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Dr. Justin A. Haegele
Department of Human
Movement Sciences, Old
Dominion University, Norfolk,
VA 23529, USA.

Dr. Jihyun Lee
Department of Kinesiology, Sam
Houston State University,
Huntsville, TX 77341, USA.

Dr. Seung Ho Chang
Department of Kinesiology, Sam
Houston State University,
Huntsville, TX 77341, USA.

Dr. Kijeong Kim
School of Exercise & Sport
Science, College of Natural
Sciences, University of Ulsan,
Ulsan, South Korea.

Correspondence
Dr. Seung Ho Chang
Department of Kinesiology, Sam
Houston State University,
Huntsville, TX 77341, USA.

Sociocultural Reproduction: Implications for Physical Education Teacher Education

Justin A. Haegele, Jihyun Lee, Seung Ho Chang, Kijeong Kim

Abstract

Sociocultural reproduction can be thought of as an unequal distribution of resources across classes from one generation to the next. Also, it can be mediated by the educational system. This phenomenon can be perpetuated by actions with social power while acting as oppressive for individuals based on gender, race, sexual orientation, or ability/ disability. Unfortunately, people in the education system including the school settings who are involved in reproducing social order typically do not understand the social sorting that school imparts on students. In addition, they participate in this process unconsciously. Physical education (PE) is also a potential setting where sociocultural reproduction can occur. The significant responsibility of physical education teacher education (PETE) programs is teaching this phenomenon to PE teacher candidates to decrease the likelihood of its continuance. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to describe sociocultural reproduction and to provide implications for PETE.

Keywords: Sociocultural reproduction, physical education, physical education teacher education, pre-service PE teacher

1. Introduction

Sociocultural reproduction suggests that pre-existed norms and notions are passed or sustained from generation-to-generation, resulting in an unequal distribution of social, cultural, and economic capital based on social class ^[1]. This phenomenon is a mechanism where dominant groups reproduce propagated sociocultural structures for their advantage, value, or faith or to justify such structure within society.

The work of Bourdieu has made significant contributions to our understanding of the mediating role of educational systems in reproducing the social structure ^[11, 13]. The process of reproduction is facilitated by the educational system in that success in school is mediated by the possession of cultural capital. According to Bourdieu ^[2], teachers' pedagogical actions promote the capital of the dominant class in schools and simultaneously reward students that have cultural or social capital while discriminating and marginalizing those who do not conform to the dominant habitus in terms of gender, race, sexual orientation, or ability/disability ^[14]. Unfortunately, those involved in reproducing the social order, including school personnel, often do so unintentionally, are ignorant to the social sorting function of the school, and may be actors within the cycle of such reproduction ^[11].

The phenomenon of sociocultural reproduction has important implications to teacher education programs, including physical education teacher education (PETE) programs. PETE programs must educate their students about this phenomenon in physical education to decrease the likelihood of social equity issues. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to describe sociocultural reproduction and implications this phenomenon has on physical education training programs.

2. Sociocultural Reproduction

The term sociocultural reproduction is derived from the work of Pierre Bourdieu, a French sociologist. Bourdieu defines sociocultural reproduction as the unequal distribution of social and/or cultural resources across classes that are transmitted from generation to generation ^[1, 3]. A system of social reproduction is constructed of all the processes and strategies for generationally handing down all the advantages and disadvantages that determine relationships between the dominant and dominated classes ^[1]. Sullivan ^[13] describes it as a link between

One's original class membership and ultimate class membership.

The work of Bourdieu has made significant contributions to our understanding of the role that schools play in social and cultural inequalities and suggests that sociocultural reproduction is mediated by the education system [11, 13]. Bourdieu [2] explains that teachers' pedagogic actions promote the capital of the dominant class in schools and simultaneously reward students that have cultural or social capital while punishing students who do not. Such pedagogical actions are identified as being oppressive for individuals based on gender, race, sexual orientation, or ability/ disability [14]. Further, day-to-day social activities mediate the embodiment and reproduction of these oppressive actions [8]. Thus, the school becomes a center of social exclusion and reproduction. Unfortunately, those involved in reproducing the social order, including school personnel, often do so without either knowing they are doing so or wanting to do so [11]. Specifically, school personnel typically do not understand the social sorting that school imparts on students [11], and may be actors within the cycle of reproduction themselves.

3. Habitus and Capital: Reproduction of Inequalities in Schools

Two concepts that influence sociocultural reproduction are habitus and capital. Habitus is defined as a set of attitudes or dispositions which function as a basis of practice [1, 11]. The tendencies or inclinations that constitute the habitus are shaped through a gradual learning process which reflects the social conditions within which they are acquired [11]. According to Bourdieu [3], habitus is both created and reproduced without any pursuit of coherence or conscious concentration and produces habit-like behavior. Habitus underlies and conditions practices by providing a sense of how to act throughout the course of daily life. More simply put, the habitus sets the boundaries within which individuals are free to act [7].

