

## **Community-Based Experiential Learning: A Way of Reflexive, Transformative, and Relational Pedagogy in Physical and Health Education Teacher Education (PHETE)**

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Students in the post-secondary physical and health education teacher education (PHETE) programs are active and responsible participants in their own learning. In order to reach a deeper level of learning, students need to be fully engaged in their own learning and its outcomes. Inspiring these students, and then helping them translate that passion into proficiency in various areas in the field of physical and health education, are thus keys to the success of post-secondary PHETE programs. This viewpoint article discussed the potential contributions of community-based experiential learning (CBEL) approaches for PHETE programs as a way of promoting students' active and responsible engagements in learning. Reflexive, transformative, and relational merits of CBEL in the context PHETE were explored.

Key words: experience; pedagogy; physical and health education (PHE); physical and health education teacher education (PHETE), community-based experiential learning (CBEL)

### **Introduction**

Pre-service teachers in the field of physical and health education (PHE), students in the post-secondary physical and health education teacher education (PHETE) programs, learn practical knowledge, attitudes, behaviors, and skills as a future PHE educator during their teacher education program. In order to reach a deeper level of learning, students need to be actively and responsibly engaged in their own learning and its outcomes. Self-regulated learners (i.e., students who are autonomous in their own learning) tend to integrate their self-generated thoughts, feelings, and

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behaviors into their own academic skills (Zimmerman, 2002); and transformative learners (i.e., self-reflective students who are continuously reflecting on and being critical of their own learning) tend to care about their future “becoming” and “living” as knowledgeable and ethical educators (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999; Cranton, 1998). Inspiring PHE pre-service teachers, and then helping them translate that passion into proficiency in various areas in the field of PHE, are thus keys to the success of post-secondary PHETE programs (Konukman & Schneider, 2012; 2002Smith & Colby, 2007; Watson, Hueglin, Crandall, & Eisenman,).

Firsthand experience has been identified as a source of student knowledge (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999; Kolb, 2014). Community-based experiential learning (CBEL) approaches—that is, collaborative education methods combining university coursework and community-based programming—have thus been widely used in PHETE programs (Beard & Wilson, 2002; Jacoby, 1996; Konukman & Schneider, 2012; Watson, Hueglin, Crandall, & Eisenman, 2002). Making connections between classroom theory and real-world practices and linking academic coursework to community-based field experiences are critical components in such approaches (Beard & Wilson, 2002; 2002; Jacoby). This may be accomplished, for instance, by doing individual or group field projects at local schools or physical activity/sport organizations/facilities and presenting the results of community-based group projects at community physical activity/sport events. Problem solving (e.g., inquiry-based projects in real-world situations) and problem posing approaches (e.g., critical writing assignments on contemporary issues in current professional practices based on field experiences) in PHETE courses are the other examples that have been used to promote PHE pre-service teachers’ firsthand experience (Cunningham, 2004; Norman, 2009). Additionally, students’ participation in these community experiences can also be a valuable asset to local communities, offering an economical and sustainable means of providing quality education/services to students/participants of the community and an efficient method of training PHE pre-service teachers (Konukman & Schneider, 2012; Watson, Hueglin, Crandall, & Eisenman, 2002).

Given such benefits of CBEL opportunities both for PHE pre-service teachers and communities, this viewpoint article discussed the potential contributions of CBEL approaches for PHETE programs as a way of promoting PHE pre-service teachers’ active and responsible engagements in learning. This article focused on the ways in which CBEL might benefit PHETE programs as a way of promoting students’ reflexivity, transformation, and relationship in and through their CBEL opportunities.

## Community-based experiential learning in PHETE

CBEL has been widely used in PHETE programs by providing real-world experiences to the PHE pre-service teachers while they are attending at a post-secondary education program. This pedagogic approach refers to an umbrella concept that highlight the importance of a lived experience and reflection in PHE pre-service teachers' learning in the context of real-world community settings. This approach focuses on PHE pre-service teachers' active participation in real-world situations and also their critical reflections on such firsthand experiences (Kolb, 2014). According to Kolb (2014), learning occurs as a cycle in this type of approach: action that influences experience, reflection that is based upon the action and experience, and new insights and understanding that result from the reflection and action. Various theoretical underpinnings such as the works of Vygotsky, Hahn, and Schön have shaped and developed various approaches of CBEL. Among these works, the origin of CBEL ideas can be traced back to the work of Dewey—that is, the Deweyan pragmatism.

