

# Implications of the Multicultural Integration Mechanism in American Physical Education for Physical Education in China

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## Abstract

The United States is a nation of diverse ethnic groups that upholds and embraces multiculturalism. Multiculturalism allows multiple ethnic groups to exist independently of each other, and cultural diversity and differences are respected and treated equally, with “identity” and “equality” at its core. The research has shown that the multicultural integration mechanism of physical education in the United States contains the following components: core values of freedom and democracy, pluralistic value identity, equal opportunity and social justice, and individualism. The multicultural integration mechanism in American physical education has been an inspiration to physical education in China in three aspects: innovation in teaching content, flexible teaching strategies, and emphasis on individual evaluation, respectively.

**Keywords:** The United States, physical education, multiculturalism

## 1. Introduction

Although there are significant differences in the cultural characteristics of different ethnic groups, multiculturalism emphasizes the rationality of cultural differences among ethnic groups, and the American tradition is not based on the historical experience of a particular ethnic group. The goal of multiculturalism in the United States is the equality of different groups, the so-called “group identity and group rights”.

As early as 2007, “equity in education” appeared in China’s government work report, showing that equity in education has always been an important issue for the government. The meaning of educational equity here is more far-reaching, especially the issue of equal educational opportunities contained therein. In China’s multi-ethnic regions, many ethnic minority youths have achieved equal opportunity only in terms of prospective enrollment, but not in the specific educational process. This results in many minorities youth not adapting well to the education provided by the school system and subsequently not acquiring the necessary social competencies and opportunities.

In this context, it is particularly necessary to examine the mechanisms of multicultural integration in American physical education. Although there are significant differences in cultural characteristics among different ethnic groups, multiculturalism emphasizes the rationality of cultural differences among ethnic groups. China critically borrows the multicultural integration mechanism in American physical education according to its own national conditions, which is conducive to the stability of the country and social harmony, and will also broaden the way for China to seek equity in education.

## 2. Definition of the Concept of Multiculturalism

Multiculturalism is a political and social theory that has been widely influential in American academic, educational, and political circles for the past two decades or so. Gordon Wood argues that cultures are diverse and that the characteristics of a people will continue as long as that people allows a wide range of races to exist

together. Starting from the contradiction and conflict of cultures, Nathan Glazer emphasizes the reality of multiculturalism in the U.S. He believes that the American people must seriously face the reality that the U.S. is a diverse society. Multiculturalism in a nutshell consists of three main points. First, human beings should pursue the collective well-being as the goal rather than seeing individual achievement as the ultimate goal, therefore, individual self-realization cannot be the yardstick for measuring social progress and economic development. Second, it is the role of government to ensure equality and social justice for its citizens, and when certain groups are denied equal opportunities due to discrimination and exclusion, government must intervene to allow all members of society, especially vulnerable groups, to enjoy full and equal rights. Again, multiculturalism advocates a “politics of difference” that recognizes the existence of cultural differences and treats these differences equally. Multiculturalism is an ideology, a value, whose function is to pursue the material and cultural prosperity of different groups as well as the freedom and dignity of human beings themselves.

### **3. Analysis of Multicultural Integration Mechanisms in Physical Education in the United States**

The reality of the diverse demographic composition of American society is reflected on campus in the diversity of the student body. British scholar James Lynch argues that in multi-ethnic national societies, there is a need to help culturally diverse ethnic groups achieve balanced educational attainment and to promote mutual respect and tolerance among themselves. An important purpose of multicultural education is to give students of all groups an equal opportunity to succeed academically. Sport plays a similar function in a multicultural education system as an important part of a student’s education and growth in life, and plays an active role in bridging ethnic divisions and integrating the multicultural aspects of society due to its own characteristics. In the context of this pluralism, physical education in the U.S. presents a rich connotation of pursuing freedom and democracy, advocating pluralistic value identity, focusing on equal opportunity and social justice, and advocating individualism.

#### *3.1 The Value of Freedom and Democracy*

The values of freedom and democracy are very evident in American physical education today. The entire education is run by the states themselves, making it very different from school to school in the United States. Some states have a physical education curriculum, while others do not, leaving it entirely up to individual schools to decide how physical education classes should be taught. As a result, school physical education varies greatly from state to state. Within the fifty states of the United States, the requirements for physical education vary, with each state deciding for itself how many physical education classes each school should have per week, with some schools having only one class per week for 30 minutes each; while others have physical education classes every day.

