Reflecting on the Possibilities for Self-Study in Physical Education

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Introduction

In this conclusion to the book, we want to reflect upon and critique the potential of self-study in the field of physical education. While Tinning and O'Sullivan have commented on the value of self-study in addressing the emerging conflicts, dilemmas, and incongruities arising within the pedagogies for contemporary physical education practice, in this chapter we want to consider how self-studies of physical education make contributions to the broader field of teaching and teacher education practices. In doing so, we suggest that the implications of self-study research extend well beyond the individual people who carry out the research, and the programs and contexts in which they work. In other words, we argue that self-study research offers valuable contributions to expanding conversations, knowledge, and understanding of teaching and teacher education practices (Clift 2004).

We believe there are five strands that weave together as a common thread through the chapters of this book. First, there is an awareness that the world we are teaching in has changed. The 'new times' discussed in the introductory chapter have not only greatly diversified the theoretical and methodological resources for inquiry, but have also challenged researchers to find meaningfulness in their research endeavours. There is a new preparedness to challenge convention and become immersed as the subject and object of study.

Second, each chapter is more than just a project of inquiry; it is also a moral and therapeutic narrative of each author's own experience. The research texts are not simply stories that convey the cultural uniqueness of each author's particular setting.

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Rather, through self-study each author gains confidence in the validity of their actions and voice, as well as becoming more resilient and supported in their work.

Third, the chapters flow from the liberal and radical politics of action. They reflect commitments to humanism and social justice as the rationale for becoming immersed and enmeshed in affecting change. In each chapter, the author engages in self-study with the commitment to improve their practice and understandings of practice.

Fourth, the chapters enact the body as a medium for making sense of and making connections with a world in which they co-participate in creating (Macintyre Latta and Buck 2007). Performing research in this way enables the researcher-learner to understand their own bodily capacity for thoughts and actions, their own feelings and emotions, as well as their relationships and connections with others.

The last strand centres on transformation and professional learning. In this sense, each self-study becomes more than a mechanism for reflecting on one's teaching and extends to being a tool through which theory can be used to defract, or 'slice through' every-day experience in ways that are transformative for both knowing in action and being a teacher or teacher educator. With respect to the aim of this chapter, we turn to focus on the latter three of these strands.

Enacting a Politics of Action

In taking an improvement-oriented stance to teacher education practice, self-study researchers represent what Tinning (1991, 2002) might consider a 'modest' form of critical pedagogy in teacher education, seeking to disrupt things as they are. The very nature of self-study of practice means that teacher educators reject taken-for-granted assumptions about teaching and teacher education, and wholeheartedly acknowledge the uncertainties of teaching practice. Self-studiers thus take a political stance in sharing how they have been able to disrupt their understandings of practice and ways in which they have sought to create new and meaningful pedagogical situations.

At the heart of each author's teaching and research effort is the intent to provide deeper, more insightful, and more meaningful understandings of personal transformation that have occurred while simultaneously teaching about and learning about teaching (Loughran 2006). In doing so, there is an expectation that improved understandings will impact positively upon student teachers' experiences of learning to teach. Casey and Metzler do this by discussing how they have sought to improve their understanding of teaching and learning in physical education using a models-based approach to practice – an innovation that Kirk (2013) identifies as challenging 'one-size-fits-all' (p. 2) forms of physical education by enabling students to attain a diverse set of educational outcomes. However, as Casey and Metzler both reveal, implementing models-based approaches in teacher education programs is not without its challenges on personal and programmatic levels. Forgasz and Garbett described how using embodiment as a conceptual and methodological approach to studying teaching practice can improve understandings of the nature of teaching relationships and the emotional dimensions that are present in teaching. Both

authors provided (at least for us) a demonstration of how a focus on the body can improve how we as readers might relate at a fundamental level to the feelings and emotions experienced by teacher educators as they describe their practice. MacPhail described working as part of a community of practice (CoP) in a PETE department and explained how a CoP fostered a positive climate for sharing ideas, observing and critiquing one another's practices, and for identifying and addressing challenges. Engagement in the CoP improved how teacher educators at her institution thought about and went about their practice individually and collectively, which, most likely, improved the quality of how student teachers learned to teach.

