Lions & Bears, Oh My! Creating the Bridge Between Athletics & Academia

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ABSTRACT
In an effort to create a more culturally relevant and humanizing approach to the goal of closing the achievement gap in K-12 education, this study examines and advocates the use of athletics as a pedagogical model. The athletic model has been shown to be successful in educating culturally diverse student populations by building upon traditional standards. Through conceptual analysis of books written by or about the coaching styles of Paul “Bear” Bryant and Joe Paterno, this research builds a bridge between athletics and academia. Results show that the athletic model is a viable method for teaching ethnic minority students.

Five score years ago, a great American, in whose symbolic shadow we stand today, signed the Emancipation Proclamation … But one hundred years later, the Negro still is not free. One hundred years later, the life of the Negro is still sadly crippled by the manacles of segregation and the chains of discrimination. One hundred years later, the Negro lives on a lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of material prosperity. One hundred years later, the Negro is still languished in the corners of American society and finds himself an exile in his own land. (Martin Luther King 1963)

Approaching 50 years since Martin Luther King delivered this speech on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, African Americans still find themselves dealing with the same issues that the Civil Rights Movement had hoped to dispel (Jeynes 2005). Though strides have been made legislatively, the functionality of equality has yet to approach the doorsteps of many of those who remain stranded on the “island of poverty” (King 1963). This exile continues to persist despite the advent of a colorblind mantra; this researcher argues that it is this colorblind mantra that encourages assimilation
and instructs the uniqueness of “Negro” culture to remain isolated and unrecognized in the corners of American society.

Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka set the precedent that separate but equal was indeed separate, but unequal when it came to education, and thus established that segregated schools were unconstitutional (Hanushek, Kain and Rivkin 2002). This, perceivably, was the first step in creating an integrated society that would fulfill the dreams of those who fought for justice and equality; yet, the failing of legislated integration is that it solely integrates physical bodies. Although Brown v. Board of Education was significant (acknowledging the inferior education African American children were receiving compared to whites), the achievement gap persists (Banks 1988; Jeynes 2005; Hawley and Neito 2010). Thus, integration has not failed, but remains incomplete.

Due to the perpetual achievement gap, researchers such as Banks (1988), Ogbu (1992), Ladson-Billings (1995), and Fordham (1998) have attempted to provide an explanation. As a result, there are theories (e.g. Cultural Inversion, acting white, lack of cultural relevance, Banking Approach) that point to why some minorities, in particular African Americans, tend to underachieve in academia (Fordham 1988; Freire 1993; Bartolomé 1994). The failing, or imperfection, of integration is that the “Negro is still languished in the corners” of the classroom, “and finds himself an exile in his own” education (King, Jr. 1963). Though the African American has been integrated, the price for that integration is to keep the part that is African (Negro) veiled and to completely assimilate into the consciousness that is American. Simply put, African Americans, as well as other ethnic minorities, tend to underachieve in school because on some level their education is not culturally responsive (Bartolomé 1994; Ladson-Billings 1995). While the validity of individual theories may be debated, in order for the conversation to continue the dialogue must include the problem and the solution. In fact, it is in the spirit of developing a viable solution to the proverbial “elephant in the (class) room” of African American underachievement that this research is done.

This research will explore two questions. The first question is whether there is a need for K-12 pedagogy to become more humanizing and culturally relevant. The second question asks if the athletic model contains many of the elements of an effective culturally relevant pedagogy, and, if so, whether the model can be used to address the challenge of closing the achievement gap. First, the achievement gap and the factors that contribute to it will be defined and discussed.

While African Americans are underachieving in their academics, there are many who overachieve in the athletic classroom (Gnida 1995, Jeynes 2005).
Athletics are not solely about physical ability but about mental aptitude as well. The difference between success and failure is often based on an individual’s ability to out-think his/her opponent. Thus, athletics and its model of teaching may be a viable form of culturally relevant pedagogy and a possible solution to closing the achievement gap.

