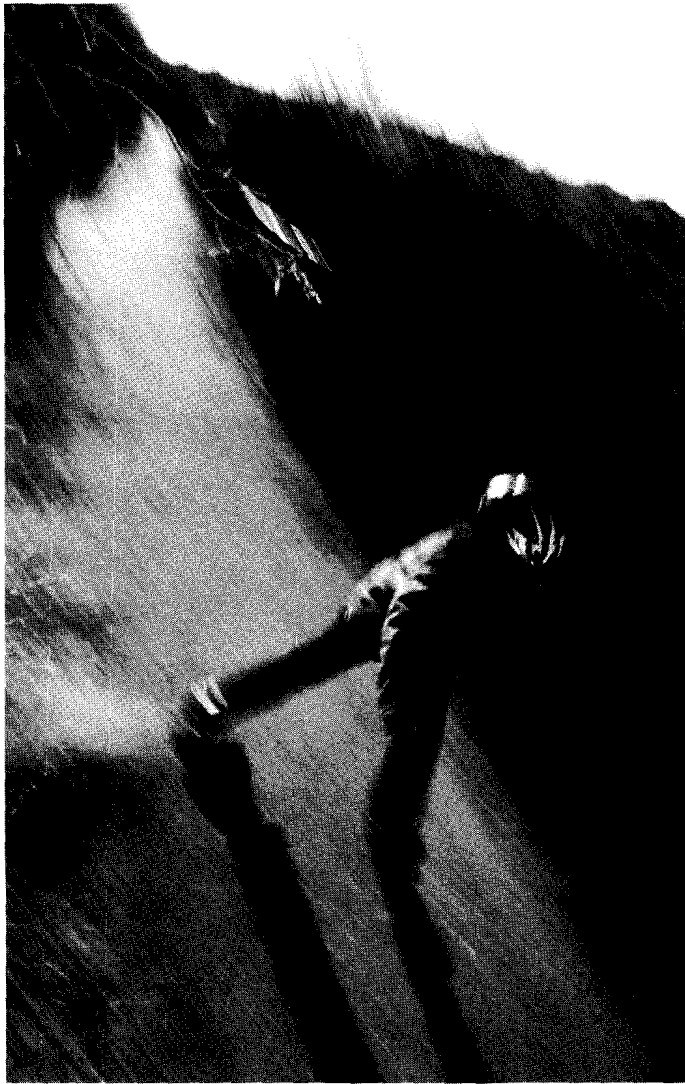


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crimination, and that it helps students to acquire the skills and knowledge that enable them to challenge unjust practices, and to build positive human relationships among their fellow students, and among all members of society. (TDSB 1999)

As a general policy for equity, it addresses and attempts to provide a solution for all forms of systemic discrimination. While inspiring, its forthrightness is misleading. The Board is seeking to address discriminatory attitudes, beliefs, and practices. The statement assures that these measures are implemented persistently, consistently and successfully. This utopian declaration would be

more validating if the policy went into further detail to explain how these actions were to be addressed within various grades and subject levels, thereby providing for a more practical application.

Another matter of concern is that these policies are not specifically enforced, as they are not mandated nor are teachers held accountable if not taught. Within many university Bachelor of Education programs, candidates are not effectively taught how to deal with such issues, and if they are discussed it is done on an insignificant scale. When dealing with the notion of providing "opportunities for all students to understand the factors that cause inequity in schools, it should not be lim-

ited to a workshop held once a year, a public service announcement over the P.A. system, or supplementary lesson plans provided to teachers as a novel idea. Nevertheless, the board's policy statement should be supported as it provides a means of educating students, teachers, as well as administrators, about fundamental issues highlighting how certain variables influence formative educational experiences. The stance that the TDSB has taken is important and aspires to a high level of achievement. However the challenge lies within its application of the policy and the hierarchical approach to create change.

When dealing with inequities, one of the overarching dilemmas continues to be the lack of support and resources available to combat them.

The Toronto Board Equity policy states:

All our students are provided with equitable opportunities to be successful in our system; that institutional barriers to such success are identified and removed, and that all learners are provided with supports and rewards to develop their abilities and achieve their aspirations. (TDSB 1999)

The "barriers" that do exist may be easy to identify, however, the challenge to "remove" such obstacles are not always straightforward, as these are not tangible items; rather ideals and beliefs constructed and reinforced within social systems. For example, masculine hegemonic ideals are "constructed in relation to and against femininity and subordinated forms of masculinity. The dominant masculine form is characterized by heterosexuality, power, authority, aggression and technical competence" (Mac an Ghail 12) and therefore, these values act as a foundation from which inequalities arise. In order to neutralize these differences, an emphasis should be placed upon "human qualities" that accentuate similarities between male and female students, rather than the distinctions that divide them.

