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## Prioritising classroom community and organisation in physical education teacher education

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This research investigates how teacher candidates in a primary physical education curriculum and methods course learned about and were influenced by efforts to emphasise classroom community and organisation. Qualitative data in the form of interviews, focus groups, and course artefacts were gathered from nine participants throughout one academic term. Analysis of data suggested that most teacher candidates came to recognise pedagogies that fostered a sense of community; however, only a few were able to connect this to their developing visions for teaching. Despite this, all participants came to view the development of a sense of community as one of the most important aspects of their evolving teaching practice.

**Keywords:** sense of community; physical education; pre-service teachers; classroom atmosphere; classroom management

[Teacher educators] rarely tell teacher candidates that they should develop priorities and make choices about what to emphasize. Full coverage of the curriculum tends to be implicitly endorsed in pre-service programs. (Kosnik & Beck, 2009, p. 2)

Faculty members and instructors in pre-service teacher education face many dilemmas in making programmatic and curricular choices. Kosnik and Beck (2009) identified the tension between depth and breadth as one such dilemma. This tension is not especially new for teachers and teaching, being recognised by, for example, Dewey (1938) and many others since (cf. Darling-Hammond, 2000; Hagger & McIntyre, 2006; Kayler, 2009; Richardson, 1997). However, according to some researchers, proposed solutions tend to be short-lived or are found to be ineffective once teacher candidates enter the workforce (see Darling-Hammond & Hammerness, 2005 for a useful review). In response, Kosnik and Beck (2009) argued that teacher education programmes should identify and give special emphasis to certain priorities and themes, ‘a selective, integrated set of pedagogical ideas and intentions that, to the degree possible for a new teacher, they can name, understand, own, and implement’ (p. 3). Grounded in constructivist learning theories and based on a longitudinal study of a cohort of 22 programme graduates of the University of Toronto, Kosnik and Beck (2009) identified seven priorities for pre-service teacher education: programme planning, student assessment, classroom organisation and community,

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inclusive education, subject content and pedagogy, professional identity, and vision for teaching.

Although Kosnik and Beck (2009) proposed their priorities on a programmatic level, individual instructors must still decide how they will go about addressing the priorities in the courses they teach. While having a coherent set of priorities within a programme makes sense, the fragmentation that often occurs within programmes (due to diverse subject matter requirements or visions of individual instructors) often makes such a goal unattainable. As such, while we strongly agree with the need to prioritise in teacher education, we found a need to prioritise *within* the priorities in the primary/elementary physical education methods course that provides the context for this study. Addressing all seven priorities in a 12-week methods course would only lead to the very problem that prioritisation seeks to address: a superficial approach that, while introducing some core ideas about educational theory and practice, would not provide necessary opportunities for teacher candidates to deeply reflect upon, analyse, critique, and enact those ideas.

Having considered Kosnik and Beck's (2009) seven priorities and given our recognition to prioritise within those, we identified two that we felt should be emphasised over the others: (a) classroom community and organisation, and (b) subject content and pedagogy. We chose the former because of the recognised importance of providing beginning teachers with practical, proactive approaches to managing classrooms (LePage, Darling-Hammond, & Akar, 2005), and the latter due to critiques of the content and pedagogical knowledge of beginning teachers of physical education (Kirk, 2010). The purpose of this study is to consider how prospective teachers of physical education learned about one of the priorities – classroom community and organisation – and to analyse the influence that this priority had on their experiences of learning to teach. In turn, we explore the extent to which the notion of fostering a strong sense of classroom community was seen to have value as a priority for teacher candidates' future teaching practice and their evolving visions for teaching.

### **Theoretical framework: classroom community and organisation**

Kosnik and Beck (2009) associated classroom community and organisation to the contextual setting in which teaching and learning take place: 'the structure, routines, social patterns, and atmosphere of the classroom' (p. 64). Developing a sense of community within the classroom involves the provision of structures that encourage students to be responsible for their learning, take risks, seek help from others (including the teacher) when needed, show concern for the needs and opinions of others, and gain cognitive benefits from interacting with peers (Marzano, 2003; Watson & Battistich, 2006). Wubbels (2011) identified the building of classroom communities as being aligned with an 'internal control' approach to classroom management, where there is a focus on social emotional learning and building relationships with students. In this way, developing community may be viewed as one strategy that teachers can use to manage classrooms.