LITERATURE REVIEW

... if I am not what I've been told I am, then it means that you're not what you thought you were either ... If, for example, one managed to change the curriculum in all the schools so that Negroes learned more about themselves ... you would be liberating not only Negroes, you'd be liberating white people who know nothing about their own history. (Baldwin 1963, 3)

In this quote, Baldwin articulates his fundamental response to education. He maintains that the resistance to embracing a more culturally relevant pedagogy is not so much a resistance toward educating ethnic minorities in a different way as it is resisting the truth that persists as a result. This researcher argues that education, at its core, is fundamentally about examining and trying to develop an understanding of the world that surrounds us. Socratic reasoning demands that educators be willing to sacrifice and endure the pain of examination in order to create and nurture the type of learning environment that is inclusive and not exclusive (West 2001).

The Achievement Gap
The “achievement gap”—the disparity in academic performance between different groups of students—continues to plague K-12 education (Jeynes 2005). The disparity in academic performance is evaluated based on educational measures. The State of California’s Department of Education evaluates student academic performance with the Academic Performance Index (API) score, which utilizes students’ scores on statewide assessments (e.g., STAR, CASHEE) and converts them into points on a scale from 200 to 1000. African American students in California score on average 152 points lower than Anglo American students (California Department of Education 2010) and drop out at a rate three times higher (California Department of Education 2009). What exacerbates the gap is that African Americans are performing well below the baseline of 700 while Anglo Americans are performing on average well above it (California Dept. of Education 2010).

Identifying the factors or causes for the achievement gap can be a difficult task. Considering the primary variables in the equation, the root causes can be attributed either to the student, the system, or both. In order to appropriately
address the achievement gap in full, both the student and system variables should be fully vetted; this study will focus more on the latter. Specifically, this study focuses on pedagogy and its effects on the ethnic minority student’s performance.

Reviewing the API scores of the different ethnic minority subgroups in California reveals that there are also differences in performance that exist between the subgroups themselves. To account for the difference in performance between various ethnic minority groups, Ogbu (1992) developed the Cultural-Ecological Theory of Minority Performance in School. Ogbu highlighted three sub-groups of minorities: Autonomous, Immigrant or Voluntary, and Caste-like or Involuntary. This study focuses primarily on voluntary and involuntary minorities. “Voluntary minorities” are defined as individuals or a group of people who immigrate to the U.S. in search of a better opportunity and do not look at their residence as being forced upon them by the government or “white America” (Ogbu and Simons 1998).

Involuntary minorities, conversely, view their residence as forced upon them by “white America.” Involuntary minorities historically have been marred by oppression, enslavement, relocation, forced occupation, and as a result have developed an oppositional response to the dominant culture (Ogbu and Simmons 1998). Involuntary minorities, such as African Americans, tend to have the greatest struggles in school (Ogbu 1992).

Many students’ perceptions about education are developed through the macro and micro influences of everyday life. Macro aspects include the student’s community, how his/her community fits into society as a whole, how the community achieved minority status, and the effect that minority status has on the student’s relationship with school (Ogbu 1992). For involuntary minorities, there is a struggle between the ethos of their communities and their education (Fordham 1998). There is often a decision to be made between embracing a definition of success that focuses on the individual or one that focuses on the collective. What results is an oppositional social identity, which equates academic success with acting white (Ogbu 1992; Fordham 1998). The stigma of “acting white” refers to a rejection of an individual’s culture and group identity in preference for the dominant “white” culture and identity; the community implicitly discourages academic success for fear of losing its best and brightest to the dominant white culture (Fryer 2006).

There are also micro factors that contribute to the achievement gap. The micro aspects include focusing on the student’s relationship with academia, his/her relationship with the teacher, school, administrators, and most importantly the active pedagogical model (Ogbu 1992; Ogbu and Simmons
Duncan-Andrade (2009) notes the importance of hope in education as a pedagogical tool, and argues that hope is essential for student growth. Teachers then should be cognizant of the type of hope they are providing. While true hope may serve to inspire and engage students into their education, false hope can hinder inspiration, disengage, and erode motivation, contributing to the growing achievement gap (Duncan-Andrade 2009).