The educational theorist John Dewey understands experience as “*relational, temporal, and continuous*” (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 44). Experience is *relational* because people are always in relationships with each other within social contexts. People experience their personal reflection in any experience (e.g., feelings, emotional reactions, and thoughts) and undergo interactions within societal environments in any experience (e.g., the influences of culture and traditions on one's assumptions) (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Experience is also *temporal* and *continuous*, because it is constantly changing as it unfolds through time. Furthermore, experience grows “out of other experiences, and experiences lead to further experiences” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 2). According to Clandinin and Rosiek (2007), “Every experience both takes up something from the present moment and carries it into future experience” (p. 69). Considering this relational, temporal, and continuous nature of experience, it can be said that learning occurs by experiencing experience as a form of ongoing reconstructions in and through experience (i.e., learning from experience).

However, Deweyan pragmatism emphasizes that learning does not occur independently by experiencing experience. Deweyan pragmatism stresses that learning also occurs as a process of transformation by reflecting upon experience. For this reason, PHE pre-service teachers involved in CBEL are provided opportunities for reflecting on their individual experiences in their learning processes and encouraged to make meanings from their reflections (i.e., learning from reflection). Accordingly, PHE post-secondary educators who incorporate CBEL approaches are often considered as a facilitator and resource for PHE pre-service teachers' reflection and learning. These educators offer PHE pre-service teachers opportunities to acquire new perspectives about their learning, themselves, and their surrounding environments through societal interactions within real-world PHE social contexts.

CBEL approaches feature components involving experiential learning in various problem posing/solving approaches such as community service-learning, community-based practicum, university-based volunteering, and in-class experiential learning (Cunningham, 2004; Jacoby, 1996; Norman, 2009). PHE pre-service teachers are provided opportunities for not only implementing classroom theories into the real-world community settings, but also reflecting upon their firsthand experience in the context of PHE professional pedagogic practices (Furco, 1996). This later phase can occur as an individual process of critical self-reflection or a shared group reflection to encourage PHE pre-service teachers' active and responsible participations in their own learning and outcomes.

Pre-service teachers in the field of PHE are expected to learn practical knowledge, attitudes, behaviors, and skills for restoring, promoting, and maintaining their future students' health and wellness through various physical activities. Furthermore, they are expected to focus on their personal growth in becoming socially/culturally responsible PHE educators. For this reason, CBEL can offer opportunities for PHE pre-service teachers to engage in critical thinking and self-reflection on their own prospective educational practices through their learning experiences in the real-world PHE community settings during their post-secondary education (Brock, 2010; Watson, Hueglin, Crandall, & Eisenman, 2002).

## **Promoting Reflexivity, Transformation, and Relationship in Learning**

### **Reflexive learning**

In understanding another person and culture you must simultaneously understand yourself. The process is ongoing, an endeavor not aimed at a final and transparent understanding of the Other or of the self, but of continued communication, at an ever-widening understanding of both. (Sarris, 1993, p. 6)

*Reflexivity* refers to an action that examines “critically the assumptions underlying our actions, [and] the impact of those actions...from a broader perspective” (Cunliffe, 2016, p. 748). Therefore, it involves a critical self-reflection on one's own assumptions, value systems, and actions, as well as impacts of those onto others. According to Enosh and Ben-Ari (2016), when people acknowledge their differentness—that is, the “apparent incongruity that needs to be explored and understood, or both” (p. 579), they tend to engage in the process of critical self-reflection. However, such moments of self-awareness do not directly lead to their reflexive thinking and action. Instead, reflexivity occurs when people engage in a “deliberate awareness involving both a contemplative

stance (state of mind) and intentional activity” (Enosh & Ben-Ari, 2016, p. 578). One of the core aspect of CBEL in the contexts of PHETE is to provide opportunity to learn from reflection. Such encouraged “intentional activity” of reflection can prompt a discovery and careful interpretation of PHE pre-service teachers’ incongruities and insecurities in relation to their own personal and social contexts (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2000; Enosh & Ben-Ari, 2016).