While we agree with some researchers who consider the terms 'classroom management' or 'managing classrooms' to refer to any activities that involve the planning, running, and organisation of a classroom (O'Neill & Stephenson, 2012; van Tartwijk, & Hammerness, 2011), we recognise that many teachers, both pre-service and practising, tend to think of classroom management as being synonymous with (or even limited to) behaviour management, largely involving student control and

discipline (Evertson & Weinstein, 2006). According to Wubbels (2011), such limited interpretations may be partially attributed to the ways in which pre-service teacher education programmes frame the relationship between community building and classroom management. In particular, Wubbels (2011) suggests that community development is often reported as an aim of classroom management rather than as a technique. However, we believe it can serve both purposes. That is, developing community may be used as a way to manage classrooms (including the prevention of student misbehaviour) *and* it can come as a result of well-managed classrooms. Throughout this paper we conceptualise classroom management as a broad aim or group of skills, and that one way to achieve this aim may be through developing a sense of community. Thus, we believe that teacher candidates can learn about classroom management by developing skills that promote building relationships with students, effectively managing group work, valuing students, and so on. We were cognisant of communicating our interpretation of the relationship between community building and classroom management to the pre-service teacher participants throughout the course in which this research was conducted.

We believe that a particular emphasis on the sense of community (which we suggest might also be referred to as classroom atmosphere, classroom climate, or classroom culture) is warranted, as the feelings of comfort, belonging, and attachment that students have in the classroom can significantly impact upon their educational experience (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011). According to Watson and Battistich (2006), there was a recognition in the 1970s and 1980s that a sense of community has strong implications for student learning, which led to teachers and administrators seeking new approaches to classroom management and disciplining of students. Battistich, Solomon, Watson, and Schaps (1997) argued that teachers who foster a sense of community tend to be warmer and more supportive of students, emphasise social and interpersonal learning, and encourage deeper student thinking and stimulation of ideas. Furrer and Skinner (2003) suggested that these practices often lead to an increase in student engagement and enjoyment of school, positive interpersonal behaviours (such as demonstrating concern for others and being more effective in resolving conflict), and motivation for learning. In addition to influencing cognitive and social engagement, several authors have claimed that a strong sense of community can have a profound impact on overall sense of well-being for both students and teachers (Durlak et al., 2011; Spilt, Koomen, & Thijs, 2011).

For the purposes of this study, we consider community in a relational sense (as opposed to a geographical sense), in that it is concerned with the quality of human interactions and relationships. Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder (2002) argued: ‘a strong community fosters interactions and relationships based on mutual respect and trust. It encourages a willingness to share ideas, expose one’s ignorance, ask difficult questions, and listen carefully’ (p. 28). Due to the ‘complexities and diversity of communities’ (Sumsion & Patterson, 2004, p. 625) and claims that ‘the word community has lost its meaning’ (Grossman, Wineburg, & Woolworth, 2001, p. 942), we heeded caution in how we conceptualised community, but felt that four distinct elements identified by McMillan and Chavis (1986) resonated with our views and understanding of the concept:

- Membership: a feeling of belonging and personal relatedness;
- Influence: a sense of mattering, where one can feel they are able to contribute or ‘make a difference’;

- Reinforcement: where members of the community feel that their needs can be fulfilled by community membership, and;
- Shared emotional connection: where members share history, places, time together, and similar experiences.

Weaved throughout these four elements are two concepts: *interactions* and *relationships*. The interactions and relationships that students develop between their peers and their teachers are key aspects in developing community in individual classrooms and in different educational institutions. As such, interactions and relationships strongly influence learning. It is suggested that when learning is viewed as a social phenomenon, individuals derive knowledge and meaning and come to form their identities from participating in social communities (Sarason, 1974; Wenger, 1998). When positive interactions and relationships are fostered in a community, members might find greater meaning in learning situations by feeling a closer affinity to other community members, groups, and institutions (LePage et al., 2005). Importantly, in educational contexts, students might also come to feel a closer affinity to the subject matter with which they are engaging. Students who learn in classrooms where a sense of community is fostered may therefore be better able to develop a sense of connection to themselves, other students, their teachers, and the world (Azzarito & Ennis, 2003; Battistich et al., 1997; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009).