In many cases, the achievement gap is the result of a complex interplay between macro and micro forces within education. The teacher-student relationship that is analyzed at the micro level is not simply isolated from its macro counterparts, but is often viewed through the scope of a collective/community point of view (Fordham 1998; Fryer 2006). Scholars have also noted the importance of the student’s relationship with his/her community in order to create a pedagogy that will begin to close the achievement gap (Freire 1992; Ogbu 1992; Bartolomé 1994; Ladson-Billings 1995; Duncan-Andrade 2009).

**Culturally Relevant Pedagogy**

The relationship between students and teachers can be one of the core variables related to academic performance. Freire (1993) defines this relationship as fundamentally about power. By defining the relationship in this manner, the teacher may fulfill the role of the narrating subject while the students are the listening objects. This command style of teaching (Mosston 1968) provides the teacher with full autonomy in all decisions in the learning process and the student with no autonomy. This style of teaching, also known as the banking concept of education (Freire 1993), allows the teacher to inhabit a position of superiority and the student a position of inferiority. What results is a system that reinforces the power structure of the outside society and, whether explicitly or implicitly, the minority student’s historical role (Woodson 1969).

Acknowledging the cultural inversion that exists with involuntary minorities, it becomes easy to see how the student begins to reject the current education model. Bartolomé (1994) says that robbing students of their culture reduces minority students to a “savage” status and effectively dehumanizes them. Pedagogy should then incorporate the authentic history of the student as a base and should be criticized when it perpetuates the belief that ethnic minorities are inferior to the dominant culture (Woodson 1969).

Culturally relevant pedagogy erases the self-identification of ‘savage’ and allows students to transition from objects to subjects through the infusion of culture in the curriculum and culture of the classroom. Such pedagogy would also attribute to student success, inspiring critical thinking by both the teacher and student in the educational process, and creating a paradigm shift where
teachers and students become partners in learning (Villegas 1991; Bartolomé 1994; Ladson-Billings 1995; Franquiz and Salazar 2004). As a result, the teacher has a better opportunity to embrace the community, and delineate some of the outside communal issues that affect student performance in school.

Culturally responsive pedagogy takes on the challenge of “growing roses in concrete” (Duncan-Andrade 2004, 1). It is the process of transforming the student from object to subject along with the simultaneous paradigm shift of the teacher to learner (Jackson 1994; Govindarijan 2001; Duncan-Andrade 2004). Hope and trust become irreplaceable ingredients in creating an atmosphere that will inspire the highest level of success with students in their academics (Jackson 1994; Duncan-Andrade 2004). For students, trust in their teachers is highly correlated with their motivation to learn and the feeling of empowerment with their learning (Govindarijan 2001; Curzon-Hobson 2002). Motivation and learner empowerment has the potential to translate into student achievement, but successful development of trust between teachers and students is not easily accomplished. The adage that people don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care is especially true for many ethnic minority students who are rose seeds planted in concrete; thus, trust between teachers and students, as it relates to a culturally responsive pedagogy, is built on the teacher’s ability to care about his or her students. Teachers must provide a sense of material and Socratic hope to their students if they intend on developing a trust foundation upon which they can build (Duncan-Andrade 2004).

**Athletics and Culturally Relevant Pedagogy**

The first question of the research is whether or not there is a need for a more humanizing and culturally relevant pedagogy. The second is to examine whether the athletics model can be seen as a model of culturally relevant pedagogy and can be used to close the achievement gap with involuntary minorities. The athletic model, which occurs outside of the classroom, differs from traditional classroom pedagogy due to its problems being more practical or applied (Nasir and Hand 2008). Problems that are more practical than theoretical can have an effect or impact on student engagement.

