

We make a difference

Learning communities in physical education

Introduction

- The implementation of the 1999 *Health and Physical Education in the New Zealand Curriculum (HPE)* and the 2007 *New Zealand Curriculum (NZC)* required a substantial paradigm shift (Stothart, 2000) from scientised or technocratic views of physical education (Culpan, 1996/97) to a socio-critical humanism.
- These difficulties raised questions about how teachers develop physical education classes that can utilise pedagogies to implement the philosophical intent of the NZC (2007).

Research question

- Do teachers of physical education establish classes as learning communities? If so how

Methodology

- This study was situated within the interpretative paradigm; a qualitative case study
- Data was collected by employing semi structure interviews with 4 physical education teachers. One teacher was selected for observation of classes and focus group interviews with 6 students from a year 9 class were conducted.
- Data analysis was conducted using the constant comparative method.

Analysis

From the data collection 3 significant themes developed:

- Characteristics of an altruistic class communities
- The pedagogies
- Characteristics of a learning community



Characteristics of an altruistic class community

This requires the following:

1. The development of positive student/teacher relationships

Teachers build positive relationships with students in a variety of ways:

Reciprocity, power sharing, and taking a personal interest in students creates opportunities for learning conversations

- The teachers deliberately shared something of themselves in an effort to create mutual spaces for conversations.
- Teachers engaged students in conversations about their student lives outside of school build relationships.
- Power sharing and reciprocity are the prerequisites for the promotion of student agency. (Alton-Lee, 2003; Rogers, 1983; Sewell, 2006; Watkins, 2005). Agency is a key to engaging students in inquiry learning

Trust and an ethic of care

- A mature student teacher relationship is built on trust, mutual respect and an ethic of care. This relationship contributes to a discourse of community

Behaviour is managed in ways that are consistent with the development of student agency and responsibility

- Rights and responsibilities, balanced against the ideals of freedom and equity (Davies, 2008)
- Teachers are authentic in managing student behaviour in a respectful manner while maintaining an ethic of care

Humour as an ethic of care

- Teacher humour, especially when directed at self, is also a useful tool for conveying the message to the students that "we're all in this together"
- Humour generates a "humour license" giving the students the right to laugh at themselves and laugh together, developing an enjoyable class atmosphere (Pollak & Freda, 1997).

2. Developing positive student to student relationships

Diversity is viewed as a strength and provides a rich complexity

- The dual dimensions of care and valuing diversity are core features of a community
- Conversations with "others not like me" provided a springboard for the students to develop altruistic peer relations with diverse others.
- The teachers became the representation of "we" in their classes. "We" was inclusive of those who are Māori, Pakeha, Tokelauan, Tongan, Japanese, Dutch, Cantonese, Somali, or multiple ethnic heritages

Develop student agency, empowerment and responsibility

- Teachers promoted the role of the student as being one of taking responsibility and increased agency through the transfer of selective decision making responsibilities to the students. E.g. Warm ups, including others, coaching peers and learning from each other

Teachers as facilitators

- The teacher role was one of facilitation: empowering people to take control and responsibility for their own efforts
- The teachers nurtured students' psychological needs, personal interests, and integrated values and is part of humanistic discourse.
- Teachers are role models for the values and behaviours they are looking for their students
- The teachers have "conversations" with the students about altruistic socio-moral content



In conclusion

The physical education classes in this study were fledgling learning communities. All teachers were engaged in inquiry learning positioned mostly towards teacher centered end of the inquiry-knowledge generation continuum with some forays into student centered end of the continuum.



The Pedagogies

1. Learning about the social through social learning tasks

The explicit teaching of socio-moral learning outcomes

- The teacher's programme goals promoted empathy, moral reasoning maturity, task motivation and the development of personal and social responsibility (Alton-Lee, 2003; Lieber, 2002; Martinek & Hellison, 1998; Miller, et al., 1997).
- These goals are coincidentally also NZC (2007) goals.
- All teachers in this study identified similar taught content as contributing towards the development of community:
 - Team work, leadership, followship, intra and interpersonal skills;
 - Attitudes and values
 - Participation, inclusion and involvement;
 - Personal and social rights and responsibilities;

Socio-constructivist pedagogies

- Learning about the socio-moral can be integrated into curriculum and develop community through task design (Alton-Lee, 2003).
- 'Social' task structures contribute to the development of student agency, belonging, and class cohesion, while catering for the diversity of the class. These tasks required cooperation, collaboration and communication (Alton Lee, 2003, Bossert, 1979) and opportunities for socio-moral learning experiences.
- The teachers used experiential learning, Teaching Games for Understanding, Hellison's Teaching Personal and Social Responsibility Model, group work/problem solving tasks and Guided Discovery/teacher questioning.

Instrumental pedagogies:

- Teachers learning activities had goal and task coherence and were developed using movement contexts as a means to teach socio-moral outcomes.

2. Pedagogies for Inquiry learning

Inquiry pedagogies

- The teachers in this study used a range of pedagogies to encourage inquiry. Pedagogies at the teacher centered end of the continuum included teacher designed questioning, experimentation, divergent discovery/problem solving and firsthand experience
- The teachers provided the learning framework within a movement context. Through firsthand experience, experimentation and reflection, the students inquired into their individual and collective values, behaviours and goals; all facilitated by teacher questioning

Negotiated Curriculum and co-construction of learning goals:

- Pedagogies from the student centred end of the continuum included co-constructed curriculum. Teachers co-constructed curriculum by inviting students to consider learning outcomes and construct their own learning activities.
- This is a democratic process with the teacher and students work collectively, with students taking responsibility for developing their learning goals and activities.

Characteristics of a class learning community

1. Activities and entities contributing to a discourse of inquiry

The development of a community and a learning community is dialectically related and these entities evolve simultaneously in a messy complexity. The activities and entities which contribute to the development of a learning community are evolutionary and separately positioned on a continuum. These consist of:

- Power sharing via the use of tasks which required collaborative inquiry, problem solving and knowledge generation
- Student learning about meta-learning and reflection



- Teachers move up and down this continuum influenced by the willingness and ability of the students to take responsibility for their learning
- The teachers deliberately planned to power share with students to develop student agency, responsibility, and inquiry, moving the students towards engaging in independent and collaborative learning activities.

Meta-learning and reflection

- In this study individual and collective reflection was an inherent and essential component for meta-learning, explicitly taught within the experiential learning cycle. Reflection was seen as the linking process between experience, inquiry, investigations and action and thought (Beard & Wilson, 2002).

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