### ***Community in physical education***

Students who feel a sense of community might benefit from more meaningful educational experiences to which they have some social, emotional, physical, and/or cognitive ‘attachment’. Notions of membership, meaning, and attachment are especially pronounced in research on student experiences of physical education. While physical education has been identified as a vehicle for teaching children about how to lead a healthy lifestyle, it has been the target of enduring criticism because students often report struggling to find the subject meaningful and relevant, and consequently, enjoyable (Ennis, 2000; Kirk, 2010; Tinning & Fitzclarence, 1992).

Several authors have argued that the dominant sport-based curriculum that pervades school physical education programmes focuses too narrowly on developing specific techniques required for a limited number of activities, few of which might be considered as ‘lifetime pursuits’ (Haerens, Kirk, Cardon, & De Bourdeaudhuij, 2011; Rovegno, 2008). Moreover, those students who display physical prowess or ability – particularly boys – are often privileged by teachers in terms of programme structure, delivery, and in the interactions that occur and relationships that develop (Brown & Evans, 2004). This means that those who, for a variety of reasons, do not participate in sports or other forms of physical activity outside of schools are often not provided with quality instruction that fosters positive experiences. Subsequently, they become marginalised in the gymnasium and may ultimately develop negative attitudes toward physical activity (Carlson, 1995). These outcomes led teacher candidates studied by Oliver and Oesterreich (2013) to believe that providing students with an emotionally and physically ‘safe’ classroom was a key element of student motivation in physical education.

Azzarito and Ennis (2003) recognised the important role that a sense of community can play in physical education classrooms where there is an aim to foster

connections to the ‘real world’ and enable feelings of belonging and meaning. Two teachers in their study achieved this by emphasising collaboration through small group work and promoting opportunities for students to demonstrate leadership and responsibility. Elsewhere, opportunities to display leadership were also recognised as being crucial in the use of the Sport for Peace curricular model to develop a sense of ‘family’ in physical education (Ennis et al., 1999). Importantly, students in that study described the affiliation they felt with classmates as a family (a term that closely reflects a sense of community), feeling responsible to teammates and developing trust. In addition, students were able to display leadership in several ways, including using student coaches or having low-skilled students affiliate with their teams and take responsibility for their efforts. In both instances, students both earned and showed respect to fellow class members, which, in turn, led to more positive physical education experiences.

Although participation in physical education has been identified as a means to promote positive social behaviours and interactions between children and youth, it is crucial to recognise that any positive benefits are not automatic; they do not come by merely participating (Bailey et al., 2009). As such, teachers of physical education need to work hard to foster positive classroom environments, taking planned and explicit steps to teach students about developing social and emotional skills.

### *Attending to a sense of community in teacher education*

While the idea of building community and developing social skills might be espoused widely in teacher education programmes, Elliott, Stemler, Sternberg, Grigorenko, and Hoffman (2011) suggested that teacher candidates are largely unaware of how to go about enacting a sense of community following graduation. Indeed, this applies more broadly to classroom management (which, as outlined above, we believe may be partially attended to by developing a sense of community), which several authors have identified as being neglected in teacher education (van Tartwijk & Hammerness, 2011; Watson & Battistich, 2006). The shortcomings in how teacher candidates develop an understanding of how to enact community may be due in part to the perceived tacit nature of developing interpersonal skills for teaching (Elliott et al., 2011). Yet, the importance of being able to enact practices that foster community should not be underestimated, as Solomon, Battistich, Kim, and Watson (1997) demonstrated that such practices have clear and direct links to student behaviour and engagement. It is for these reasons that some teacher education scholars have argued that building community is the single most important factor of successful teaching (Beck & Kosnik, 2001; Kosnik & Beck, 2009).

Several teacher educator-researchers have demonstrated the benefits of developing community in the teacher education class by modelling community building with pre-service teacher candidates. For example, Beck and Kosnik (2001) and Summison and Patterson (2004) suggested that developing a sense of community in pre-service teacher education programmes can be beneficial to prospective teachers in three ways: (a) they can experience what it is like to learn in an environment that has a strong sense of community; (b) they can analyse the strengths and weaknesses of fostering a sense of community, which can enable the development or implementation of this in their own classrooms; and (c) it can improve their own sense of well-being and their social, emotional, and cognitive growth in the context of



learning to teach. While these points seem relatively straightforward, there are few examples in the literature we could locate that examined how these processes were enacted in pre-service programmes.