Interactivity

The subtlety of a politics of action is also expressed in the forms of interactivity that are established within each study. Kelchtermans and Hamilton (2004) suggest that 'good self-study scholarship involves collaboration not just with the present others, but with those whose opinions and ideas we value (from personal interaction or from texts) and whose voices become part of our system for considering our own analysis, findings, interpretations, and ideas' (p. 786). Although each of the chapters in this book are authored by individuals, examples of interactivity and collaboration are apparent in each of the works.

This collaboration is easier to see in some chapters than others. For example, in the meta-analysis of self-studies reported by Metzler, the interactivity and collaboration involves several groups of participants: teacher educators and students in the PETE programme at Georgia State University (GSU), programme graduates, field-based cooperating (or associate) teachers, K-12 students, and research collaborators from other institutions. This level of interactivity emphasizes the value that institutional/programmatic self-studies hold, as they enable multiple perspectives on the 'impact' of teacher education practices in a programme, helping to address concerns that some stakeholders (particularly policy makers) have about the trustworthiness of self-studies (Craig 2009). In other chapters, critical friends provided a source of interactivity for the teacher educator-researchers. For instance, Cameron engaged in conversations with several scholars who shared similar beliefs and stances about pedagogy (namely critical pedagogy), working through challenges, sharing experiences, and identifying ways to effectively teach a critical agenda and to 'handle' the struggles they faced personally and professionally. Ovens, Casey, and Brown also worked with critical friends with whom they were able to discuss their respective practices or have them observe classes to offer feedback and critique. In each case, the interaction with others helped the teacher educator-researchers to question and reframe understandings and experiences of teaching practice, enabling new perspectives to be considered (Bullough and Pinnegar 2001).

In some of the chapters the interactivity is buried slightly deeper beneath the surface. For example, although Attard describes his engagement with critical friends during his early years as a teacher, much of his initial interaction came from

conversations that he was having with himself through his journal. Not only does this form of conversing allow for open and unpredictable discourse, when viewed and re-analyzed as an archive (Ham and Kane 2004), it can provide an ongoing source of new data that allows continual reframing of ideas and practices. The caveat to using one's own journaling thus becomes ensuring that honesty and openness form a central platform to guiding journal entries. The value of self-studies for others in teacher education lies in the researcher sharing instances where challenges were faced, vulnerabilities exposed, and problems revealed (Samaras and Freese 2009). Exposing and grappling with the problematic thus becomes the essence of strong self-study research.

The Body as a Medium for Making Sense and Making Connections

The second strand that we wish to draw attention to is the embodied nature of these self-studies. In particular, it is through the emotional dimension that these teacher educator-researchers have made connections with the nature of teaching. Zembylas (2003), Labaree (2004), and Van Veen and Lasky (2005) all offer the fairly obvious, but relatively under-emphasized observation that because the nature of teaching involves human interactions (or the development of relationships) it necessarily involves an emotional dimension, and paying attention to emotions is crucial to foster meaningful learning. Labaree (2004) suggests that the emotional connection that students have with their teachers is perhaps the most powerful tool to encourage engaged learning. Following from this, Kelchtermans and Hamilton (2004) argue that there is a need to place more emphasis on relationships and their 'emotional currents' (p. 785) as a part of teacher knowledge. Such emphasis needs to consider not only the emotions experienced but also acknowledge how curriculum and other structural features of teaching shape emotional experiences (Hargreaves 2001). Despite recognizing the centrality of emotions in teaching and an increase in research on emotions in teaching over the past two decades, it remains a relatively under-researched field of inquiry, and as a result, our understanding of the role of emotions in teaching is somewhat limited (Akinbode 2013). However, the chapters in this volume suggest that self-study can be used as a powerful methodology to explore emotions in teaching.

By committing to explore emotions, Kelchtermans and Hamilton (2004) assert that researchers cannot 'neglect the *embodied nature* of teaching and learning' (p. 800, emphasis in original). Emotions are felt, they are lived, they are experienced through our bodies. Forgasz supports this assertion in Chap. 2 and suggests that the kinaesthetic nature of physical education (as well as drama and various forms of performance art) makes it a suitable context through which to explore embodied ways of knowing in teaching practice through self-study. One example Forgasz describes involved an interaction with her mother, discussing her heart racing prior to a job promotion. Forgasz described to her mother that it 'was your body's way of telling you something about how you were feeling in that moment'. We are sure

most of readers can relate to the feeling of their hearts racing (we certainly can) and can recall some of the embodied emotions attached to the experience, whether fear, excitement, desire, or anxiety. The important point is that the description captures something that most readers can readily relate to and vicariously live through or experience, which we suggest strengthens the abilities of self-studiers to effectively share their work in meaningful ways.