Student engagement is directly related to academic performance. As students transition to subjects of learning they become more engaged, which helps to improve academic performance (Freire 1992). Many students value the team first or collective ethos that is associated with athletics, which helps to increase their engagement (Nasir and Hand 1992). Scholars (Banks 1988; Jackson 1993; Franquiz and Salazar 2004) have noted that students who tend to be field dependent or relational in their learning styles are more attuned
to social aspects of their surroundings and tend to experience a higher degree of academic success in cooperative learning environments than in competitive ones. These students typically identify as African Americans, Mexican Americans, or Native Americans (Cohen 1969; Witkin 1977; Banks 1988).

Nasir and Hand (2008) discuss student engagement in terms of the student’s ability to make a “connection between self and the activity” (147). The connection or engagement can be measured by the student’s access to the domain of knowledge as a whole, the ability to take on integral roles and accountability for the role, and the opportunity for the student to engage in self-expression or make a unique contribution (Nasir and Hand 2008). At the core of student engagement is the relationship between student and teacher and the teaching styles used (Mosston and Ashworth 1985). In order to maintain student engagement and inspire high academic achievement a variety of teaching styles should be used with the autonomy of decision-making trading off between students and teachers (Mosston and Ashworth 1985). Whether reproductive or productive in nature, student and teacher/coach are able to create a more symbiotic experiential relationship in the course of learning (Mosston and Ashworth 1985; Nasir and Hand 2008).

The athletic model affords an opportunity for high student engagement because it allows students to connect with the activity by utilizing a variety of teaching styles and allowing the student to have access to the domain, providing integral roles, accountability, and encouraging self-expression. Coaches rely on communication with their players in order to be successful, and the more specific the communication, the better students are able to engage (Gallimore and Tharp 2004; Nasir and Hand 2008). Gallimore and Tharp (2004) noted in their research that coaches also invest in their students by getting to know them individually, their families and communities, learning style, and then tailoring instruction to bring out the best in the individual, which includes consistently evaluating individuals in response to overall team performance as well as individual growth, and then relating this information back to the student/athlete (Gallimore and Tharp 2004; Nasir and Hand 2008). The specificity of the feedback helps to build the trust relationship between student and teacher that is essential to student engagement and overall performance. It also provides consistent access to the domain of knowledge and allows the student to appropriately evaluate their standing, holding them accountable for their specific areas of opportunity while not discouraging self-expression.

Thus the achievement gap, defined by the performance scores from the California Department of Education, establishes a need for further research.
The sub-group that appears to be most susceptible to poor performance is involuntary minorities, particularly African Americans. Many factors influence the academic performance and engagement of students. Often a combination of these various factors makes the issue of academic performance complex. As a result, many students feel disenfranchised or forced to choose between two different worlds—school and home (Fordham 1988). A more humanizing and culturally relevant pedagogy would allow the student to better engage in his or her learning, and it eliminates the need for the student to choose between competing identities. The athletic model contains many of the humanizing and cultural elements in its infrastructure and can serve as a model for academia.

Paterno & Bryant
The books examined for this research include *Paterno by the Book* by Joe Paterno, *Bear Bryant on Winning Football* by Paul “Bear” Bryant, *Joe Paterno: Football My Way* by Mervin D. Hayman and Gordon S. White, *Playing for Paterno* by Charles Pitman and Tony Pitman with Jae Bryson, and *Career in Crisis: Paul “Bear” Bryant and the 1971 Season of Change* by John David Briley. The choice of Joe Paterno and Paul Bryant as subjects for the analysis is due to their unprecedented success as college football coaches. Joe Paterno is currently the head football coach at The Pennsylvania State University, having served in this capacity since 1966, and has accumulated the most wins of any Division I Bowl Subdivision team. Paul Bryant at his retirement (1982) was the wins leader (being since passed by Paterno and other coaches) in Division I Football Bowl Subdivision and he had relative success at each coaching stop in his illustrious career. What makes both men important to the research questions is that they presided over teams that saw the integration of African Americans. Bryant was the first coach in Alabama’s history to have African Americans on the football team; Paterno oversaw the increasing diversification of his teams for more than four decades as the head coach.

