**What did you do at School Today? Sharing Student Learning in Physical Education**

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Introduction to Educational Research

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**Introduction**

**Personal Experience and Research Interest**

As a student, parent and teacher I have trouble with the whole reporting process, parent-teacher interviews, student led conferences and especially report cards. Growing up and reading a report card never provided me any useful information about what I learned or what I was able to do. Now, as a teacher at a school of 350 children, Primary - Grade 5 students, in a predominantly middle class community, with activity involved and engaged parents, I feel that many of the families would greatly appreciate having more than a glimpse of what is happening in the gym.

With my current situation, I find that there is not a very effective form of communicating what is going on in the academic life of a student. Between the limited time and space available to report on student learning or the arbitrary grades… very little substantial communication is taking place. This is especially true in a subject like physical education.

How is it possible to encapsulate the learning of a term or year into 600 characters and a letter grade, and really what does it mean? There has to be a better way to effectively communicate a student's ability to perform a variety of fundamental movement skills; or how they are developing their physical literacy; or whether or not they are meeting any number of the outcomes established for their grade level.

My passion for teaching physical education to young children and watching them develop their skills over the years in elementary school as well as my frustration with the reporting system that greatly limits how I can communicate to the parents and students, has led to my wonderings. I want to do a project that will focus on effectively sharing and communicating what the students are doing in class as simply and as often as possible. That leads me to ask "In what ways would I be able to share daily physical education in the gymnasium so that the parents and students will be able to see what's going on and over time see progress in skill development?", "How can I provide students the opportunity to review and comment on their learning and skill development?", "How can I track student learning  over longer periods of time?" and "What would be a way to get students engaged in sharing their out of school physical activity and development?".

In reflecting on my wonderings I believe that the key aspect of my frustration is the lack of effective and substantial communication of student learning throughout the school year which provide parents and students with an ongoing feedback on what is being accomplished with regard to the student's FMS development, physical literacy and success in meeting the NS PE outcomes.

**Literature Review**

In reviewing the literature, many authors (Mitchell & Bolt (2012), Loughrey & Cox (2012), Hager & Beighle (2006), Faerber (2006)) focused on the importance of advocating for physical education and the important place that it should take in the education of children. Mitchell and Bott (2012) discuss some do's and don'ts when promoting your PE program, and also provide insights into what makes a good presentation. They also talk about the benefit of engaging parents in the PE curriculum through fun PE activity nights. Meanwhile, Faerber (2006) focused on providing concrete examples that were simple and conventional in their approach. Hager & Beighle (2006) also focused on strategies to share the student learning with parents discussing such "old school" approaches as bulletin boards, phone calls home, good work notes and even visits to the family home that celebrate student learning.

These articles connect well to my purpose; providing strategies for effective and ongoing ways for student learning to be more visible and accessible to students and their families, by giving simple and conventional ways to share information with families. Unfortunately, the three articles are a little dated (2006, 2006 and 2012) when it comes to the inclusion of technology. While a class website is one of the suggestions, today's technology has moved beyond simple websites to the social media platforms and smartphone apps that are plentiful and easy to use for accessing information. As Mitchell and Bott (2012) conclude in their article;

"The only limitation to the possibilities for communicating effectively is the imagination of the teachers involved. If teachers who have found exciting and fun ways to communicate with their parents would share their ideas at conferences, in journal articles, or via social media (e.g., blogs, Facebook, twitter), all would benefit. Sharing strategies for effective parent-night performances can help individual programs and, in turn, help programs everywhere to remain a critically significant part of the school curriculum." (p.46)

Keeping in mind the need to include today's modern technologies, further review of the literature found that technology in education is a growing and ever expanding process. In a 2005 article by Graham-Clay, the author discusses communication with parents and the benefits of the use of video technology as a tool for parents to get ""picture report cards" and video illustrations of procedures to encourage maintenance and generalization of new skills at home." (p.123) and that

"parents reported the videos enhanced communication with teachers and understanding of their child's school program" (p.123)

The concept of sharing learning with the parents of students is another key area of my purpose. Within this context it is critical that teachers use both one-way and two-way communication. One-way communication informs parents about the learning taking place but does not allow for any interactions. Two-way communication, however, provides both parties with the opportunity to share and discuss the learning taking place. Typically teachers and parents share one-way communication through report cards and two-way communication at parent-teacher meetings and through phone calls home. Today with our technological advances two-way communication is able to take on a whole new format through texting, mobile apps and the internet in general.  (Graham-Clay, 2005)