A closer look at the chapters in this volume reveals that emotions are evident in the self-studies of most teacher-educator-researchers. Emotions are revealed through the authors' reporting of feeling, for example, vulnerable, uncertain, disappointed, or elated. Some of these instances occur as a result of conducting self-study – that is, self-study made the author more aware of their emotions – while others used their identification of emotions to drive their self-study. Several examples of embodied emotional responses to teaching and learning situations are evident in Garbett's, Cameron's, Bruce's, Ovens's, and Brown's self-studies, and the emotions revealed provide a lens through which to consider each author's sense of identity (Van Veen and Lasky 2005). As such, we are given a better insight into who teacher educators are and how an understanding of self drives the work they do.

Several authors offer details of their own embodied emotional responses to teaching and learning situations. For example, as others have done elsewhere using self-study (Bair et al. 2010; Skerrett 2008), Cameron described specific emotions she felt in response to some student teachers' resistance to critical pedagogy, a stance and approach to practice that she felt best captured her identity and helped make explicit the identities of her students. Bruce's description of feeling on shaky ground similarly emphasizes the emotions she felt when her own ways of viewing, knowing, and enacting teaching practice were disrupted. In each case, emotions were formed as a result of relationships and interactions that were occurring in teaching. Garbett also recalled a variety of emotions as she learned to ride a horse (ranging from frustration to elation) but notably it was how she used her interpretations of those emotions to gain insights into teaching practice. Garbett states that the self-study provided the context to discover that 'my body has been the medium for making sense of, and connections to, being a teacher educator'. The emotions she experienced and lived through also enabled her to better understand some of the feelings and emotions that her student teachers experienced as they learned the new skills (for them) involved in teaching. Importantly, Garbett also acknowledged that new teachers needed time and space to discuss those feeling and emotions. The self-study process thus allowed Garbett to achieve a sense of emotional closeness to her students, but also led her to be cognizant of highlighting the discrepancies between doing teaching ('going through the motions') and *being* a teacher. These studies provide different ways through which emotions can lead to better understanding – of self *and* practice. Like others who have given attention to the affective domain in teacher education, in each case the authors described ways in which a focus on emotions enabled a deeper understanding of how influential relationships and interactions (with students, colleagues, teachers, and texts) can be in developing pedagogies of teacher education (Garbett and Ovens 2012; Kelchtermans and Hamilton 2004; Ritter 2011).

Emotions also occupied a central role in the chapter by Ovens, and they were apparent in two ways. First, like Garbett and Cameron, Ovens describes the emotions he felt as a teacher educator during peer teaching. By turning the focus of his inquiry on himself, Ovens reports that peer teaching initially led to him feeling 'disoriented' and 'bored' in the teacher education classroom, and as a result he derived less satisfaction from his teaching. While maintaining satisfaction in one's teaching role is crucial to staying motivated and committed to their work (Kelchtermans and Hamilton 2004), self-study led Ovens to the realization that much of the satisfaction he had experienced to that point in his teaching career had come from a transmission-style approach to teaching, where he was in control of the conversations and actions that he and his students engaged in. Yet, reframing both his pedagogies *and* the things from which he gained satisfaction while teaching (focusing on supporting student learning through critical approaches) led Ovens to gain a new found sense of satisfaction in his practice. The second way that emotions were apparent in Ovens's chapter was from the perspectives of student teachers in his class. The emotions student teachers described were a prominent feature in disrupting his assumptions about the authenticity of the peer teaching experience, and the vulnerability that student teachers are exposed to when teaching their peers. Tensions (embodied through emotions) between students were observed to impact upon the peer teaching process, which led Ovens to acknowledge the need to consider the existing and present relationships that student teachers have with each other inside and outside of the teacher education classroom. While teacher educators often go to great lengths to foster positive teacher-student relationships and model this aspect of practice (Bullock 2012; Cole 1999), there is also a crucial need to be cognizant of the student-student relationships that exist, and to think about ways that teacher educators might become members of, at times, already well-established learning communities. An important point to consider here, however, is that already established communities might not be cohesive or positive, and this has implications for how student teachers will experience learning to teach in those environments.