**METHODOLOGY**
This research will use a conceptual analysis approach to evaluate the chosen literature. The concept categories will be based on the research question of whether the athletic model is a viable model of culturally relevant pedagogy in K-12 education. As the literature is analyzed it will be coded for the existence of the defined concepts. The concept categories will focus on the teacher/coach–student relationship and student engagement. These categories will range from how the teacher/coach views his position in relation to the student/athlete to the student/athlete’s ability to identify with
the activity. Each of these categories is considered essential in establishing a more humanizing and culturally relevant pedagogy.

The presence of the various concepts in the literature will provide a theoretical framework as to how the athletic model can be applied outside of the athletic classroom and in the academic classroom. The concepts are defined to show how students are empowered to achieve greater success in the classroom. By coding for the existence of the concepts in the literature, a connection will be made between the success of the students in the athletic classroom and the existence of the concepts in the curriculum (i.e., athletic model).

Category Description
The category descriptions are discussed in this section.

Teacher/Coach Position
This category will focus on how the teacher views himself or herself in relation to the students. Specifically, the teacher would view him or herself as a participant in the learning process, not exclusively as the facilitator of student learning. Being a participant in the learning process allows for a more equitable relationship in the classroom, empowering students to take greater ownership of their learning (Bartolomé 1994). It would also allow for the teacher to embody a position of learner, creating an environment where the students and teacher are teaching and learning from each other, inspiring greater student engagement and higher academic success.

Culture and Community
Culture and community as a concept will be the use of the student’s social practices, values, beliefs, and history within the curriculum with the goal of empowering the student and inspiring higher academic engagement and success. Culture and community should be used as a means of awakening critical consciousness within the student that will allow the student to critically analyze their environment and the prevailing social structure.

Teaching Model
There is a commitment to educating all students and a variety of mediums are utilized to account for the various learning styles of a diverse group of learners (Mosston and Ashworth 1985). By not subscribing to a one-size-fits-all mentality of delivering instruction, more access routes to the domain of knowledge are created. Subsequently, students can find the access point that fits them best as learners. This helps students to transition from being objects to subjects of learning (Freire 1993; Nasir and Hand 2008).
Ethos
A more collective approach to learning is implemented. There is a culture of togetherness, collective accountability, as well as collective empowerment. Individual empowerment takes a back seat to the collective (Ladson-Billings 1995).

Feedback
Expectations that are specific, measurable, and attainable are collaboratively set between teacher and student, with specific feedback provided on a consistent basis. Students are expected to meet and exceed expectations, and feedback is utilized as a motivational tool for inspiring higher achievement (Gallimore and Tharp 2004). With consistent and specific feedback, students gain greater access to the domain of knowledge (Nasir and Hand 2008). Increased access to the domain leads to greater student engagement. Also, setting high expectations and continually raising the bar through opportunities to provide feedback helps empower students and leads to greater academic success.

Practice-linked Identity
Students begin to identify with the activity in which they are participating. An atmosphere of learning is created that allows the student to take on integral roles in the learning process. Self-expression and innovation are welcomed, valued, and seen as a means of enhancing learning outcomes, which creates a learning process that is more humanizing in its approach and increases student engagement (Nasir and Hand 2008).

ANALYSIS/RESULTS/DISCUSSION
This research begins to reveal the athletic model as a successful example of culturally relevant pedagogy. This researcher delves into an athletic model for closing the achievement gap in today’s schools. Seven concept categories related to culturally relevant pedagogy and the athletic model were identified and defined to assist in the examination of the selected text. The selected text focuses on the teaching styles of Joe Paterno and Paul Bryant who have reached the pinnacle of success as football coaches. This section provides an analysis of the results as they relate to the various concepts examined.