The use of the internet can also allow for a more individualized approach to learning, assignments and homework, are intuitive to today's students who have grown up knowing only the digital online world, and supports the involvement of families in the process. De Waard (2014) takes these notions further discussing specific types of social media and mobile applications that can assist learning and learners. She gives examples such as:

- "Sharing visuals, audio and/or movies gives others an in-depth view on what is happening." (p.118)
- "Blogs can be used by learners to reflect on what they learned and what they think is of importance; and to keep a learning archive or personal learning environment." (p.118)
- "Mobile applications are often easy for students to relate to, because mobile technology plays an increasingly important role in the lives of today's students (p.120)
- "technologies provide the ability to engage in learning conversations between students and lecturers, between student peers, students and subject experts, and students and authentic environments (p.117)

The other key area of research that pertains to my purpose would be providing feedback and having effective dialogue with student about their learning. In "Make it count: Providing feedback as formative assessment" Troy Hicks discusses the importance of providing relevant and practical feedback as soon as possible to students and allows them to revise and improve their work. This concept is also elaborated on by Susan Graham-Clay (2005) when she shares that effective dialogue requires the development of trust, that jargon must be avoided and that the message should include both positive and negative or critical messages about the student and their learning.

Research also revealed a few limitations to resolving my wonderings concerning sharing student learning with their parents. A few barriers exist that are pointed out by Graham-Clay, and are categorized into three types: Societal or cultural, parental and school. Such limitations on the use of technology to communicate with families include cultural and linguistic barriers, and a possible general lack of technology available in the home. From the parent perspective, past personal experiences in school can negatively affect their outlook and interactions with teachers. (2005)

Table #1: Key Ideas from the Literature Review

| Topic: Sharing PE Learning | Article #1: Mitchell & Bolt (2012) | Article #2: Hager & Beighle (2006) | Article #3: Faerber (2006) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Key Idea | What not to do:<br><br>Boring and illiterate presentations focused on blaming parents or on insinuating that the gymnasium is a "no learning zone" should be avoided. | Physical educators are beginning to become aware of the importance of promoting physical activity beyond physical education. | Ways to keep parents informed about the PE program, your philosophy and the planned activities in the course. |
| Key Idea | Why PE is important:<br><br>Make parents aware that PE programs are standards based and students should be held accountable<br><br>Draw attention to problems in society such as obesity, inactivity, bullying… and how quality PE can help address the problems. | Strategies and ideas for engaging parents in the student learning<br>1. Calendars and logs<br>2. Events, fun days and programs<br>3. Newsletters<br>4. PE nights | Don't overlook the simple and conventional ways of communicating and supporting the students and program. |
| Key Idea | Effective Presentation of Information:<br><br>Brevity, clarity and enthusiasm - give the parents an impression of what the students see daily. | With some creativity and hard work, physical educators can make parental involvement an integral part of a quality physical education program. | Building relationships with the families. |

| Topic: Sharing In PE | Article #4: Graham-Clay (2005) | Article #5: Hicks (2014) | Article #6: de Waard (2014) |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Key Idea | One Way Communication informs parents about the learning of the student. Typically formal and dealing with concerns rather than positive events.<br><br>Two way communication is an interactive dialogue between the teacher and parent. | Important to provide relevant and practical feedback as soon as possible to students and allows them to revise and improve their work. | Social media tools - why to use them and the extras they can provide. |
| Key Idea | Effective dialogue avoids "educational jargon", builds a sense of trust, and provides the parent with positive and negative events which are discussed. | | Mobile technologies are easy for the students to relate to as they form an integral aspect of their everyday lives. |
| Key Idea | Use of technology can enhance communication in a variety of ways and increase parents understanding of the students learning. | | Mobile learning allows for engagement of learners in learning conversations with peers, educators and subject experts worldwide. |
| Key Idea | Barriers to using technology in communication with parents exist on the societal, parental and school levels. | | |

## Data Collection Plan

When selecting data collection strategies, I believe that it is important to consider which strategies best answer the research question and which strategies fit as seamlessly as possible into

my daily practice while being also being intentional and systematic. Nevertheless, when selecting my strategies, a couple questions I had to keep in mind were:

- Can I afford the time to gather, record and reflect using this technique?
- How soon can the technique give me information?
- What are the limitations of this technique?

With these questions in mind I will use the following Data Collection methods in my inquiry.