Several of the chapters in this book demonstrate ways in which emotions can simultaneously provide the impetus for and desire to conduct self-study research (that is, by recognizing an emotion or a response to an emotion and seeking further insight about how or why that emotion was present and its implications for practice) *or* enable deeper understandings of teaching and learning through the self-study process. As such, by acknowledging the role that emotions played in self-studies, teachers and teacher educators are offered with a means to 'self-develop' personally and professionally (Zembylas 2003), and create deeper understandings of practice.

Transformation and Professional Learning

Self-study is recognized as a way that teachers and teacher educators might engage in long-term, sustainable forms of professional learning and development (Attard, this volume; Dinkelman 2003). While an extensive discussion on

the nature and characteristics of 'effective' continuing professional development (CPD) is beyond the scope of this chapter, we find the framework offered by Day and Sachs (2004) to be useful in considering contemporary views of CPD. They suggest that CPD needs to provide teachers and teacher educators with mutual opportunities to build knowledge that they may not have had (a deficit model) as well as to improve upon already effective forms of practice (an aspirational model). Practitioners are thus encouraged to engage in CPD that: is represented by a lifelong learning approach (in contrast to one-off workshops); develops knowledge for-, of-, and in-practice (Cochran-Smith and Lytle 1999); is related to teachers' personal and specific needs, and offers extended opportunities to engage in personal reflection to develop knowledge of the self (Day and Sachs 2004). Yet, Loughran and Northfield (1998) suggest that self-study meets these criteria *and more* because it encourages the wider communication of the ideas and knowledge generated through professional learning as part of the culture created by the self-study community. It is the notion of sharing that Tinning (this volume) highlights as setting self-study apart from other practitioner research communities.

The professional learning and development of teacher educators in the early stages of their career represents a growing line of inquiry in the literature (*cf.* Bullock 2009; Casey and Fletcher 2012; Dinkelman et al. 2006; Ritter 2007; Williams and Ritter 2010; Zeichner 2005) and this focus is evident in several of the chapters. For example, Attard's, MacPhail's, and Casey's chapters support claims that systematic forms of professional learning and development are virtually absent from the experiences of many beginning teacher educators (Murray and Male 2005), but importantly, both also show how powerful professional learning can be when it is offered.

Attard describes how he was able to use a reflective approach to self-study to engage in a sustainable form of professional learning, both individually and collaboratively. The value of the process was such that a participant in Attard's collaborative self-study group said that reflective self-study was 'the best type of professional development he had ever experienced'. According to Attard the reasons that reflective self-study was so powerful as a form of professional development was that it was directly relevant to his own and other participants' needs. The self-study process allowed participants to explore issues that *they* had previously identified as warranting change, rather than issues identified by external sources. According to Attard and others (*cf.* Armour and Yelling 2007; Borko 2004; Day 1999; Duncombe and Armour 2004) far too often professional development for teachers is removed from factors deemed personally relevant for teachers issues deemed important by policy makers and conducted in circumstances that ignore the highly contextual nature of teaching. What is somewhat ironic is that teacher educators are seldom offered *any* form of professional development (not even ineffective forms!) and are left to struggle for survival in their professional roles, much like many of the beginning teachers whom they teach. However, Attard puts forth a compelling argument for the value of self-study in addressing the needs of beginning teacher educators.