Despite the effort made by the Toronto District School Board to promote equitable policies, the hierarchical approach provided limited success; the "trickle down effect" from theory to practice failed to manifest itself beyond a cursory level. An alternative method utilized by the Saskatchewan Board of Education's policy, "Equity in Education" written in 1997, emphasized a collaborative approach, in which different levels of organization committed themselves to a unified objective. The Saskatchewan board believed that if any transformations were to occur, it would be dependent upon dedicated members of the school community. An emphasis was placed upon "fa-



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cilitating a high-profile, long-term process approach [that] requires time and sustained commitment” (Saskatchewan Board of Education). Of greater significance was how the Saskatchewan Board of Education acknowledged within their “action plan” that a change in behaviour and attitude was a key factor in facilitating change. Understanding that while actions are needed to continue removing structural and systemic barriers, in many cases the most significant work must occur within each one of us; as we examine our personal values and attitudes and reflect upon our behaviour and commitment (Saskatchewan Board of Education).

The benefits of a collaborative approach that values the importance of individuals doing their part, clearly outweigh those of the hierarchical process, in that it values the input of the community members where the exchange of ideas and the development of long-term relationships are dedicated to change. A new perspective and approach within the discipline

of Physical Education should incorporate the framework and envisioned values outlined within the Saskatchewan Board of Education policies. Importantly so, as the Toronto Board acknowledged the basis of inequities, administrators and policy makers must be aware and take into consideration that females are not a homogeneous group and that they differentiate from one another as a result of their race, ethnicity, sexual orientation or ability. Their experiences are individualistic and unique in their own manner and when creating an atmosphere that is conducive to physical education experience, or a policy, curriculum or pedagogical approach must take these factors into account. Therefore, female students need to be given a “voice” in order to express their concerns within physical education settings, and physical educators need to re-evaluate and reflect upon their objectives and mandates. A renewal of commitment and collaborative approach for change within indi-

vidual physical education classes and departments need to be fostered and supported if any future changes are to occur.

Curriculum

The British Columbia Ministry of Education commissioned a report in November 2001, “Physical Education Curriculum Review,” and claimed that regardless of their high standards of curriculum, it is not being administered in its entirety, and as a result students do not benefit from their educational experience. The report attributed the lack of improvement in student participation rates to the lack of resources, the fact that segments of the curriculum were not being implemented into the courses (i.e. dance and gymnastics) and that there was not a provincial standard to measure individual achievement. The report also acknowledged that low levels of female participation were attributed to negative experiences in earlier

grades, where the focus was oriented too much on sport and competition, emphasis on repetition of mechanical skills instead of play, as well as lack of accessibility. It was concluded that if female students had had more of a positive or rewarding experience within elementary grades, then enrolment at the secondary level would

“Since men are the primary agents maintaining sexist oppression, they can only be eradicated if men are compelled to assume responsibility for transforming their consciousness.”

be higher (British Columbia Ministry of Education).

In attempt to provide an environment conducive to all students, a study was conducted within the United States where the “Sport for Peace Curriculum” was implemented that “function[ed] to enhance students” opportunities to participate within an equitably structured environment” (Ennis 5). Teachers assign various individuals a “student coach” position to assist other individuals in the development of a particular skill. Every student is given the opportunity to participate as a coach, player, statistician, official or time/score-keeper. The teacher reinforces the notion of working together and determining positive relationships with each other.

By extending the length of the unit to promote affiliation, creating a family atmosphere, assigning positive, group oriented responsibilities to the coach, and providing a sense of ownership of all team members. Play-

ers 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 members, and to enhance the performance of others on the team by providing opportunities to practice and instructional cues to improve (Ennis 8).

Teachers helped facilitate and guide the class and provided strategies and expectations for the groups to meet. Students had an additional sense of responsibility and were accountable for creating an environment conducive for everyone to play in. The appeal of this approach was that the emphasis upon establishing positive relationships was the primary objective and the development of skills and the competition of the game were deemed of limited importance. This method minimized the alienation of females and other students within physical education, and fostered the notion of teamwork and the necessary steps needed to develop a successful team. The success of a team was not based upon the winning game in class, rather the lessons learned needed to become effective as a whole. As a result, this approach was beneficial in the sense that it provided for a growing and personal experience. Ennis did report that within this study there was some resistance of males and their co-operation within certain activities. Some males were bothered with the low skilled players and as a result, teachers had to either reinforce the objective of the course, or modify the program encouraging males to conform. However, over time it was documented that males did become more respectful and co-operative of females and non-skilled players. It is important to recognize that even though the Sport for Peace curriculum did provide a setting where students were

encouraged to collaboratively work together, it “create[s] an environment that helps the teacher to change and sustain a more equitable focus” (Ennis 12) than before using a minimum of extra resources. Therefore, this case refutes many excuses for not facilitating change.