In the educational setting, the habitus acts in several ways. First, the habitus can make students feel restricted by their circumstances [11]. Those students are incapable of perceiving reality outside of what they believe is standard practice. This phenomenon is detrimental to individuals who are disadvantaged or oppressed, as they may discard certain aspirations while accepting possibilities which they see as suitable for themselves or their social group. In this way, the individual believes that they are less capable of "making things happen," but rather believe that "things happen to them."

A second way in which the habitus can act is through practices which are beyond conscious control or awareness to the individuals that may be oppressive in nature [8]. These oppressive behaviors, such as sexism or ableism, are unconsciously adopted as a result of normalizing practice in society which the individual learns to re-enact [8]. Since the habitus is formed subconsciously through social processes, both restrictive and oppressive inclinations are a result of influences and reproduction from society.

Capital exists in symbolic and material forms and is accumulated through day-to-day practices that individuals take part in [10]. Light and Kirk [10] suggest that different types of capital can determine the individual's position in social space, specifically cultural and social capital. Cultural capital consists of familiarity with the dominant culture of society and the ability to understand and use preferred language [13]. Social capital is a network of lasting relationships, or belongingness with others in the field [8]. Bourdieu [3] suggests that while each social or cultural class has capital, they are not equal. Rather,

cultural and social capitals are inculcated by parents, so students from higher-class homes are advantaged [1]. Capital plays a central role in societal power relations and provides a non-economic form of hierarchy [3].

4. Implications for Physical Education Teacher Education

Sociocultural reproduction can occur within the educational context, including physical education. According to Hunter [8], those who influence reproduction in physical education include the educational authority, physical education teacher educators, physical education curriculum writers, school administrators, physical education teachers, and students. This conceptualization situates physical education teacher education into a position to influence practices that occur within the schools. Therefore, the way in which physical education teacher education provides education and training to pre-service training can influence sociocultural reproduction in schools. In this section, several such implications for teacher education programs are discussed. Specifically, the following subsections will discuss relationships between sociocultural reproduction and

- (a) Field experiences;
- (b) Understanding students' previous educational experiences; and
- (c) Teacher educator behavior.

4.1 Field Experiences

Sociocultural reproduction is the unequal distribution of social and/or cultural resources across classes that are transmitted from generation to generation [1, 3]. This concept provides an important implication for physical education teacher education programs to thoroughly select and supervise field experience sites and mentoring teachers. When pre-service teachers are exposed to the day-to-day activities of their supervising teacher in schools, those behaviors can be embedded into what student teachers believe are standard teaching practices. These practices can then be passed down from current teacher to future teacher. Therefore, when pre-service teachers participate in field experiences in which oppressive practices are occurring, they may continue to perform those oppressive actions in the future. Equally detrimental, the student teachers may accept those oppressive actions as being standard and feel restricted in their ability to help fix it.

There are several oppressive practices that occur in physical education that can be reproduced if pre-service teachers experience poorly chosen field experiences. For example, Brown and Evans [4] contend that male physical education teachers can act to reproduce biased gender relationships in physical education through relations with student-teachers. They suggest that the student teaching experience lends itself more to exercise status quo in teaching rather than progress practice. The student teacher – mentor relationship presupposes the transmission of information, or the reproduction of behaviors. In the interest of the study of gender, student teachers are explicitly and covertly encouraged to absorb lessons of gendered pedagogy that their mentor teacher provides [4]. These can include practices which have female students publically perform tasks in front of peers, which can lead to withdrawal from activities [5].

This phenomenon is not unique to male physical educators, where female physical education student teachers are also complicit with the status quo of gender bias in physical education [12]. While female physical education teachers may have a desire to pass on experiences that they had in elite sport and physical activity to the next generation of girls, their desire

for all students to enjoy sport may include reproducing some gendered inequalities within their teaching ^[12]. Specifically, rather than changing the structure or nature of traditional physical education, female physical educators tend to believe that they can change the attitudes of the girls who are either disinterested or non-participatory. In instances like these, the physical education teachers' solution is for female students to cope with gendered social barriers present within the practice and curriculum, rather than making changes to promote physical education activities all their students.

These examples provide important information for physical education teacher education programs to consider when choosing field placements for student teachers or field experiences. Brown and Evans ^[4] and Rich ^[12] demonstrate how gender-biased behaviors can be reproduced through the physical education teacher- student teacher relationship. It is essential for physical education teacher education programs to closely monitor and discuss behaviors like these with their pre-service teachers in order to discontinue the cyclical nature of socio-cultural reproduction in this context. Further, by evaluating and selecting field experience sites based on targeted teacher behaviors, physical education teacher education programs can ensure that students are learning the correct practices that will have a positive impact when reproduced in their teaching career.