As Kolb’s learning cycle suggests (2014), CBEL approaches can construct new ways of thinking and doing by reflecting on a concrete experience in the context of PHE, that can be transferred to the other situations by formulating and testing out practical knowledge, attitudes, behaviors, and skills within real-world PHE situations. Schön (1983) argues that learning from reflection involves “important opportunities to think about what [they are] doing” and chances to avoid their “narrowness and rigidity” in their own doing (p. 61). Schön (1983) further note that reflexivity not only occur after one’s doing. It occurs simultaneously in one’s action as a *reflection-in-action*, a form of problem-solving through on-the-spot critical thinking. As such, PHE pre-service teachers can directly contribute for positive societal change that benefits their local communities while they are engaged in CBEL opportunities in their PHETE programs.

Reflexivity also occurs through the retrospective self-reflections on one’s doing by examining critically the alternative actions and solutions about one’s previous doing (i.e., *reflection-on-action*). Thus, the intentional activities of reflection in CBEL could contribute PHE pre-service teachers to gain socially-responsible knowledge and be helpful for their future educational practices to be ethically-sound (Rolfe, 1997; Schön, 1983). This reflexivity skill can further encourage PHE pre-service teachers to engage continually in reflecting on and thinking critically about their future educational processes and potential implications of such endeavors, and to foster relational and transformative dialogues with other PHE teachers.

### **Transformative learning**

If we change the stories we live by...changing who we are...we might change...our own lives and those who live in relation with us. (Clandinin, 2013, p. 23)

Traditionally, PHE pre-service teachers were considered as a recipient of knowledge that is transferred from their knowledgeable instructors (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999; Konukman & Schneider, 2012; Watson, Hueglin, Crandall, & Eisenman, 2002). For instance, PHETE programs focused on passing on knowledge and evaluating how students respond to examination questions about the knowledge as a means of recognizing students’ success in learning. On the other hand, a critical aspect of CBEL focuses on providing PHE pre-service teachers relevant and practical

educational experiences in acquiring professional knowledge, attitudes, behaviors, and skills, as well as developing abilities for critical thinking and problemsolving, within real-world PHE environments (Cranton, 1998; Mackeracher, 2004). Therefore, CBEL can develop PHE pre-service teachers' readiness to engage in lifelong learning and measures the ways in which they apply their knowledge to real-world situations (Diamond, 2008; Fenwick & Parsons, 2000).

Considering an active and responsible role of PHE pre-service teachers, CBEL involves promoting PHE pre-service teachers' transformation through learning (Loyens, Magda, & Rikers, 2008). As a result, self-regulated learning environment can foster PHE pre-service teachers' active engagement of knowledge generation and acquisition in learning (Loyens, Magda, & Rikers, 2008). According to Mezirow (2000), learners are the agents of self-change and transformation. Mezirow (2000) argues that learners are able to identify their own limitations and engage in new ways of becoming (e.g., a development of critical consciousness and their own political identities) through self- or shared reflections in and through their own learning experience. Mezirow's theory also argues that transformative learning opportunities can further develop learners as self-regulated, autonomous, and self-empowered individuals who are transformative for new possibilities in their own practices through critical thinking and problem-solving actions (Mezirow, 2000).