Beck and Kosnik (2001) provided one example, describing the experiences of teacher candidates in a cohort-based programme that explicitly emphasised community. On the whole, teacher candidates responded positively to the sense of community that was established and recognised benefits in terms of the impact that community had on the academic components of the pre-service programme. This included: increased involvement and quality of discussion (in small and large groups), growth in awareness of the value of collaboration, increased willingness to take risks in field experiences, and a willingness to express and be open to individual points of view. The authors described the heavy workload that fostering a sense of community can have on faculty and instructors, however, they felt this came to be viewed as one of the more personally and professionally meaningful aspects of working in teacher education.

Sumsion and Patterson (2004) also demonstrated the benefits of a sense of community; however, for teacher candidates in their programme, the sense of community was not intentionally fostered by faculty members. In adapting to the demands of a teacher research course, the authors described how teacher candidates came to feel a sense of community by sharing experiences and feelings of resentment, resistance, and stress from their experiences in the course. Teacher candidates came together to help each other and share things in meaningful ways, developing a sense of belonging amongst peers. Importantly, these feelings of belonging and attachment did not involve the teacher education faculty. Further, it did not appear that teacher educators made efforts to model how teachers might go about enacting a sense of community or having it shape their teaching practice. A key message from the findings of Sumsion and Patterson (2004), however, is that community does not have to come from always accentuating the positive. There is much that can be gained from struggling together or dealing with tension and conflict; to learn how to go about these situations respectfully would appear to be crucial.

A different source of tension surrounding community in teacher education concerns conceptual differences in how teacher candidates and faculty members view community. In the programme at the University of British Columbia described by Farr Darling (2001), faculty members strove to foster a community of inquiry, where teacher candidates and faculty members would engage in a 'collective pursuit of knowledge and understanding' (p. 9). However, teacher candidates' responses to their experiences of a community of inquiry emphasised elements more closely linked to a community of relatedness or 'community of compassion' (Farr Darling, 2001), referring to elements such as comfort, safety, care, and collegiality. As such, the aims of the faculty members to foster a community of inquiry did not appear to influence teacher candidates. Farr Darling (2001) suggested that this is largely due to individual interpretations of the term 'community', a point reinforced by Grossman et al. (2001) who suggested that people have tended to take what they will from the concept. In order to avoid similar confusion, we avoid referring to, for example, communities of practice (Wenger, 1998), communities of inquiry, or community of learners in this study; instead, our focus is explicitly on developing a sense of community in the classroom.

While teacher educators can provide prospective teachers with certain principles and strategies to cultivate classroom community and organisation, Jennings and

Greenberg (2009) argued that the literature on developing a sense of community lacks empirical support. This follows Woolfolk Hoy and Weinstein's (2006) suggestion that systematic inquiry is needed into how teachers 'establish and maintain positive, caring relationships with students, foster autonomy and self-regulation, and build community' (p. 211). In the literature on developing community in pre-service teacher education, the examples offered suggest that there has tended to be an emphasis given to the theoretical over the practical. We are not suggesting that this be reversed, but rather ways identified to connect theory and practice that may enable teacher candidates to 'handle the problems of everyday teaching through theory-guided action' (Korthagen, Loughran, & Russell, 2006, p. 1021). In summary, specific pedagogical approaches and strategies are needed that teacher candidates can observe, recognise, and enact. Going beyond this, prospective teachers should understand how these approaches can connect to or reflect an overarching philosophy or vision of teaching.

## Methods

### *Context: setting and participants*

The research took place in a large Atlantic Canadian university. Nine undergraduate students who were enrolled in a double-credit primary physical education curriculum and methods course participated in the research during the 12-week term in which the course was taught. The first six weeks of the course involved intensive campus-based coursework, where teacher candidates learned about and through physical education content and pedagogies. In each of the first six weeks, teacher candidates attended two one-hour classes in a traditional classroom environment and two two-hour classes in the gymnasium. The second six weeks was a blend of on-campus coursework (maintaining the two one-hour classes) and a supervised field experience, where teacher candidates spent three mornings a week in a primary school (K-6) with a specialist physical education teacher. Because there was a large number of teacher candidates to be placed and a limited pool of eligible schools in the local area, supervising teachers were selected based on convenience rather than exemplary practice. This is not to suggest that there are not outstanding teachers who supervised teacher candidates (there are several national teaching award winners), but it is important to note given the context of the study. Teacher candidates were paired with peers for their placements and encouraged to collaborate, team-teach, share planning, reflect together, and so on.