School physical education classes in the United States are generally divided into required and supplemental classes. Supplementary courses are those additional teaching and training courses that are added to the required courses. The main forms are: out-of-class and out-of-school classes, sports club activities, and youth sports training classes. Physical education clubs give students the freedom to choose sports according to their interests. School physical education in the United States emphasizes student freedom and democracy. In this regard, the organization of supplementary classes is outstanding. Unlike the teaching of compulsory classes, the organization and exercises of supplementary classes are mainly arranged by students themselves, with teachers supervising and making suggestions, and students have a great deal of freedom. Teachers help students to actively participate in the organization and practice of physical education classes, improve their organizational skills and ability to express themselves, listen to students’ opinions, give them timely feedback, and finally enable them to self-evaluate, plan and summarize their classes.

#### *3.2 Promoting Multiple Value Identities*

The diversity of values is firstly reflected in the diversity of physical education contents. In addition to the sports that originated in the West and are very popular in the United States, there are also traditional Eastern martial arts such as Aikido and Taijiquan, etc. In school activities and sports clubs, there are also martial arts, yoga, and calisthenics of Eastern origin. Diversity values respect differences among individuals and groups. In physical education in the United States, teachers are often able to provide programs that respect diverse values. Ennis (1992) states that “recognizing individual differences in values will allow educators to provide more choices for students”. Moreover, “recognition of individual differences in values” is a very important element in physical education programs. Religion is the main carrier of traditional American values and an important part of society’s culture. In terms of value identity, an American philosopher said that the root of religious freedom is equal respect for all citizens. An important reason for the victory of the American Revolution over the colonists was that the Founding Fathers overcame the obstacle of religious intolerance, which facilitated the establishment of a constitutional order that could deal fairly with the deep religious beliefs that people already had. Respect for religious diversity is an important part of democracy. In U.S. physical education, many elementary, middle, and high schools allow students to be exempt from physical education for one school year or longer, and exemptions for students at all levels include religious reasons.

### *3.3 Equal Opportunity and Social Justice*

In the U.S., equal opportunity in education encompasses the following: 1. Make some level of free education available to all school-age children and make it a major condition for employment; 2. a common curriculum for all children, regardless of the background of those children; 3. children from different backgrounds should attend the same schools; and 4. equality and consistency within the same district, since education taxes and enrollment are divided by district.

Since the 1990s, Vice President Al Gore unveiled a \$600 million action plan to improve Latino-American education in February 1998. The program is based on high standards and school reform, with an additional \$393 million allocated to fund minority education on top of existing grants (32 percent of the grant's beneficiaries are Hispanic-American); \$66 million to train 20,000 teachers; \$30 million to help schools with high dropout rates; and \$69 million to help disadvantaged youth succeed academically in college and \$60 million to improve education programs for immigrant youth and adults.

The 2006 survey reported that of the 48.4% of elementary and middle schools that offer in-school activities or sports clubs, 35.0% require students to pay for the activities, but 86.1 percent of these schools gave free admission to those who could not afford it. Of the 82.6% of middle and high schools that offer intercollegiate sports, 33.2% require students to pay, but 86.1% have a free policy for those who cannot afford it. In terms of access to school sports, the United States is striving to achieve equal opportunity and social justice.

### *3.4 Promoting Individualism*

Physical education in the United States exhibit a strong "individualistic" character, both for students at different times and for different individuals. Florida, for example, has designed 38 different physical education classes and 18 dance classes for students to take, and New York State provides that students in grades 7-12 may choose one or two sports from the syllabus as their lifelong exercise program, depending on their interests. In American physical education, students are allowed to express their opinions on what activities should be included in the physical education curriculum, which not only allows physical educators to better meet student preferences, but also creates a more meaningful curriculum that fosters new sporting interests.