Another aspect apparent in several chapters concerned the recruitment of faculty members who take on the task of teaching teachers as a major part of their role. While pre-service programs recruit teacher educators because of their postgraduate qualifications, backgrounds in research, or exemplary school teaching practice, it appears that far too often the assumption is made that those recruits can fairly easily display exemplary practice in teacher education programs based purely on their theoretical knowledge of teacher education or by transferring their school teaching practices (Murray and Male 2005). Such assumptions thus limit mentoring, induction, or professional development opportunities offered to teacher educators (Williams et al. 2012). For example, despite being an accomplished high school teacher and gaining accolades for his innovative school teaching practices, Casey arguably felt a sense of 'de-skilling' (Murray and Male 2005) as he realized that his innovative approach to practice could not be readily transferred to the contexts of pre-service teacher education. Unfortunately, Casey's story is all too familiar when considering the experiences of other classroom teachers who make the transition to teacher educator (Bullock 2009; Dinkelman et al. 2006; Ritter 2007; Williams and Ritter 2010; Zeichner 2005). Taking Casey's and Brown's self-studies as examples, the assumption that teachers can easily make the transition to teacher educator continues to be made despite significant changes in institutional culture, the age and maturity of learners, and perhaps most importantly, the content and pedagogies necessary for successfully teaching teachers. When the individual teacher educators who have been lauded for their practice come to the realization that they have to change their practice significantly, this can affect their self-esteem, personal value, and motivation for teaching.

MacPhail's professional learning as a teacher educator was described in terms of her involvement in a PETE CoP. The benefits of collaborative professional learning for teacher educators have been described by other self-study researchers (Bair et al. 2010; Gallagher et al. 2011; Kosnik et al. 2011; Pennington et al. 2012), although others have not necessarily used the conceptual elements of situated learning (Lave and Wenger 1991) and CoP (Wenger 1998) that MacPhail employs. Self-study offered MacPhail ways to more deeply understand the nature of her experiences and the impacts that her involvement in the CoP had on her understanding and enactment of teacher education practices. MacPhail contrasts her experiences as a teacher educator (a) in the first 3 years of her role where her departmental colleagues were not sharing common interests or goals in improving their own practices or students' experiences of learning to teach, with (b) following the arrival of new colleagues who fostered a collegial, collaborative CoP with the aim of improving understandings of teaching and learning for individuals and the group as a whole.

An outcome that was described by both Casey and MacPhail was the importance of providing mentoring and induction opportunities for new teacher educators, with self-study playing an important role. Such opportunities would (hopefully) mean that new departmental colleagues are, at the very least, offered some semi-structured induction and guidance into their institutions and the academy, avoiding the 'sink or

swim' experience of so many new teacher educators (Murray and Male 2005). MacPhail's chapter also suggests that mentoring and induction that occurs in a collaborative setting (such as a CoP) can have benefits for other members of the department as they engage in ongoing professional learning – a point emphasized by the collaborative mentoring experiences of Fletcher et al. (2012). Moreover, for beginning teacher educators self-study offers opportunities to develop both their teaching practice and their scholarship, by encouraging the wider sharing of their experiences in the educational research community. With the current emphasis on disseminating research in university departments, providing new teacher educators with means to focus on teaching and scholarship at the same time may further allow them to feel like full participants in university communities.

Conclusion

Drawing together the self-studies showcased in this book highlights the rich diversity of approaches that have been used to explore the edges of self in the moments of practice. The strength of such an endeavour lies not in being able to make a singular, unifying conclusion, but in celebrating the myriad ways that physical educators are studying their practices in order to improve the learning outcomes for their students. To conclude, it is worth returning to a concept that we proposed in the introductory chapter. We proposed the following: 'When framed as a provisionally rational project, self-study becomes more than a set of techniques, or an exercise in patience, or application of intelligence, or accumulation of evidence. It values alongside these qualities the ability to sense, feel, think, and act with imagination in order to open up more useful interpretive possibilities'. Taken together, we believe that the self-studies compiled in this volume are strong examples of scholarship that not only provide evidence and rigorous analysis that might be deemed 'acceptable' by more conventional interpretations of what counts as research: they offer reflexive, personalized accounts of the humanness involved in teaching practice. As such, the examples are not meant to be taken as concrete solutions to enduring problems or issues: they are subjective snap shots of specific actions, in specific places, at specific moments. Each of the authors describes challenges they have encountered in practice and, importantly, they have shared their lived experiences – the feelings, emotions, doubt, joy, difficulties, and frustrations – in their attempts to improve personally and professionally. In sharing these experiences and their interpretations of the experiences, they seek to better understand what can work in teaching, how it works, and why it works, and to provoke the reader to question their own understandings of practice. If the purpose of scholarship is to provide a platform for knowledge creation and debate, we encourage readers to take what they have read in the preceding chapters and to share their own understandings of scholarship and practice through self-study.

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