As the instructor for the campus-based course, Tim identified strongly with the two main priorities (Kosnik & Beck, 2009): classroom community and organisation, and developing subject matter and pedagogical knowledge. Believing in the educational benefits of models-based practice in physical education (see Casey, 2014; Kirk, 2013; Metzler, 2011), Tim felt that having teacher candidates learn about classroom community and organisation through the use of two pedagogical models would be an appropriate way to simultaneously position teacher candidates as learners *and* teachers. Positioning teacher candidates in this way may enable more complete understandings of the problematic and complex nature of teaching, 'learning about the specific content being taught, learning about learning and learning about teaching' (Loughran, 2006, p. 5). The two pedagogical models chosen were Cooperative Learning (CL) and Teaching Games for Understanding (TGfU), as it



was felt that both highlighted the importance of classroom community and organisation. Metzler (2011) supported this assertion, identifying learning in the affective domain as central features of both models. It is assumed that readers are aware of the general principles and features of CL given its application across subject areas. As such, we do not discuss it at length here other than to say that CL is a pedagogical model where students learn with, by, and for each other in small, heterogeneous groups to collaboratively complete group tasks (Dyson & Casey, 2012; Slavin, 1980). However, given the subject-specific nature of TGfU, we believe it is worth offering a brief description.

Originally developed by Bunker and Thorpe (1982), TGfU is a pedagogical approach that aims to develop learners' abilities to understand and play individual or team games (Kirk & MacPhail, 2002). Bunker and Thorpe (1982) recognised that many games shared important features and in the TGfU model, games are thematically categorised according to key characteristics in their rules and tactics, for example: territorial/invasion games (e.g. rugby union, basketball, soccer, field hockey) involve one team attacking an opponent's territory in order to score points. Other categories include target games (e.g. archery, darts, lawn bowls), striking/fielding games (e.g. cricket, softball), and net/wall games (e.g. tennis, volleyball, squash, badminton). It has been suggested that TGfU aligns with constructivist or situated theories of learning, in that the model places emphasis simultaneously on learning in the physical, social, and cognitive domains (Kirk & Macdonald, 1998). A core feature of TGfU is the use of small-sided, modified, developmentally appropriate games that enable students to work together to problem solve, and recognise and understand tactical problems in game play (hence, exemplifying aspects of community building). This stands in contrast to other dominant approaches to games teaching that tend to place emphasis on the importance of learning discrete skills (such as different types of passes in basketball or batting strokes in cricket) through drills. TGfU does not ignore or downplay skill development; importantly, skills are learned in the contexts of the games in which they occur, rather than in situations removed from game contexts (i.e. drills). While paying attention to the core pedagogical features of CL and TGfU, specific tasks and strategies aimed at developing classroom community were incorporated into the teaching–learning experiences within the course.

Classroom community was conceptualised as one way to approach the management of classrooms in ways that can support positive learning opportunities (Hammerness, 2011). As such, like Beck and Kosnik (2001) but unlike Sumsion and Patterson (2004), there was explicit intent in fostering community within the class, and this was communicated to teacher candidates from the first class of the course. Following recommendations by Kosnik and Beck (2009), this included (but was not limited to):

- Explicitly addressing community building as a pedagogical approach, (particularly as a way to proactively manage classrooms);
- Providing many opportunities to experience, participate in, and learn about small group work;
- Making time/space to share stories of teacher candidate success or news in/out of the class; and
- Making time/space for teacher candidates and faculty to interact with one another in a formal and informal manner (for example, having an instructor participate in small group work).

Wubbels’s (2011, pp. 125–126) list of ‘teacher actions for effective classroom management’ also lends support to our argument that community can be used as both an aim and a technique of classroom management. With the intent of building community, our analysis showed that Tim regularly used the following actions identified by Wubbels (2011) (Table 1).

**Data gathering and analysis**

Participants took part in four interviews that were conducted by Kellie (who was not involved with teaching the course) throughout the term; this included three individual interviews and one focus group. The three interviews were conducted (respectively): (a) during the first two weeks of the term, (b) during the week prior to beginning the field experience, and (c) following the completion of the course (including the field experience). The focus group was conducted at the midway point of the field experience. Each interview typically lasted from 45 min to over one hour. Other forms of data gathered included informal and anonymous written teacher candidate responses to aspects of the course that were gathered throughout the term (we referred to these as ‘tickets out the door’). Tickets out the door were gathered from all teacher candidates who were present in the class; however, participants in the study were asked to mark their responses with an asterisk to indicate that they were willing to have them used as data and to separate their responses from non-participants. Participant responses to required course assignments were also used as data, in particular, a two-part paper on teacher candidates’ evolving visions for teaching physical education.

