Analyzing Physical Education for Equality

Jean L. Ambrose
EDITORIAL

It's been a year since our last editorial. We continue to receive encouragement about the Newsletter especially from people who like the mix of news about elementary, secondary, and higher education. But we wonder about the fact that we've had no negative criticism of our coverage or our features. And we're sorry, frankly, that we've been able to provoke no debate, and only a trickle of correspondence from our readers. In the interest of provoking such debate or correspondence, we offer several clusters of questions that need answering. We hope you'll try one or more of these.

First, about courses. What should “introductory” courses consist of? Will content need to shift with the level of popular consciousness, or is there a “hard core” of information, a developed “body of knowledge” that all introductory courses should contain? After introductory courses, what? What distinguishes “introductory” from “intermediate” from “advanced courses”?

Second, about curriculum. Is there a practical theory for organizing a women's studies curriculum? What models are there for organizing a sequence of women's studies courses? Need all programs offer a pot-pourri or are there other means of curriculum-building?

Third, about “majors” or “minors” in women's studies. Are they necessary or useful? Or are there alternatives? Where do majors lead? What is happening to graduates?

Fourth, the issues of programs. Is the interdepartmental or “network” model viable? Or is it too costly and too powerless? Are programs becoming “departments”? Are any programs dissolving? What are the major political and pedagogical issues that new and continuing programs face? How are directors being selected?

While we've asked specific questions only about higher education, obviously there are even more questions to be asked about newer developments in secondary and elementary. Here, our needs are somewhat more primitive, for we don't yet have an abundant proliferation of women's studies courses or units, much less system-wide programs. What we need here are information, reportage, and analysis from those of you teaching or administering new developments in women's studies. We also need information from those of you who are pressuring for system-wide nonsexist education or developing public school affirmative action programs. Let us hear from you.

ANALYZING PHYSICAL EDUCATION FOR EQUALITY

On his last day in office, New Jersey's Governor William T. Cahill signed into law A823, a bill prohibiting discrimination in the public schools of the State. The bill states simply:

No pupil in a public school in this State shall be discriminated against in admission to, or in obtaining any advantages, privileges or courses of study of the school by reason of race, color, creed, sex or national origin.

The following day newspapers reported the enactment of this legislation on their sports pages. There is good reason for this. While many aspects of sexism and sex discrimination are not recognized as such by educators and laypersons alike, discrimination in educational sports programs is so blatant it cannot be overlooked or rationalized. The increasing demands of girls and women for more equitable treatment in sports programs are seen by many as a threat to the boys' programs, and, therefore, are viewed with alarm by the male sports establishment.

Just how unequal boys' and girls' sports programs can be is demonstrated by a study of the athletic program of the Westfield, New Jersey, schools undertaken by this writer for the Union County Chapter of the National Organization for Women. Westfield was chosen for survey because it typifies the pervasive neglect of extra-curricular sports programs for girls.

Table 1 graphically illustrates the gross inequities in the girls' program.

EVALUATING A WOMEN’S STUDIES COURSE

Some fifty women attended the first Women's Studies Evaluation Conference in June 1973, at Wesleyan University. About half had previously taught women's studies courses. Literature and the social sciences were heavily represented; there were no hard scientists. We came with questions about the value, even the possibility, of evaluating women's studies courses and programs. We wondered whether any measuring technique could isolate one class as the cause of change in a student. We questioned social science methodology, and we speculated about possible alternative methodologies.

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Boys are offered only seven more sports than girls in the overall program, but in interscholastic sports, the difference between eighteen sports offered to boys and four offered to girls is clearly discriminatory. Girls are offered five sports extramurally. Interscholastic and extramural sports are basically the same: teams from one school play teams from another. The primary difference is in the trappings—interscholastic teams are equipped with uniforms, employ paid officials, receive letters, etc. It is interesting to note that in Westfield, when boys' teams play other schools, they play only interscholastically. There are no boys' extramural teams.

Somewhere, it has been decided that girls don't need the "extras"—in training, facilities, and rewards—that boys do.

Swimming, tennis, and golf are offered as extra-curricular sports, but are not taught within the physical education program. The students who win places on these teams have been trained outside the school system. Expertise in these sports is not an outgrowth of in-school training and unfairly discriminates against the student, boy or girl, who has not had the opportunity or the financial means to obtain this training elsewhere. Ironically, these are the sports most likely to be played throughout a person's lifetime.

