

How Many Phys Ed Teachers Does It Take to Teach a Phys Ed Class?

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In Phys. Ed. there's just one teacher. But now in the program, there's five teachers, six teachers, seven teachers sometimes. (Colin, field text, April 2016)

Over the past four years, we have worked alongside Indigenous youth in an after-school wellness program entitled Growing Young Movers (GYM). The intention of establishing the GYM program was to engage youth in positive movement and wellness opportunities while connecting us, as researchers, with Indigenous youth and the community. The program is loosely structured around Hellison's (2011) model of Teaching Personal and Social Responsibility (TPSR) that focuses on building personal and social responsibility. We use developmental

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movement opportunities to engage the youth, which we believe brings about opportunities to build a relational space within the gymnasium. An integral component of the program is an intergenerational approach. This approach includes youth aged 6 to 12 working together with high school and university students, First Nations elders and researchers. For one and a half hours each Wednesday after school, from September to June, we come together in an elementary school gymnasium to engage in developmental movement opportunities that become the vehicle to connect with youth. The opening field text from Colin, a high school youth, serves as a reminder of the strength of this intergenerational approach.¹ Colin's words—"there's five teachers, six teachers, seven teachers sometimes"—frame this particular article as we continue to consider who is the teacher in this small elementary school gymnasium.

Literature

From our review of the literature, five threads surfaced with respect to after-school programming for Indigenous youth:

- Rationale of programming
- Extension of school
- Approaches
- Effective programming
- Program models

What became apparent as we considered these threads was that a theme of positioning Indigenous youth as being in deficit emerged. The positioning (or starting point, if you will) placed youth connected to after-school programs as being at risk or in need. Programs looked to enhance perceived shortfalls of youth—in particular, academic performance and social development (Kugler 2001; Fashola 2002). After-school programs were seen as being an intervention on youth seeming to be in need of support from outsiders. To briefly summarize, programs were often extensions of school, led by adults who were implementing models designed to improve the academic or social performance of youth. Put bluntly, the programs were implemented to fix youth, not to learn from them. As narrative inquirers interested in lived experience (Clandinin and Connelly 2000), we believed that positioning youth as being in deficit bumped with our commitments, as it discounted the experiences and knowledge of the youth. Dewey's (1938) pragmatic view of experience, the underpinning of Clandinin and Connelly's narrative view of experience, is transactional in that "representations arise from experience and must return to that experience for their validation" (Clandinin and Rosiek 2007, 39). It is with this lens that we choose to view experience, which positions the youth connected to GYM as knowledge holders, not as being at risk.

Methods

While we collected a number of field texts, including conversations, digital stories, observations and program evaluations, this article focuses on a narrative inquiry with three Indigenous youth mentors who have been part of the GYM program for two years or more. The remainder of the article shares findings from the first author (Brian Lewis) who was part of the larger study previously discussed. The first author engaged in ongoing conversations with Candice, Clary and Colin, which were documented through both audio and written journaling.

Along with ongoing conversations and observations, I (Brian) undertook five narrative inquiry research conversations with each participant. In doing so, I asked questions that explored (personal) feelings, hopes and dispositions; the social (that is, what was happening around them); temporality (that is, how their experiences were bound in time); and, finally, place, “which attends to the specific concrete physical and topological boundaries of inquiry landscapes” (Clandinin and Connelly 2000, 51). Inquiring further alongside the youth, we co-created a narrative account, allowing us to give “a representation of the unfolding lives of both participants and researchers” (Clandinin 2013, 132). From these three narrative accounts, we were able to pull common threads. Inquiring into these threads allowed us to animate further the youths’ experiences in this particular knowledge landscape. In the remainder of the article, we use the field texts from Colin to illustrate the shifting conception of who was positioned as the teacher.