**Critical Friend Focus Group**

I'll begin by first conducting a brief focus group with my Critical Friend Group (CFG), a group of like minded PE teachers from the surrounding schools who often meet to discuss our programs. With them I will present my purpose and give a brief overview of the process and then brainstorm communicating student learning and share ideas for ways that it can happen easily, effectively and in an ongoing manner.

I will also take time to pilot my parent survey with my CFG for feedback on the survey questions, as all of them are also parents with kids at various stages of schooling.

Given that we traditionally meet before the start of school every year I feel that this will be an effective use not only my time but hopefully theirs as well, perhaps encouraging one or more of them to pursue a communication program similar to me. With regard to time, it will not be difficult to work into my year's preparations. Most importantly it will give me valuable data immediately, from a group of experts, that I will be able to follow up on to develop my program. The only limitation I foresee to this method is attendance of other PE teachers at our meeting, as attendance is hit and miss with some of the other teachers.

**Parent Surveys**

I feel that the survey method, while possibly time consuming, will provide essential information to my program. To be efficient I will use Survey Monkey, an online survey tool, to create the questionnaire and to gather responses. This will allow real time access to the data, provide design flexibility, be no cost, be convenient to the respondents and provide basic analysis of the responses. The limitations to an online survey include the possibility of the survey getting "lost" amid the plethora of emails parents receive on a daily basis. Another limitation is that there is no interviewer to clarify questions and probe for more information. One final limitation could be families who lack home access to the internet who might be unable to complete the survey online. Though given the demographics of my school I am not concerned as we are a middle class school and if any families

do not have internet access at home, I would be surprised if their parents did not have access through a mobile device such as a smartphone or tablet.

With the limitations in mind, early in the first term I will survey all of the Grade 5 parents, about how/what they would like to see as methods of communicating student learning beyond the traditional parent-teacher meetings and report cards. I will use an online questionnaire that will be provided to the parents through email access and an online link from the Physical Education Program page of the school website. The questioning for my online survey will be closed and include both categorical and scaled questions. This will allow me to easily analyze the results and develop the plan to move forward in the inquiry.

Using Survey Monkey, will allow me to create, distribute, follow up with reminders, collect data and provide thank yous to the parents of the grade 5 students. Below is a link to the initial draft version of the questionnaire and below that in Table #2 is the unformatted introduction, questions and choices.   https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/H8HCP52

Table #2: Parent Online Questionnaire

The purpose of this questionnaire is to provide me with feedback on the best way to effectively, and in an ongoing, accessible and meaningful manner, provide you with a means of observing and interacting with the student learning taking place in the grade 5 physical education program.

My goal is to create or use an engaging program that will allow you, me and your student to interact, share information on learning and activities, provide feedback and simply engage in the learning process together. This program would be strictly private and only accessible to myself, the student (at your discretion) and the registered parents/guardians/caregivers recorded in the powerschool system.

1. How often would you be interested in receiving feedback on your student's learning in physical education?
- as often as possible or when something "cool" happens
- once a week (1 time for every couple classes)
- 2-3 times a month (per 6-8 classes)
- once a month (per 6-8 classes)
- once per term (simply through report cards)

2. Please indicate the types of feedback on student learning you would be interested in receiving.
- videos of your student performing in class
- pictures of your student performing in class
- general pictures and videos of the activities taking place in class
- documents that outline activities taking place in class
- links to online examples of skills or activities
- audio recordings of student
- images of student work
- checklists of skills/outcomes

3. Would you be interested in a program that was...
- one way delivery - I send you information, but you cannot interact with it.
- one way delivery that allows comments - I send you information and parents/students can respond to it or comment.
- two way delivery - teacher, and parents or students can send info and also comment on each others posts

4. Would you share physical activity examples from home for me to review, if that was an option?
- Yes
- no

The process that I will use to disseminate the questionnaire will be through a short introductory letter, see Table #3, that goes home early in the school year. I will then follow this up with an email to all parents that includes the link to the online questionnaire. Follow up will also be by email through the online survey program that tracks the completion of the questionnaire and identifies those who

have accessed it or not. Survey Monkey allows for "reminders" to be sent and also has a "Thank you"
email option for those who completed the survey.

Table #3: Sample Introductory Letter

Dear Parents/Guardians,

This year as a way of improving communication of your student's learning in the physical education
program, I am asking you to take a few minutes and complete a quick questionnaire to assist me in
the development and implementation of a communication program.

My goal is to create or use an engaging program that will allow you, me and your student to
interact, share information on learning and activities, provide feedback and simply engage in the
learning process together.