In terms of instructional evaluation, the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance's 1999 textbook for elementary and middle schools states that evaluation of physical education should be process and individual evaluation rather than summative evaluation based on test scores. Each student is expected to develop holistically in the physical, emotional, and cognitive domains, as well as acquire health-related knowledge and develop positive attitudes toward physical education. This approach to assessment values individual differences in student development and fully expresses the value of individualism in American society.

## **4. Implications for Physical Education in China**

### *4.1 Innovation of Teaching Content*

The diversity of students' ethnic composition is reflected in the significant diversity in the content of physical education. In addition to the sports that originated in the West and are very popular in the United States, traditional Eastern martial arts, such as Aikido and Taijiquan, are taught in American secondary schools. Among the on-campus activities and sports clubs are martial arts, yoga and calisthenics. The rich and varied content gives students a great deal of choice and contributes greatly to fostering their physical, cognitive, social, and emotional development in all four areas.

This rich and diverse teaching content has certain inspirational effects on the teaching content of physical education in China. First of all, we should correctly treat the entry of competitive programs into the physical education classroom and give full play to the cultural transmission, fitness and recreational functions of competitive sports, which serve to enhance the physical and mental health of students. For example, in areas where ethnic minorities live, we can introduce local traditional sports to campus as an elective course, which provides students with a more diversified and extensive choice of sports on the one hand, and is a good way to pass on the traditional sports of our country's ethnic minorities on the other. For example, in some areas with specific geographical features or climatic conditions, some sports activities can be carried out according to local conditions, such as sailing on the water, ice and snow sports in cold areas, etc., to better stimulate students' interest in learning and improve the learning effect.

### *4.2 Flexible Teaching Strategies*

The traditional teaching methods in China are mainly didactic teaching and systematic teaching. In didactic teaching, the teacher has absolute "authority", which makes the whole process of teaching passive learning and mechanical imitation. Systematic teaching emphasizes the systemic nature of students' learning in technical movements, which is equivalent to the training methods of competitive sports. This teaching method only

considers the laws of kinesiology and physiology, but is not conducive to the development of students' talents and personalities.

American physical education teachers use a variety of instructional strategies such as cooperative group activities, competitive group activities, physical activity stations, and peer-to-peer teaching activities. In their teaching practices, teachers pay close attention to protecting students' interests of movement and are committed to building a good foundation for students' lifelong physical education.

The flexible teaching strategies are inspiring for the physical education in China. The overly teacher-centered teaching format should be changed to highlight the subjectivity of student learning. Focus on students' emotional experiences and use flexible teaching strategies in the teaching process. In the teaching process, students are taught according to their abilities as much as possible, so that each student's potential can be explored and maximized as much as possible. At the same time, the individual differences of students are taken into account as much as possible, the cultivation and protection of students' interests in sports are emphasized, and various teaching methods are combined to achieve better learning results and lay the foundation for students' lifelong sports.

#### 4.3 Emphasis on Individual Evaluation

In terms of evaluation criteria, American physical education emphasize individual assessment, which means that students' physical education learning effectiveness is evaluated by individual progress, rather than by an absolutely uniform standard or comparison with each other.

This is a good reference for physical education in China. Physical education in Chinese schools can include students' subjective evaluation in the evaluation content, so that the subjective factors such as students' learning attitudes can be added to the evaluation content, which is conducive to the cultivation of students' lifelong sports habit, such as students' learning interest, attitude and will can be added to the evaluation of students' subjective factors, so as to achieve positive emotional motivation and inspiration for students. At the same time, physical education in China should not simply evaluate all students by a uniform standard, but should be more based on the degree of individual progress to evaluate students, so that the objective differences in physical and mental development of students are fully taken into account, thus making sports evaluation more realistic and effective, so we can include the content of process evaluation in the evaluation, fully recognize every step of students' progress, thus better protecting students' sports emotions, and also making the evaluation more comprehensive and reasonable.

### 5. Conclusion

The attention to national culture, respect for religious beliefs, and the importance of disadvantaged groups in American physical education will play an important role in the development of education and culture in the whole country, which will be conducive to the harmony and stability of the country and society, all of which will broaden Chinese vision on the road of seeking educational equity. The United States, as the most developed country in sports, has a rich experience in multicultural integration. An in-depth investigation of the multicultural integration mechanism of American physical education has an important inspiration for the development of contemporary physical education in China.

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