4.2 Understanding Educational Experiences

A second implication for physical education teacher education is the importance of understanding the previous physical education experiences of pre-service teachers. While the previous section discusses how practices can be passed down through the teacher- student teacher relationship, the physical education teacher- favored student relationship may have a similar effect ^[4]. Brown and Evans ^[4] suggest that many physical education teacher education students were once favored students who were influenced by close relationships with their physical education teachers. These students typically have positive experiences in physical education, and are motivated to create a similar experience for their future students. To do so, they may reproduce behaviors learned from an apprenticeship-like relationship with their physical education teacher ^[4].

Research provides evidence of several biased or oppressive practices that can be reproduced by physical education teacher education majors who learned them as a student. One such study, by Fitzgerald ^[6] demonstrates how teachers can present unfair practices in physical education when working with students with disabilities. When asked about their physical education experience, students with disabilities describe how physical education activities contribute to a lower social status in schools as well as a negative perception of their own abilities ^[6]. One such example includes their participation in a bocce club that was exclusively for students with disabilities. While they confirm their enjoyment for the sport, they continually refer to a belief that members of the physical education staff and peers did not find value or status in the activity ^[6]. However, their participation in bocce was a result of not being permitted to participate in those activities which garnered more social capital, because of the perceptions of their ability. Participants discuss the perceptions they believed physical education teachers had of them, many of which were negative ^[6].

While students with disabilities tend to value physical education and sport participation ^[9], they are restricted from taking part alongside their able-bodied peers ^[6]. This

phenomenon may be due to a lack of accommodation or level of understanding of their physical education teachers. In terms of sociocultural reproduction, students who are typically developing may experience these practices as a peer and believe that it is the standard practice.

Students who favor physical education and may consider it as a career typically develop close bonds with their physical education teacher. Close bonds, and an apprentice-like relationship, allow the physical education teachers to pass on beliefs and practices to potential future teachers. Over time, oppressive practices or beliefs by the physical education teacher can be internalized by the student as standard practice. These practices can include exclusionary practices that the physical education teacher uses while teaching in his classes ^[6]. Internalized practices like these can then be reproduced when students become the next generation of physical educators.

For these reasons, a second implication of sociocultural reproduction for physical education teacher education programs is to have a sound idea of the physical education programs which pre-service teachers experience as students. Prior experiences can shape how physical education teachers reproduce oppressive or biased practices during their teaching. Rich ^[12] describes a strategy called life histories that can act as a valuable introductory activity for new physical education teacher education students. The life history provides an opportunity for students to search through incidences in their life experiences that may shape their lives and teaching practices ^[12]. By exploring these experiences, teacher trainers can learn about what experiences students have and direct them away from oppressive or biased behaviors they may otherwise reproduce.

4.3 Teacher Educator Behavior

As discussed in the first two sections, pre-service teachers can be influenced by their physical education experiences and field experiences ^[4]. A third relationship that should be considered as being influential is the pre-service teacher – faculty member relationship. Therefore, a further implication of sociocultural reproduction on physical education teacher education is the need for teacher education professionals to act in a socially responsible and equitable manner when interacting with pre-service teachers and to understand the influence their action has on later behavior of pre-service teachers.

It is implied that physical education teacher education programs influence how physical education teachers practice through explicit instruction, field experiences, and student teaching. However, other, non-explicit actions within the physical education teacher education program can also influence how future physical educators teach. This concept should not be looked upon negatively, but rather as further opportunity for teacher educators to reproduce desirable beliefs and practices. For example, it is not uncommon for physical education teacher education programs to include students of different racial, ethnic, or religious backgrounds, as well as those with disabilities. By including those individuals, making accommodations for their needs, and not discriminating against applicants based on these characteristics, physical education teacher education programs are sending an important message to their students. When teacher trainers opt not to make accommodations, it could be seen as a type of institutional religious discrimination. More importantly, in this context, this type of behavior may be seen as acceptable by the pre-service trainers who could reproduce the behavior in future contexts.

It is implied that physical education teacher education programs influence how physical education teachers will teach through explicit instructing. However, other actions within the physical education teacher education program also influence how future physical educators teach. It is important for teacher educators to consider what type of practices they are covertly embedding into future teachers' education. Practices such as providing accommodations for individuals with varying religious beliefs can influence students to reproduce oppressive or appropriate practices as future professionals.

4. Conclusion

Sociocultural reproduction is defined as the unequal distribution of social and/or cultural resources across classes that are transmitted from generation to generation ^[1, 3]. In PETE programs, oppressive patterns of behavior can be learned during any time throughout undergraduate coursework including lectures, field-based experiences, as well as student teaching that reflect in future behavior of PETE students as a teacher. It is essential for PETE professionals to recognize the influence which they, and others, have throughout the forming process for pre-service teachers and provide opportunities to embed well-balanced values, inclinations, and behaviors into their repertoire. By taking sociocultural reproduction into consideration, PETE programs can implement practices to ensure that future physical education teachers discontinue the cycle of sociocultural reproduction and provide equitable and appropriate educational experiences for all students.

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