

Integrating Ethnic and Gender Diversity into the Sport History Curriculum

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In recent years a major debate has developed in American universities and colleges and in the larger society over the content and purpose of a liberal education and the need for curricula to reflect the realities of the American culture and society. Because sport has its historical roots in the social and physical struggles of various racial and ethnic groups, it is the premise of this paper that the sport history curriculum should be moving from the current model which is predominantly monocultural to a multicultural one. Indispensable to a multicultural sport history curriculum is a demonstration of sensitivity to issues of race, ethnicity, gender and class as they relate to the rich complexity and diversity of the playing fields of yesteryear.

RATIONALE

Integrating the sport history curriculum is morally, and intellectually grounded. Its moral justification is rooted first in its respect for the human person. This respect is and must be for all sports persons, not simply as abstracted individuals but as sports persons-in-communities, or defining groups. Instruction in sport history, therefore must emphasize the ethical and social dimensions of the subject matter as well as their applications to the playing fields of North America.

Multicultural sport history is intellectually grounded on several levels. It is a necessary corrective for the conceptual and content inadequacy of the exclusive curriculum which omits or diminishes the variety of the human culture. Multicultural sport history is a necessary corrective for racist, sexist, classist and chauvinist approaches to sport history which now exist. Multiculturalism envisions and encourages, moreover, a sport history curriculum reflective of the society and world in which we live and is an effective response to the global economy as well as societal changes and demands.

While the North American landscape has always been diverse, with the recent increased arrivals of immigrants from Southeast Asia, Central and South America, and other countries our playing fields have become even more diverse. Across all age groups in the state of California for example, the population of people of color is expected to become the majority shortly after the turn of the century. Indeed 146 languages are currently spoken in Los Angeles. Although California is leading the U.S.A. in demographic diversity, the states of Florida, Illinois, New York, Texas and most of the nation's largest cities will be equally as diverse by the turn of the century. Such population shifts require a response which prepares all students for a diverse society and nowhere is there a better reflection of society than on the playing fields of North America.

GOALS OF A MULTICULTURAL SPORTS HISTORY CURRICULUM

The goals of a multicultural sport history curriculum are practical as well as moral. The important task for the sport historian is to create an environment in which students can learn to think critically about their own sporting experiences, to view their sport environment with a measure of objectivity and reason to assume responsibility for the world in which they play.

DEFINING THE MULTICULTURAL SPORT HISTORY CURRICULUM

The ideal multicultural sport history curriculum is several things at once. It is first of all a philosophy or a framework and statement of understanding and commitment. It is also a methodology, a definitive approach and perspective to achieve stated goals. It is a process, that is to say, a series of activities and interactions to achieve stated goals. Finally, it is a product, perceptible and definable results, which are open to ongoing refinement and expansion.

This multicultural sport history curriculum 1) affirms the concept of diversity as central and indispensable to understanding the social reality of the playing field, 2) provides fundamental grounding in diverse cultures and gender studies as essential to a serious and adequate sports education 3) is committed to equal opportunity and maximum outcome for all students 4) is directed towards providing students with knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to contribute to the human community and 5) is committed to furthering the body of knowledge of diversity in sport history through research and scholarly debate.

CURRICULUM

Reassessment and recrafting of the sport history curriculum to reflect the multicultural reality of the playing fields, the campus and the community is essential and indispensable. There is no single model which stands in opposition to the existing curricula. What unites most is their goal of overcoming what may be called the “exclusive” curricula, whether these be Eurocentric, Anglo-centric, or male-centric. The problem with “exclusive” curricula is that they equate the values of the dominant group with “universality,” and falsely present the experience of a dominant group as a formula for all other groups. The sport historian is faced with some hard choices in redefining and reconceptualizing the existing curriculum—especially in areas which reflect cultural values. Transforming the normally male and Eurocentric sport history curriculum to a multicultural one should not be seen as “catering to special interests” as exemplified in the ghettoization of women and blacks in most current sport history texts. Respect for diversity requires that we move beyond the chauvinistic notion that the “exclusive” curricula (i.e. sport history reflecting the white male experience exclusively) are synonymous with universalism. Multiple acculturation, that is to say, pursuing multiple models must be facilitated. Such a transformation requires a greater emphasis on the critical analysis of social problems and inequity. It requires helping students to identify options for decisions, to take action to implement those decisions and to become social critics of the traditional sport history texts.

CURRENT SOCIAL CLIMATE

We cannot leave the responsibility of research on ethnic and gender diversity in sport history to women, members of color and David Wiggins. We all must accept the obligation to promote the study of the contributions of many ethnic groups to sport history by 1) the nurturing of members of all ethnic groups, 2) the encouragement of students of color to pursue scholarly inquiry in the subject 3) the exercising of leadership in providing for the discussion of alternate models of sport history instruction and research and 4) the establishment of a registry where source materials, teaching materials and information relative to the integration of diversity into the sport history classroom can be placed.

Techniques Used:

Essays. I am Proud. My Personal Sport History. Mother/Father Lines. My Home Town’s Sport History.

Miscellaneous. Diversity Exercise. Designer Baby Exercise. Use of videos such as “Facing Differences.” “There Is Always Sun Shining Some Place.” “A League of their Own.”