Pedagogical approach

Bell hooks stated that, “like women, men have been socialized to passively accept sexist ideology. While they need not blame themselves for accepting sexism, they must assume responsibility for eliminating it” (hooks 581). As society proceeds into the twenty-first century, many advances within society have occurred and with that, the desire for an equitable pedagogy. Teaching is a predominantly female profession and female educators are assumed to possess nurturing, caring characteristics. However, as a male educator and specifically a male physical educator, to exhibit such qualities undermines their “masculine” identity and sense of worth, as to possess any feminine characteristics devalues their status, power and authority. Haywood and Mac an Ghail examined how the masculinities of teachers are created within the school setting and concluded that it was the ability to exert discipline as well as the educator’s style of teaching which are categorized into the following: the Professionals, which focused on an authoritarian style of teaching and is a type of masculinity that “draws on themes of paternalism.” The Old Collectivist approach “emphasize[s] equality, meritocracy, anti-sexist and anti-racist practices. This can be seen as a masculine style that was drawing on liberal pluralist and feminist ideas.” The New Entrepreneurs

welcomed a labour process which was redefining teachers’ work in terms of appraisal, accountability and effective management. This type of masculinity worked with ideas of a

conventional upwardly mobile industrial and business like masculinity. (Haywood and Macan Gaill 53)

Therefore, the surfacing of the various types of masculinities illustrates a progression from the traditional model or prototype of "how to be a man," and does not necessarily confine males to a rigid standard that they once had to adhere and conform to. Male teachers who believe and adopt a more liberal approach such as the "Old Collectivists" can lead by example and positively influence younger male students by displaying a more egalitarian, anti-sexist/anti-racist approach. However, when discussing the teaching style of a male physical educator, within a non-traditional classroom, it is almost expected that a hypermasculinized approach is taken, in order to discipline the class, as well as maintain their status of power, strength and authority.

Hickey and Fitzclarence state "as embedded, embodied and traditional beings, educators face considerable upheaval in any reconstruction of what is "known and secure" (4) and as a result, there may be resistance to create change. Ultimately, at the root of the problem are the attitudes and beliefs of women's secondary position within society. In order for change to occur, the myth of men's superiority over women must be contradicted and women must be included, accepted, and celebrated as equals. These ideologies are not likely to be overcome in the near future; however accepting a role to create positive spaces and opportunities for females provides a foundation to establish a new manner of accomplishing things. There have been suggestions to provide females with a more equitable environment within physical education classes; however, it is vitally important that these suggestions are rigorously implemented and continually improved upon to enhance females' experiences. It is especially important to increase fe-

males' self-esteem within physical education, as the stage of adolescence is an onerous one due to the onset of physical changes, peer pressures, gaining acceptance, and the self-esteem of teenagers is fragile due to many expectations exerted within the home or school. Therefore, if females thrive in the discipline of Physical Education, it may translate into more confidence within academic subjects as previously mentioned, in addition to the physical, social, mental and emotional benefits of health. There have been discussions on the issues of gender equity, yet there has only been limited consultation with male educators regarding their role within this process. It is important to include males within this process if an anti-sexist environment is to emerge, as men are integral to both the problem and the solution.

Since men are the primary agents maintaining and supporting sexism and sexist oppression, they can only be successfully eradicated if men are compelled to assume responsibility for transforming their consciousness and the consciousness of society as a whole. (hooks 586)

If attitudes and change are to occur among male physical educators, one of many starting points would be to create organizations that support and promote ideals of equality, such as The United States' National Organization for Men Against Sexism and Toronto's Metro Men against Violence; yet specifically within the context of physical education and sport where male physical educators would take a leadership role in advocating for change. Taking this initiative could provide for a more equitable experience as well as educate and advocate for positive social change. As not all males benefit from a patriarchal and sexist society, this kind of paradigm shift would be advantageous to them as well and lessen the need to conform

to standards that position them in a secondary state like their female counterparts. Therefore, an initiative needs to be taken to identify common goals concerning patriarchal attitudes and systemic oppression in order to facilitate positive changes.

The dawning of a new century

The marginalization of female students within Physical Education has been attributed to the masculine hegemonic ideals reproduced within educational board policies, curriculum and pedagogical approaches, and in order to provide gender equitable education, male educators and administrators must assume a shared responsibility to create positive changes. It has been demonstrated how current practices within the educational system continue to cater to males' needs, and while several attempts have been addressed at a hierarchal level to provide for a more inclusive experience for females, it proves to be of limited success. There have been case scenarios where groups or individuals have taken a creative element when dealing with inequities and have suggested a collaborative approach, with a long term commitment that focuses on changes in attitude and behaviour; fostering healthy, cooperative relationships between males and females and adopting different teaching styles, all account for methods that male educators and administrators can embrace in order to make a difference. "Men must become increasingly active in transforming their own culture, which in turn affects the conditions under which they will parent and love, and in which their own children will have to make their way in the future" (Burstyn 274). Therefore, the responsibility that men assume is a significant determinant of women's advancements within society. In order for men to adopt an active role, it must provide meaning and value to them, otherwise the power and privilege that they bestow is of

greater importance and worth.

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LATORIAL FAISON

The Pediatrician

I watched him
as he looked my kid over
just skimming ...
ears, nose, mouth, feet, legs
head circumference
I guess he was thorough
because my baby was happy
as a lamb
and I just want to know if
the slight twist in his left
foot, leg, tibia, whatever ...
will be a bother in the future
so I watched him
as he looked my kid over
making small talk
in eighteen month old tongue
while I wondered where the
blame belonged
as he told me my kid was fine
"right where he needed to
be"
so he said ...
and so we'll see him in six
months
to repeat the cycle
repeat the questions ... the
answers
the uncertainty.

Latorial Faison is the mother of two children.



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