Through CBEL opportunities, PHE pre-service teachers thus can acquire personal practical knowledge and new perspectives and insights on their learning processes and outcomes while experiencing their experiences and reflecting on those experiences (Beard & Wilson, 2002; Connelly & Clandinin, 1999). According to Clandinin and Connelly (1988),

Personal practical knowledge is in...past experience, in...present mind and body, and in...future plans and actions. Personal practical knowledge is found in...practice. It is...a particular way of reconstructing the past and the intensions of the future to deal with the exigencies of a present situation. (p. 25)

For this reason, providing CBEL opportunities in PHETE should not merely be understood as a placement-based pedagogic approach that sends PHE pre-service teachers in a community-based learning situation. Instead, CBEL approaches provide PHE pre-service teachers opportunities for scaffolding their own past experiences in a real-world present experience in community PHE settings. Such present experiences, along with carefully designed reflection activities, can further provide PHE pre-service teachers opportunities for identifying transformative ways of engaging in future educational practices (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999; Driscoll, et al., 1996). Giroux (2009) note that current post-secondary education often seeks to focus on merely preparing students for employment,

rather than providing opportunities for developing students' ethical and socially/culturally responsible attitudes that would enrich their future educational practices and societal impacts. CBEL approaches in PHETE, however, emphasize transformations and changes in an effort to achieve positive and meaningful societal change by engaging future PHE pre-service teachers in such processes as agents of change.

### **Relational learning**

We have to pay the closest attention to what we say. What [others] say tells us what to think about what hurts them; and what we say tells us what is happening to us—what we are thinking, and what may be wrong with us.... Their story, yours, mine—it's what we all carry with us on this trip we take, and we owe it to each other to respect our stories and learn from them. (Coles, 1989, p. 30)

Considering the relational nature of experience, CBEL involves establishing relationships between PHE post-secondary educators and PHE pre-service teachers, that are built on the purpose of co-creation of knowledge through CBEL processes. As such, CBEL engages both PHE post-secondary educators and PHE pre-service teachers in a process of collaborative knowing, which can be reciprocally beneficial for both parties as a way of personal growth and societal development (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999; Driscoll, Holland, Gelmon, & Kerrigan, 1996; Johnson, 2017). For example, PHE pre-service teachers can expand their experiential backgrounds for future educational careers, while acquiring self-confidence, critical thinking abilities, and pedagogic skills. PHE post-secondary educators can also experience a sense of satisfaction that results from observing PHE pre-service teachers' growth and becoming, as well as recognizing potentially societal changes that are made by PHE pre-service teachers in their learning processes and their future educational practices.

Furthermore, the field of PHE is multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary in nature (Schary & Cardinal, 2015; Vertinsky, 2009). Therefore, the contents of CBEL opportunities in PHETE are not isolated from material taught in other disciplines (e.g., socio-cultural studies, community/public health, and psychology). CBEL in PHETE thus emphasize the importance of making connections between the perspectives, professions, and technologies of various academic disciplines related to the field of PHE. Interactions with in-service PHE teachers, field professionals, and other related community stakeholders from various PHE contexts can maximize PHE pre-service teachers' multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary experiences through CBEL activities.

Finally, in real-world PHE contexts, there are ethnically, culturally, linguistically, and

economically diverse students (Fletcher & Dashper, 2014). Through CBEL opportunities, PHE pre-service teachers can also be exposed to this reality and learn ways of accommodating such diversity in learning processes, aspirations, styles, needs, and outcomes by experiencing multi-directional interactions occurring in the real-world community PHE settings.

## Conclusion

Post-secondary educators in PHETE are facilitators and resources for PHE pre-service teachers' learning. The goal of PHETE should involve guiding and encouraging PHE pre-service teachers' lifelong engagement in learning. They then can learn practical knowledge, attitudes, behaviors, and skills for promoting people's health and wellness, and at the same time, they can focus on their personal growth in becoming ethical pedagogic professionals in the future through their critical thinking and self-reflection. And most importantly, PHE pre-service teachers can also contribute to societal changes through their ethical, knowledgeable, and socially and culturally-responsible future practices in a wide variety of physical activity contexts. Through such opportunities, PHE pre-service teachers can learn classroom theory in a real-world setting, while contributing to the immediate changes in the communities. This can be a win-win situation for PHE pre-service teachers and the community. CBEL is thus a reflexive, transformative, and relational pedagogic approach for PHETE programs.

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Received: April 30, 2018

Reviewed: May 23, 2018

Accepted: June 21, 2018