Interview data were transcribed verbatim and sent to participants for clarification as a way of member-checking. Data were analysed using both inductive and deductive approaches. Specifically, the principles of grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2007; Glaser & Strauss, 1967) were initially applied to analyse data inductively where interview transcripts, tickets out the door, and teacher candidate assignments were read, coded, compared, and re-read by both authors independently to draw out categories or themes from the data. Following this first step, we met and compared codes and identified instances of agreement and disagreement. The debate that surrounded the discussion of each code and the ideas the codes represented allowed us to begin to recognise and generate particular themes in the data that related to developing classroom community.

Table 1. Teacher actions for effective classroom management (Wubbels, 2011, pp. 125–126) enacted by A1.

Teaching social emotional skills	Speaking with students after lessons or in the hallways
Building caring relationships	Showing feelings and emotions
Explaining reasons for decisions	Showing humour
Sending non-verbal messages of rest and control (small gestures, eye contact, emphatic speech)	Actively engaging in probing for individual students’ interests, beliefs, and backgrounds
Explaining goals/purposes for activities explicitly	Listening to students on school-related and non-related issues
Welcoming students and greeting them	Showing respect

Our early themes positioned teacher candidates respectively as learners and teachers, focusing upon the influence that developing community had on teacher candidates' experiences and thoughts about teaching. We returned to the literature with these initial themes, corroborating our ideas with concepts from community in pre-service teacher education (Beck & Kosnik, 2001; Farr Darling, 2001; Kosnik & Beck, 2009; Sumsion & Patterson, 2004). Upon returning to the data with these ideas more crystallised in our minds, we began to feel that some teacher candidates had much more complex thoughts than others about how a sense of community impacted them as learners *and* prospective teachers. When we considered the data in this way, it appeared teacher candidates thought about the role of developing community in classrooms at micro and macro levels, and it is this contrast that helped us begin to frame the data thematically.

## Results

Throughout the 12-week course, teacher candidates consistently identified the importance of developing a sense of community in the classroom. They considered their experiences of community through two lenses simultaneously: (a) as learners in a university environment and (b) as prospective teachers. Although explicit emphasis was given to the importance of developing community most strongly by Tim during the first six weeks of the campus-based course, teacher candidates made reference to the usefulness and relevance of developing community well into the end of their six-week teaching placement (that took place in the latter half of the 12-week course) and in a post-course interview. For example, in the post-course interview, all nine participants spoke positively about the importance of developing a sense of community on their learning and future teaching practice, with several using strong adjectives such as 'extremely important', 'super important', and 'incredibly important'.

Our analysis suggests that teacher candidates viewed the sense of community that was fostered in terms of compassion rather than challenge (Farr Darling, 2001). For example, Brenda said: 'I think this course more than anything opened up everyone and actually brought everyone together'. Importantly, however, most participants appeared to understand the links between community and learning, particularly in terms of how learning in a compassionate community fostered productive learning; for themselves as individuals learning to teach and for the school students with whom they worked in their field placements. There were nuances and general stages of development in terms of how teacher candidates came to see community in a more complex fashion, and we describe the progression of this development in the following two sections along with their respective sub-themes.

### *Recognising and enacting ways to foster community*

During the first three weeks of the campus-based course, teacher candidates were invited to consider the concept of community from both practical and theoretical perspectives. For example, there was frequent use of small and large group work, and a class 'pot luck' (similar to a smorgasbord or shared lunch) was held at the end of the first week during class time as a way for teacher candidates and faculty to get to interact outside of the bounds of traditional teacher-student relationships. Teacher candidates read chapters from Kosnik and Beck (2011) on classroom

community and organisation, and on Cooperative Learning in physical education (Metzler, 2011). Following small and large group discussion of some theoretical aspects of developing a sense of community (such as feelings of belonging, attachment, shared experience, and so on), teacher candidates discussed what these principles might look like in practice. Tim then taught several classes in the gymnasium using CL as a way to introduce teacher candidates to teaching cooperative games in primary physical education. By doing so, he was teaching about *and* through CL to develop understanding of subject matter and pedagogical knowledge in physical education, to develop community in the pre-service class, and to model aspects of teaching practice for teacher candidates. As Tim taught the classes, he would often stop to explain why he was doing what he was doing, and asked teacher candidates to describe privately (through anonymous Tickets out the Door) and publicly (through small and large group discussion) their experiences as learners and to critique aspects of his practice. The purpose of the latter stage of reflection was to begin having teacher candidates consider teaching practice from their points of view as learners and prospective teachers (Loughran, 2006).