Individual responses to the questionnaire will not be shared or discussed with others, however,
everyone will receive a summary of the results and the direction the communication program will
take this year.

My goal is to have the program in place by Thanksgiving, so I ask that you take a few minutes as
soon as possible after receiving the questionnaire to complete it. Should you have any questions
please contact me at tvanritchie@hrsb.ca or pop into the gymnasium to chat.

Yours in education,

Todd Van Ritchie, BEd MPE
Physical Education Specialist
Millwood Elementary School

Around the end of January (approximately half way through the school year) I'll do another
very short survey of parents to see how many have accessed the program and what are their
thoughts thus far compared to previous years experiences.

Then at the end of year, a final survey on the effectiveness of the Student Communication
Program and if the parents feel it was a benefit to their understanding of what is happening in the
gym, how their child is doing, how they can help the child's learning at home and if their child
benefited in any way from the program.

**Research Log**

My research log will be a record of communications to share with families, it will allow me to
have a quick reference guide to who I have shared with and what it was…. The format of the log will
likely take the form of iPhone or iPad notes or possibly some sort of electronic form or notebook.
Simple notations will record whether I shared a video, picture, or message and what student it was.

Weekly I will review the log and reflect on how the program is going, and any issues I am

having. I will also review the students that have and have not received "posts" over the last week to ensure that all students included in the program are getting feedback from their PE classes.

The time commitment to logging, will at times be a challenge and it being a new habit will be tough at first. However, the immediate availability of data will benefit the overall success of the program. The largest limitation to logging details of the program and reflecting will be ensuring that the information is not too superficial that it is invaluable and ends up wasting time versus providing reliable information.

**Student Blogging**

The student blog will be a grade 5 blog that will be available to any grade 5 students. They will be able to post to the blog during PE classes by using one of the PE tablets. All posts will be moderated and reviewed by me at the end of each day prior sharing them online.

My goal is that the blog posts will inform me on the students perceptions of their learning that is taking place in the gymnasium and in their PE program.

Reviewing and approving posts will possibly be time consuming, however, it will force me to review all students' posts and allow me to reflect on that day's lesson in a timely manner.

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**Data Analysis Plan**

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There will be two aspects to the data analysis plan. An initial collection and analysis of qualitative data from the Critical Friend Focus Group and the Parent Survey, then a second ongoing collection of data from the Research Log, Student Blogging and the comments section of the Sharing Student Learning Program.

**Critical Friend Focus Group (CFFG)**

Information gathered from colleagues during the CFFG will help to finalize the parent survey and will also inform my inquiry regarding the ways to communicate the student learning. Discussion notes will be reviewed and any ideas and concepts that present themselves as valuable to the inquiry will be incorporated into the planning.

**Parent Survey**

Simple descriptive statistics such as frequency counts and percentage distributions provide the basic information needed to answer the questions for which the survey process was instigated. I will use simple frequency counts and percentage distributions to identify the most popular choices for parent/teacher/student communication regarding the four survey questions:

1. How often they want feedback/communication
2. Type of feedback preferred
3. Type of interaction preferred
4. Home sharing of physical activity

From there I will look for patterns within the survey data which show the preferences of the parents regarding communication with them on their student's learning. From these patterns a program of communication can be developed and implemented.

**Research Log**

My research log will require an ongoing and recursive review to identify any common themes developing through the use of the sharing student learning program. Barriers to the program effectiveness, limitations that may present themselves and positive outcomes will be tracked to help improve the program over the course of the school year.

**Student Blogging**

Student blogging will be reviewed in an emergent and dynamic manner and coded to try to pinpoint any themes that may become present in the blogs. Once coded and organized, this information can be compared to the qualitative data obtained in the Research Log and from the Sharing Student Learning Program comments.

**Comments in the Sharing Student Learning Program**

Comments from within the sharing student learning program that are made by students and parents will be periodically reviewed, coded and compared to the themes that are developing within the Research Log and the Student Blog.

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**Data Representation**

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Qualitative data from the parent survey will be represented in graph and table form in order to allow for comparison and analysis to be easily done.

Qualitative data from the Critical Friend Group, Research Log, and Student Blogging will be coded and arranged into categories or themes to allow the information to be displayed in table format for ease of reading. The qualitative information will also be summarized into a narrative form.

## Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations in teacher-led research should rely upon the evidence-informed professional judgement of the teachers involved. As an active teacher, I already have a duty of care towards my students and thus my professional judgement should direct my ethical behaviour in regard to my inquiry project.