In Westfield, a severe shortage of facilities is shouldered mainly by girls. For example, at one junior high school, the ninth grade girls' basketball team had to cancel practice and relinquish the girls' gym to the eighth grade boys when the boys' gym was needed by the ninth grade boys. A statistic that doesn't show up in Table 1 is the number of games played. At this same junior high school, the girls' basketball team played only two games the entire season.

Slightly less than one-half the participants in the total sports program are girls. Yet the budget for the boys' program is more than ten times the budget for the girls' program. The per capita expenditure (budget and coaches' salaries) for girls is $6.73; for boys it is $40.80. The entire budget for the girls' athletic program in the town's two junior high schools is $450, the same amount spent to scout the boys' teams and remarkably less than the amount spent just to film the football games ($1,740).

The Westfield schools employ ten female coaches and twenty-eight male coaches in the senior high and six female coaches and twenty-nine male coaches in the junior high. That's one male coach for every forty boys and one female coach for every ninety girls. Not only do the female coaches appear to be overburdened by numbers of students, they also receive lower wages for their coaching responsibilities. If the total salaries paid to female coaches are divided by the number of coaches, each female coach receives $261.88. The comparable figure for male coaches is $606.72. This does not take into account the length of the season and the frequency of practice times and games, but the women coaches rarely have any control over these.

The extra-curricular sports program which is voluntary and has limited participants ought to be an outgrowth of, and subordinate to, the physical education program which is compulsory and encompasses the entire student body. In fact, one of the most significant revelations of the Westfield study is the extent to which the extra-curricular program has pre-empted the physical education program, demonstrating a total lack of commitment to the athletic development of the average student, female and male. Table 2 reveals the cost of each.

Table 2
Comparison of Budgets for Physical Education and Extra-Curricular Sports Programs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Physical Education</th>
<th>Extra-Curricular</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>$4,798</td>
<td>$0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior High</td>
<td>$5,259</td>
<td>$15,450</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior High</td>
<td>$1,990</td>
<td>$48,900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>$12,047</td>
<td>$64,350</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Does not include salaries of teaching personnel.

The total budget for physical education in all schools (one senior high, two junior highs, and nine elementary schools) is $12,047, less than the extra-curricular sports budget in the junior high, and one-fourth the amount allocated to extra-curricular sports in the senior high. Surely nowhere else in the school system are the major resources of a department concentrated on what could be called the "A" student, that is, the accomplished athlete. Students, female and male, who are uncoordinated, who lack muscular development and a sure sense of what their bodies can and cannot do, receive a negligible share, while faculty, finances, and facilities are devoted to students of demonstrated athletic competency. On the elementary level, there are but three physical education teachers to teach sports skills to the entire school population. The bulk of physical education teaching is done by the regular classroom teacher, who is understandably ill-equipped for the task. Consequently, the gym class is little more than "recreation" and rarely gets beyond game playing.

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EVALUATING WOMEN'S STUDIES (continued)

As we listed the goals of women's studies courses, we realized the overwhelming expectations for both student and teacher: beyond teaching new facts, we wanted courses to raise the self-acceptance and aspirations of our students, to encourage their active involvement in women's issues, to evolve new research methods and new classroom techniques, to alter the very nature of our disciplines. Success in achieving such aims would be difficult to measure, but their very scope made evaluation especially important. Their realization demanded excellent courses, and the improvement of our classes was the best reason for evaluation.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION (continued)

While the elementary gym class is ostensibly coed, it is not uncommon for girls and boys to be treated differently. In some cases, girls and boys in the same class play at different activities. Girls (and presumably boys) who wish to engage in activity reserved for the other sex must make a special request to do so. Not infrequently, children must resort to parental intervention. Many students may, therefore, be discouraged from "crossing-over." It is hardly equal educational opportunity when one needs to be bold just to participate in an activity that should be equally available to all.

In other cases, teams are divided by sex, girls against boys (what would be thought of a teacher who divided teams by race?), and girls are permitted extra "outs," boys bat "lefty," etc. Such practices inculcate and reinforce the girls' poor image of themselves as athletes and, worse, set up a situation where it is impossible for them to win.