It appeared that once teacher candidates entered the blended course mode in Week 7 (that is, three mornings per week of field experience sandwiched by campus-based classes on Mondays and Fridays), they began to identify different strategies that were modelled and experienced in the campus-based course or that their supervising teacher used to build community. Several teacher candidates were quick to recognise that the classes that they were placed in already had some sense of community that had been established prior to their being placed in the school, and felt this contributed to the smooth running of classes and positive interactions amongst students and teachers. For example, Brenda noted that upon entering her placement school ‘their classes were so well organised and [everyone was] getting along and playing together’, which she felt made her introduction to the placement experience more positive. However, Lucy’s and Samuel’s experience led them to believe that one teacher working to establish community can struggle when there is not a joint effort from other teachers in the school. They observed several classes taught by the same physical education teacher: some in which students were, for example, disrespectful to one another or the teacher, and others where there was a positive atmosphere and warm classroom climate. They attributed the differences to other teachers working in the school who held similar or contrasting views to the physical education teacher, some of whom worked to foster community and some who did not. This contrast led these teacher candidates to conclude that, while one teacher can accomplish a great deal, the most effective way to build community requires a coherent approach adopted by all teachers in the school.

### *Small group work*

It was evident that through their experiences as learners, teacher candidates came to see how and why they could use CL to develop a sense of community through small group work. Specifically, they addressed the importance of cultivating feelings of belonging and attachment for class members. Tickets out the Door gathered in Week 3 included the following comments: ‘CL is a good method to build strong bonds between students and teachers as well as inter-student relationships’; ‘CL is a great way for students to build community, make friends, and become more confident in taking part in activities and speaking up’; ‘CL helps to build the community within

the classroom. It gives everyone the chance to create and share their own ideas'. In addition to recognising the outcomes of developing community through CL (i.e. students feeling valued), they were also able to recognise and identify specific strategies that Tim used to do this and which they could enact in their teaching practice. For example, one teacher candidate stated: 'Tim has implemented multiple [methods] (think-pair-share, large discussions, jigsaw methods, etc.)'.

Learning about and through CL in the campus-based course also placed teacher candidates in situations where they experienced team and partner selection as learners. Further, they reflected on and read about the importance of being purposeful and careful in managing team and partner selection from the perspectives of teachers. From the field experience, several noted that supervising teachers went to extended efforts to manage team and partner selection, which they did by observing the ways that children interacted with each other, chose partners to participate in activities, and selected teams. Teacher candidates were then able to enact practices that encouraged different grouping methods that avoided having students feeling left out, even when this went against some principles of CL. Lynn said:

[Students in the younger grades] tried to stay in their own little groups. So me and my partner tried every day to put people in different groups. That way everybody would know everybody in the class and they would get a chance to work with everybody, and get different ideas of how to change stuff and do things differently.

Although CL encourages groups to remain together to learn with, by, and for each other, Beck and Kosnik (2001) emphasise the importance of mixing groups because it allows all students in a class to get to know one another, and, importantly, to hear and observe different perspectives. In this way, Lynn began to modify aspects of what she had learned in the campus-based course to meet goals that she had set for herself and her students.

### *Valuing students*

In terms of approaches to classroom management, getting to know students and foster a sense of community was advocated as a strong general method to support positive learning experiences (rather than providing specific micro strategies) that helped prevent inappropriate behaviour or relationships inside and outside of the classroom (Hammerness, 2011). Although we encouraged teacher candidates to be firm when interacting with inappropriate student behaviour, we were conscious of discouraging an authoritarian 'don't smile till Christmas' philosophy that some beginning teachers are often told garners students' respect early in their careers. Teacher candidates reported seeing how getting to know students on an individual level fostered a sense of community and had positive bearings on how students interacted and related to one another and the teacher. Moreover, allowing students to see teachers as members of their class community was viewed as an important component of the teacher-student relationship: that is, teachers *and* students are people; they are emotional and have lives outside of the school. For example, Candace felt that relinquishing a sense of control or authority over the class at times was reflective of the community that had been developed in the class. This allowed her to portray aspects of herself that she initially felt should perhaps be suppressed, and in doing so, had positive effects on her interactions with students. She said: 'being silly and foolish at appropriate times really helped build community in that class'.