In order to be rigorous in my research it is critical that I contemplate the following ethical considerations:

### Consider beneficence and nonmaleficence

The action is intended to benefit the individuals by providing them additional feedback on their learning in PE as well as to communicate the learning with the families. I have carefully considered any broader negative consequences of participation and the most obvious concern is privacy and to be sure that all shared data/videos/pictures… remain private to the student, parent and teacher alone.

### Being conscious of multiple roles

Teacher-researcher role, and is there a power relationship involved - there exists a teacher to student relationship in the inquiry.

Informed consent and voluntary participation - The purpose of the research, and the expected duration and procedures along with the participant's' rights to decline to participate and to withdraw from the research once it has started, as well as the anticipated consequences of doing so will be outlined in the consent form to be signed by parents and agreed to by students. Reasonably foreseeable factors that may influence their willingness to participate, such as potential risks, discomfort or adverse effects and any prospective research benefits will be outlined. For example, knowledge that the student will be videotaped and have pictures taken will be clear to the participants along with the privacy safeguards in place. My consent form (see Table #5, below) will be in addition to the school board mandated form for use of student images (see Table #4, below).

Table #4: Use of Student Image Consent Form (abbreviated)

USE OF STUDENT IMAGE CONSENT FORM
(This section applies to internal use of images by school and/or school board staff)

I hereby consent to the image of my child/children being photographed, videotaped and/or interviewed by employees or agents of the Halifax Regional School Board in the course of their duties.

In providing consent, I understand these images can be used on school or school board websites, social media sites (Twitter, YouTube) and other materials to positively promote the work of the student, school and/or HRSB.

I do not consent to the image of my child/children (or my image if 18 years of age or older) being photographed, videotaped and/or interviewed by employees or agents of the Halifax Regional School Board in the course of their duties.

Name of Student(s): _____

Telephone Number: _____

Name of School: _____

_____          _____
(Signature of Parent/Guardian or Student if 18 years of age or older)          (Date)

Table #5: Participation in the Sharing Student Activity and Learning Program Consent Form

PARTICIPATION IN THE SHARING STUDENT ACTIVITY AND LEARNING PROGRAM CONSENT FORM

The purpose of the student communication program is:

● to provide parents/guardians with a glimpse of the learning taking place in the gymnasium

- during physical education;
- to provide parents/guardians an opportunity to respond and comment on the learning;
- to provide a means for parents/guardians and students to share learning and physical activity that is taking place outside of school hours.

The Sharing Student Learning Program will operate from early October until the end of the 2016-17 school year, at which point all files will be deleted.

Student privacy will be guaranteed through the security and privacy settings associated with the application selected for use in this program. Access to student accounts will be limited to the PE teacher, parents/guardians, and the student (at the parent's discretion).

Participation is completely voluntary and not a required element of the PE curriculum.

> I hereby consent to the image of my child/children being photographed, videotaped and/or recorded in other means by their Physical Education teacher, other students, or teachers and consent to these digital files being shared in the student communication program that is being used by the Physical Education teacher for the purpose of sharing the learning taking place in PE. I understand that at any time I can request to cease my participation in the Student Communication Program by contacting the Physical Education teacher in writing (email or handwritten note).

> I do not consent to the image of my child/children being photographed, videotaped and/or recorded in other means. I choose to not participate in the student communication program being offered to the grade 5 families.

## Confidentiality and privacy

I will give participants information about how their data will be used, what will be done with surveys, photos and audio and video recordings, and their consent forms. Pseudonyms, fictional locations or vague descriptions of locations, removing identifying information will be used in any published papers on the inquiry. Online security of the survey results will be protected by the security protocols in place with the online survey provider - surveymonkey, typeform, google forms...

## Conclusion

In reflecting on my inquiry I believe that the there exist a number of online applications that will effectively and easily work as my Sharing Student Learning Program. FreshGrade is an example of one of these programs and the program I am inclined to select based on my experience. Now I simply

have to work through the inquiry and determine that parents are in fact interested in what I want to provide to them in regard to their student's learning in physical education.

My belief is that effective communication is essential to creating a strong and positive relationship between the school and the families and that as a teacher it is imperative I do my best to provide my students with every opportunity to improve their abilities in physical education. Through providing an easily accessible and effective two way communication opportunity to students and parents I will be adding to the already existing methods for communicating student learning and improving upon them. Ultimately, though I must keep in mind that every communication exchange, regardless of format, should reflect a thoughtful, planned approach and should be viewed as an opportunity for teachers to promote parent partnerships and, ultimately, to support student learning.

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