On the junior and senior high school levels physical education classes are too large for meaningful learning to take place. Some teachers themselves seem resigned to the impossibility of teaching under such conditions and frequently sit on the side-lines and do nothing more than watch the students play at a game. Fifty to sixty students in a class cannot be taught skills, and indeed, it is in the junior high that the unathletic students begin to hate gym as they fall further and further behind their more athletic classmates. Gym can, and does, become a torment for some. Boys suffer more in this respect than girls because society promotes and the school reinforces the male "sports mystique": boys' sports tend to be intensely competitive; and many male physical education teachers lack compassion for the unathletic boy.

Clearly, new priorities need to be set for school athletic programs. It should be noted that, in the year of the last Westfield school budget defeat, the schools were deprived of, among other things, an elementary physical education teacher, an art teacher, a string teacher (music), an administrative intern, and a full-time nurse. Not one penny of the extra-curricular sports budget was touched.

Because sex discrimination in school athletics is easier to identify than sexist curricula and teaching materials, sexist guidance practices, and the bias against women in educational administration, it might seem an easy place to start pressing for action, but powerful forces combine to thwart all but token change. Of course reform is possible—indeed inevitable—but the hardest battles in the struggle for equal educational opportunity may very well be fought in the area of athletics, an area where female excellence is so devastatingly threatening to the American male's cultural image.

Jean L. Ambrose

After outlining some difficulties of classical research design, Marcia Gutten tag, Visiting Professor of Social Ethics at Harvard, presented an approach which might make course evaluation possible and useful. Her approach is, like all research strategies, an "information-destructing" process; it reduces goals and probabilities to numbers so that they may be compared. But this process seemed both flexible and practical. Traditional research design is based on assumptions which are difficult to fulfill in practice: large samples, random selection, appropriate control groups; classical statistics uses probabilities based on certain assumptions about normal distributions (chance). The method proposed by Gutten tag uses Bayesian statistics, in which the probabilities can be personal, based on prior projections of the extent to which a particular goal will be met. Thus, this "decision theoretic" model makes bias explicit. An open system, the "decision theoretic" model, unlike classical methods, provides immediate feedback throughout the evaluative process and allows for variety in individual and group goals. The expansion and evolution possible within the "decision theoretic" approach seemed especially adaptable to the dynamics of women's studies classes and programs. On the whole, our expectations were realized.

The steps of this method are outlined here (see Appendix for an actual list of goals and a GRID):

1. Clarify the goals to be achieved (here, class goals). Simply doing this with a class helps a teacher direct her course toward students' interests and needs.
2. Rank goals in order of their importance. This step (and #3) can be done in several ways. Class or program coordinators can collectively decide the order, or they can keep individual lists. In our evaluation the students decided the goals and their relative importance.
3. Assign importance weights to the goals. The list of goals is translated into numbers showing their comparative importance. Steps #3 and #2 help make class priorities explicit.
4. Determine aspects of the program being evaluated (here, class methods). List these down one side of the GRID and list the goals across the top.
5. Estimate the likelihood that each method will achieve each goal on an arbitrarily-determined scale. These estimates are the prior probabilities that are plugged into the GRID. Multiply them by the importance number assigned to each goal to obtain "utilities"; the number quickly indicates how useful the evaluators expect each method to be in meeting the program goals.
6. Decide how to measure fulfillment of the goals. (1)
7. Measure them. The degree of success is translated into numbers the same way that the estimation of success was in Step 5. The actual contribution of each method to the realization of the goals is then compared to the prior estimates of success.
8. This information shows which methods are effective enough and which should be changed or dropped, and provides more accurate estimates for planning future programs.

Since students could actively participate in this process, it fit our wish for a student-centered, non-authoritarian classroom. The method might provide some measure of evaluation during the course so that planning and evaluation might become a synonymous process.

On the last day of the Wesleyan conference, Joan Borod decided to use the "decision theoretic" approach to evaluate her summer session course, "The Psychology of Women and Sex Differences," which was to begin two days later. Three of us who had attended the conference called two meetings in Cleveland to explain the project and its implications to women who might be willing to share their time and expertise. Each meeting taught us something about the complex mechanics of collective action.

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