Teacher/Coach Position
The teacher/coach position, as part of the athletic model, has tremendous impact when defining the relationship between the coach and his players. The role the coach plays in the learning process, and the way they may perceive themselves affects the relationship between player and coach, as well as the model of teaching that is used. The previously discussed literature
provides evidence that Bryant and Paterno both were willing learners and this allowed for their players to feel empowered in the process.

Bryant, along with his belief in team unity, was a firm believer in discipline. Bryant stressed discipline in his program, believing that “the most disciplined team would often make the difference” (Briley 2006, 47); yet, though Bryant was a disciplinarian, he was also a willing learner who was ready to admit that he didn’t have all the answers, and he took ownership when he was wrong. Terry Davis, quarter back for Bryant’s 1971 team, alludes to this when he says:

*The first half was a close game and normally Coach Bryant did not send in many plays. He had always told me if I don’t like it, don’t run it. Sometime in the first half, they started running in a bunch of plays, and it was option-left and option-right. I was calling the plays that he sent in … We kept one series after another with no success … I went to the sideline and Coach met me coming off the field and he was furious. He said ‘Davis what in the hell is going on out there?’ I told him that if he would let me call the damn plays, we would be all right … He said that it was okay, and that I was exactly right about calling the plays. After that I called the plays for the rest of the half and game.* (Briley 2006, 184)

The willingness to take a back seat and become a student, allowing the player/student to take a teaching role in the learning process is fundamental in an effective culturally relevant pedagogy (Mosston 1968; Freire 1993). This gives the student the autonomy to critically think about the problem, their environment, and learning as a whole. This pedagogy also establishes a cooperative or symbiotic relationship between the coach and player.

The athletic model, based on its explicit objective of winning, is student focused, due to the fact that players win the game, and coaches help facilitate the learning that will allow the players to be successful in the game. This requires coaches to teach and encourage their players to think and learn on their own, independent of the coach at times. Paterno says:

*I say to them ‘Look, if you’re a defensive halfback and you’re playing in a zone defense and I tell you to play deep, but you just know that the next pass is going to be a short flat one and there will be times when you just know it and you don’t go against everything I’ve told you, if you don’t gamble for the interception, then you’re no damn good. You’re stupid, you’re lousy, and you’re not a good*
Challenging his players to think for themselves, even at risk of proving him wrong, empowers his players and creates a more heterogeneous learning environment. This more humanizing approach to teaching and learning alleviates many of the structural inequalities found outside of the classroom, and allows for the players to exercise their knowledge and expertise in a competent manner (Bartolomé 1994). The expectation for players to critically engage in their world, which is football, is an essential component of culturally relevant pedagogy.

Culture & Community

For football coaches, the recruitment process often takes them into the homes and communities of their players. It is during this time that they are able to meet with parents, family members, and other members of the community who may be vested in the well being of a potential recruit (Hyman and White 1978; Paterno and Asbell 1989). In terms of building an effective culturally relevant pedagogy, this is an important step, but understanding or being open to a player’s culture and community can go beyond the recruiting process. Analysis failed to show how culture and community where infused into the curriculum; however, there was recognition and engagement of the culture and communities of the players by the coaches (Hyman and White 1978; Briley 2006).

Paterno, as an Italian kid from Brooklyn, was often called a “Wop” or “Guinea” growing up, and empathizes with those who have been treated like second-class citizens (Hyman and White 1978). Paterno, addressing the subject of African American athletes, says:

> …there is so much emphasis on making it in athletics that they [teachers, family, community] don’t take advantage of the other talents these kids might have, talents that might benefit the community at large … we’re interested in his life and what we can help him make of it, not just what we can get out of him as a football animal. (Hyman and White 1978, 21-22)

Paterno’s words show that he has made an attempt to engage the culture and communities from which his players come. In order to expand their horizons and provide them with a complete education, he demonstrates a willingness to be patient when dealing with some of the external factors that have shaped his players (Hyman and White 1978).
For players and students, it’s not just about words but about actions as well. When Paterno consulted with his African American players (even though they only accounted for five percent of the team in 1969) about possible bowl game sites, he demonstrated a willingness to engage in the cultural concerns and sensitivities of his players (Paterno and Asbell 1989). If disrespecting or disregarding a student’s culture and community reduces them to an inferior state of savage, then respecting their culture, as Paterno does, allows students to experience a paradigm shift and subsequently transition from objects to subjects in the learning process (Freire 1992; Bartolomé 1994).