School and Education

“They are different.” Colin was seeing that what counted in schools differed from what counted in life. It was clear to Colin that there were things learned in school that were important and that would allow one to be successful in school; however, there was also education. Education was the learning that happened outside school—“real-life stuff,” as he would put it. “Education is a part of our life. We start learning the day we’re born.” As I listened to Colin talk about how he saw education, I was reminded of an experience that happened mere moments earlier as we made our way to my office. Arriving at the top of the stairs, we approached a set of doors seconds prior to a group of three coming down from the third floor. Seeing that converging parties were making their way to the same doorway, Colin scooted ahead quickly to open and hold the door. I asked Colin who taught him to open doors for others. “My grandma.



She really helped me understand manners and everything.” His Grandma Jean, I would come to learn, was a tremendous influence on Colin and how he treated others. Colin had knowledge passed on to him from family, knowledge gained outside of school, knowledge that he passed on to others in the after-school program.

I continued to think about Colin’s notion of education and school being different. I was beginning to see that Colin felt he had knowledge that came more from an education. Education occurred, in his eyes, on multiple landscapes, which in turn allowed Colin to see himself as a knowledge holder. This realization surfaced in one of our conversations about Colin’s physical education experiences in elementary school. The gymnasium that hosts the after-school program was the same gymnasium in which Colin experienced physical education as an elementary school student. I asked him if the space seemed different now from when he was a student. He responded, “In Phys. Ed. there’s just one teacher. But now in the program, there’s five teachers, six teachers, seven teachers sometimes.” I asked, “Would you consider yourself one of the teachers?” Colin’s one-word response—“Yeah”—brought a smile to both our faces; we both knew that knowledge gained from other places counted. The knowledge from a multitude of landscapes—family, community, school, the program—all counted.

The words “five teachers, six teachers, seven teachers sometimes” show how Colin saw himself and others as teachers in the after-school program. Considering what I had come to know about Colin, how he had come to explain education and school as being different, I saw a connection to how he had self-identified as teacher. This self-designation was quite telling as it spoke to how he positioned himself as knowledge holder. We continued to unpack what *teacher* meant to Colin.

Who Is the Teacher?

FIRST AUTHOR. What is the common story of who the teacher is?

COLIN. The people that get all the attention.

FIRST AUTHOR. OK. In the classroom, in the school, who is the teacher?

COLIN. The person standing in the front, most likely.

FIRST AUTHOR. Do you feel like you're a teacher when you're in school?

COLIN. No.

FIRST AUTHOR. Ever?

COLIN. Not really.

FIRST AUTHOR. But you feel like a teacher when you come to the program?

COLIN. Yeah.

FIRST AUTHOR. I wonder why you never feel like a teacher in school?

COLIN. I'm the one taking notes and listening.

Knowing now how Colin saw himself as teacher within the program but not at school, I was curious how he thought the youth perceived him. "Probably as a teacher or an elder, or maybe an older brother, older sister," he responded. He went on to explain:

A lot of these kids, they don't have older brothers. Or, if they do, they don't really interact with them. Everyone looks up to someone or something. When we're playing with these kids, we're helping them. By doing that, it gives us the figure of that older brother or older sister.

The words *teacher*, *elder*, *brother* and *sister* were synonymous to Colin. For Colin, *teacher* and *older brother* carried the same meaning. This implied that learning also happened in the family, outside of school. Colin's conceptualization of *teacher* went beyond the common narrative of the adult standing in front of the classroom. This notion of *teacher* is perhaps different from the dominant story of school, where youth are, more often than not, positioned as not having knowledge. We have come to understand, through being in relation with youth in the GYM program, that everyone is a teacher. An intergenerational approach opens opportunities that we, as adults, may not even be capable of achieving, given that our experiences may be extremely different from our students' experiences. This notion of opening

opportunities became more apparent as we came to understand experiences of the youth.

Colin was placed in foster care at the age of two years old. For a number of years, he would move from home to home. One home, in particular, was not a healthy situation for Colin. "It wasn't a good experience. . . . It wasn't nice. It was scary." These life lessons, as Colin named them, were much greater lessons in his eyes than anything that was taught in school. Perhaps it was these life lessons that allowed Colin to view school differently and, when given the space, to be a mentor for many younger students going through similar situations. As Colin so eloquently put it, "Anyone can teach you one plus one, but can anyone really teach you what generosity means?" His words reminded us that teaching goes beyond mandated curriculum in schools.

We came to see that Colin, and the other mentors, held knowledge that most certainly counted. This knowledge enabled them to connect with youth in patient, respectful ways. He had physical knowledge that allowed him to demonstrate a variety of developmental movement skills to youth, and emotional knowledge that enabled him to meet the youth where they were, and empathize with their lives outside school. While we would love to say that our GYM program taught him these things, this was simply not the case. At best, we offered Colin a space to display the knowledge and skills he had gained along the way from out-of-school places. These life lessons were part of his identity; lessons Colin shared each week in a small elementary school gymnasium alongside a number of younger children who saw him as a role model.

Implications in the Field: (Re)Conceptualizing Physical Education

"In Phys. Ed. there's just one teacher."

In physical education, the norm is to have students grouped into grades. Similarly, when we see organized sporting options, we see students grouped by age. The common structures of school and sport often do not allow for younger students to work with older students. This makes sense if your goal is physical development at the cost of many other aspects that could be focused upon. So, what might happen if we allowed older students to interact more with younger students in gymnasium spaces?

From our experiences, we came to understand that the youth mentors arrived each week to the gymnasium with

a wealth of knowledge that we, as researchers, did not have. The younger students identified with the youth mentors and connected with them in ways that, as outsiders, we could have never connected. In this way, the youth mentors were able to tell us things about the students that allowed us to shift programming and helped us to plan different off-campus experiences that better met the needs of the students.

While not everyone has time to run an after-school program, are there other practical implications? For example, could high school programs attempt to connect with neighbouring elementary schools to create an ongoing intergenerational physical education program? Could older students in an elementary school (such as Grade 6) work alongside the younger students in purposeful ways? Consider the cooperative learning, the leadership, and the coaching development that comes from positioning older elementary or high school physical education students as teachers. What could be gained beyond the physical? In past work, we have noted that this intergenerational approach helps to build community (Lewis, Lessard and Schaefer 2013), and that once this community becomes established, the physical development often focused on in physical education can much more successfully be incorporated. Perhaps more important, the intergenerational community creates an environment that positions everyone as a learner and everyone as a teacher, which means that everyone is included in the learning process.

For additional information about Growing Young Movers (GYM) Youth Development, please visit our website at www.growingyoungmovers.com. ■



Brian Lewis (MEd) is a doctoral candidate at the University of Regina and cofounder of Growing Young Movers (GYM) Youth Development. Brian is the program director with GYM, consultant, workshop facilitator, and resource developer in the area of physical education and physical literacy. Currently, he sits on the board of directors for

Physical and Health Education (PHE) Canada. His interests revolve around the connections between the holistic well-being of youth and its impact on their physical literacy journey. Brian's doctoral research is a narrative inquiry into the experiences of urban Indigenous youth in an after-school wellness program.



Lee Schaefer (PhD) is an assistant professor at McGill University in the Department of Kinesiology and Physical Education. Lee is also the outgoing president of the Physical and Health Education Canada Research Council. His research is focused on teacher education (specifically, physical education teacher education), youth development through wellness and physical activity, the impact of the outdoors on youth physical activity levels, and narrative inquiry. He has been recognized at the national and international levels for both his research and his writing, and has been invited to speak at local, national and international conferences. His passion for physical education and for providing youth with purposeful, developmental movement opportunities continues to drive his research, teaching and service commitments.



Sean Lessard (PhD) is from Montreal Lake Cree Nation Treaty 6 territory. Sean is an associate professor in Indigenous Education and Teacher Education at the University of Alberta and cofounder of Growing Young Movers (GYM) Youth Development. He is an award-winning speaker, writer and researcher who works closely with communities on a national level. Sean's areas of interest include youth mentorship, leadership, high school completion and transition to postsecondary/workforce strategies. Sean is the Pat Clifford Award Winner for Emerging Educational Research (2015), as well as the Myer Horowitz Outstanding Dissertation Award Winner (2015).

Note

1. All student names are negotiated pseudonyms of the research participants.

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