Teaching Model & Feedback
Analysis of the teaching model and feedback categories shows both categories to be interrelated. Feedback is an essential component of the teaching model, and the teaching model is one of the determinate factors in how the feedback would be related back to the student/player (Gallimore and Tharp 2004). Whether or not a coach is attuned to the varied learning styles of his players can often determine the difference between a players being successful or not (Jones 2005). Providing feedback to players is very similar. Paterno and Asbell (1989) allude to this when Paterno says, “Maybe he has to chew out one boy to help him. Maybe he has to invite another boy out to his house, sit him down and say to him, ‘look, son, look how good you can be’” (1979, 45).

Bryant used a variety of teaching models to coach his players. He provided a daily practice schedule and depth chart, which listed the daily player rankings for his players and accomplished two goals: First, it provided clear objectives for the players. Second, every player was aware of his or her standing on the depth chart (Briley 2006). This level of communication and transparency helps to keep the players focused on the task at hand and helps to prevent confusion between coaches and players. Comments would be made throughout the practice in regards to a player’s performance and the drill would then be repeated until it was done to Bryant’s expectation (Briley 2006).

Bryant used specific feedback as a way of teaching his players, and before the players could leave for the summer they were required to meet with Bryant personally to reflect on the contributions that a particular player has made, as well as the expectations Bryant had for the player (Briley 2006). During the season, each player that played in the game was graded based on their performance, and then were required to sit down with their position coach to discuss the grade that he received (Bryant and Stallings 1983). These meetings kept the lines of communication open between the player and
coach, so that the player was always aware of their strengths and weaknesses, what was expected of them, and how they fit into the team objectives.

The utilization of various teaching styles and the commitment to feedback and communication between the player and the coach connects directly with culturally relevant teaching; not only are the individual learning styles of the students taken into account but by providing feedback to players, the players are able to gain greater access to the domain of knowledge. As the players gain greater access to the domain of knowledge, they are able to connect their identity to the activity and they also begin to develop a critical consciousness about the domain itself (Mosston and Ashworth 1985; Gallimore and Tharp 2004; Nasir and Hand 2008).

Ethos
Analysis of literature showed that the emphasis of a collective ethos, which, for both Bryant and Paterno, was the most dominating concept based on frequency and emphasis. Both men focused more on collective empowerment or success than individual empowerment. For Bryant, the team always came before the individual, and winning meant unity (Bryant and Stallings 1983). In his book, *Bear Bryant on Winning Football*, Bryant says:

> In order to have a winner, the team must have a feeling of unity; every player must put the team first, ahead of personal glory. The men who play for us must be willing to make sacrifices. Victory means team glory for everyone. Individual personal glory means little if the team loses (1983, 29).

Bryant establishes a collective goal for his team and uses this ethos as a foundation for his teachings. By doing this Bryant is able to redefine the definition of success, putting diminishing value on individual success in place of team success. Bryant’s emphasis on team unity and a collective identity made the transition of integrating African Americans on his team easier.

Paterno, similar to Bryant, also built his teaching foundation on a collective ethos, which he calls “we” and “us.” In *Paterno: By the Book*, Paterno and Asbell write:

> Penn State style football was enriching these guys far beyond just winning and losing games. It had to do with pride; it had to do with caring about their teammates as people as a community … We remind ourselves of the kind of team we are: not a team of I’s and me’s, but a team of we and us (1989, 129).

As stated by former players Charlie and Tony Pittman, who as father and son both were recruited by and played for Paterno, team ethos is effective:
Paterno...has created a program that puts young people face to face with gargantuan tasks that force them to believe in themselves as part of a collective. Playing for Paterno is not about padding your individual statistics. Winning as part of a united team is what matters. Paterno grooms his teams to focus on the team’s objective… Individual achievement takes a backseat (Pittman, Pittman and Bryson 2007, 45).

Paterno plants seeds deep within his players’ minds from the moment they become students in his classroom, making it clear that the overall objective are the community objective. Individual accomplishments would never overshadow the team; it is the responsibility of every member of the team to ensure the success of their teammates (Paterno and Asbell 1989). This type of collective efficacy utilized by Bryant and Paterno are the basic building blocks for culturally relevant pedagogy. As stated by Gloria Ladson-Billings, “culturally relevant teaching [is] specifically committed to collective, not merely individual, empowerment” (Ladson-Billings 1995, 160). Fostering an atmosphere of collaborative learning provides opportunity for the players to become responsible for each other’s learning and success.

LIMITATIONS

Limitations of the research include the level at which the analysis was done. The analysis looked at coaches who have been successful at the college level, while the research is focused on closing the achievement gap in K-12 education. One of the concerns is that coaches at the college level are paid to win, and their salary is not comparable to teachers in K-12 education. Also an ethnographic case study would be the ideal method for researching and analyzing the athletic model. Another limitation in the research is that it looks exclusively at football, and doesn’t include any sports that women participate in, which brings up the question of whether the athletic model is a viable model for women as well.

CONCLUSION

The athletic model as an example of culturally relevant pedagogy is not, as result of the analysis, exactly culturally relevant. Instead, Bryant and Paterno’s model is an equity model, as it focuses on maintaining equality among its team members. Thus, Bryant and Paterno’s model contains many of the elements associated with a culturally relevant pedagogy. This makes sense because an equity model meshes seamlessly with a focus on collective or team identity that is so prominent with the athletic model. By choosing equity, cultural relevance is sacrificed in order to cultivate a community, or
team, united by common ground. This study shows that equity as a focus for teaching excels because it is more humanizing in its approach to educating students. In other words, students are provided an opportunity to have worth and value in the learning process. Based upon the analysis, there is evidence that the athletic model, as a means of educating ethnic minority students, is effective and has the potential to be an effective form for teaching all students, regardless of their ethnic status because of its equitable approach. While emphasis should be placed on finding a viable solution for closing the achievement gap, the ultimate goal of educating all students should not and cannot be lost in the process. Any viable solution may not only enhance the learning outcomes for ethnic minorities, but all students in general.

The athletic model should be explored in an effort to close the achievement gap because it has the potential to empower students to take possession of their education and inspire them toward higher achievement in the classroom. The understanding that the student is the vehicle that will deliver success or failure makes it imperative that education be about equipping students with the tools and skills that will allow them to participate in the classroom. Though the athletic model lacks the components to be considered culturally relevant pedagogy, it is about helping students engage in their education, choosing success over failure, which is done by empowering students to take control of their own voice and identity.

The athletic model is also just as much about the educator as it is about the student. As a model of equity teaching, the athletic model requires the educator (coach) to be in a position to learn just as much from his/her student as the student learns from the educator. The flow of information becomes a two-way street. Student and teacher dialogue begins and as a result, there is greater access to the domain of knowledge.

The initial objective of the present study was to explore whether the athletic model was a model of culturally relevant pedagogy. As a result of the analysis, the athletic model, as defined by Bryant and Paterno, was more color blind or equitable in nature than it was culturally relevant. Possible future research would be to look at other athletic programs, such as Grambling State University’s program, which was headed by African American educator Eddie Robinson (Robinson and Lapchick 1999). This further research would examine whether more culture and community was infused into the athletic model. Future research would also include female athletic teams, as well as a case study at the K-12 level, which would lead to a better assessment of the potential of the athletic model as a solution to the achievement gap.
REFERENCES


Mosston, Muska and Sara Ashworth. 1985 “Toward a Unified Theory of Teaching.” Educational Leadership 31-36