In addition to being able to enact strategies they had learned in the campus-based course or had observed being used by their supervising teacher, some teacher candidates began to develop their own repertoire of strategies to build community. For example, Fedor spoke of how using student demonstrators could help build (or reflect) community:

We had to get demonstrators for cup stacking... and I picked six kids and those six kids performed and they felt really good about themselves. Then the following day I picked a different six kids and I think at the end of it I got them all. But I tried to get everybody into doing it so then everyone [could say]: 'I demonstrated this' ... I always just tried to have a mental check of people demonstrating and contributing that way. It's good for presentation [skills] and I guess they also get to feel like 'I'm contributing to the lesson [and] that makes me feel special: I feel respected, I feel important'.

Fedor's comment reflects the importance of influence, what McMillan and Chavis (1986) identify as individuals feeling that they matter, can contribute, and 'make a difference'. Fedor's rationale for implementing this strategy is supported by the findings of Ennis et al. (1999), who described the positive feelings of low-skilled students when high-skilled peers viewed their successes in class. Importantly, this also had a positive influence on high-skilled students in coming to see how low-skilled peers made positive contributions to the class.

When reading Fedor's comment, our initial response was that having willing demonstrators perhaps came as a direct result of *initially* developing a sense of community, providing an emotionally safe environment in which students could take risks, share, and participate. In this sense, comfort would come *after* community was developed. However, this interpretation does not recognise that safety can come *following* participation; from 'testing the water' and learning that you can share your thoughts, feelings, and knowledge without facing negative repercussions or humiliation. In this way, a sense of 'community' is perhaps as much a process (in that it is continual and shifting) as it is a product.

Throughout the 12-week campus-based course and blended field experience component, it became evident that teacher candidates were able to recognise specific things that teachers did (either in pre-service contexts or in K-6 schools) or could do to build community. Importantly, for their own development as teachers, most were able to describe how they enacted pedagogical practices in their placements (or would do so in future situations) that fostered a sense of community in the classroom. However, most participants tended to refer to community in terms of the feelings of belonging and acceptance that were generated amongst class members, with few articulating an understanding that they had come to see it as a practical strategy to proactively manage classrooms. For example, Lucy said that building community 'cuts down on class management for one thing, as you'll have less people arguing', while Candace said that a sense of community 'makes classroom management that much easier'. In both Lucy's and Candace's comments it is evident that they viewed community building and classroom management as two distinct concepts. In their interpretations, classroom management was synonymous with and limited to student discipline or behavioural management. As such, neither came to see community development as a part of classroom management, but as something that was separate. Despite Tim's explicit description of community building as a classroom management strategy, few participants in this research expressed a similar understanding following their teaching placements.



### ***Community beyond the classroom***

While our initial analysis of teacher candidates' responses to community was somewhat pleasing, we were unconvinced that they saw how specific practices related to developing a sense of community could reflect broader theoretical or ethical principles described by, for example, Kosnik and Beck (2009), and Azzarito and Ennis (2003). We did not feel that there was, as yet, a bridging of theory and practice. However, during post-course individual interviews, a small number of teacher candidates demonstrated quite complex understandings of developing community and recognised broad implications for teaching and learning inside and outside of their own classrooms.

Tim had made attempts to explain that notions of community for teachers went well beyond their immediate classroom context; it extended to the school and to the local community in which they would be teaching. He was, however, less explicit about how teacher candidates were becoming members of a broader community of teachers. Only two participants (Spike and Brenda) recognised how their experiences of learning in an environment that fostered community helped them to become aware of the broader applications of the concept that extended beyond their classrooms and the interactions they had with students.

Beck and Kosnik (2001) demonstrated that many teachers tend to work in isolation, a practice that can have substantial effects not only on the teachers' practices and well-being but also on how students come to see school-based knowledge as being integrated, with multiple applications and interpretations. For example, Brenda referred to the benefits of community building in terms of collaboration and its impact on how the whole school ran as well as how individual classes (such as in physical education) might run. Importantly, when speaking of this she spoke of benefits to students as well as to teachers in the school. As a teacher candidate coming into a new professional environment, Brenda stated that the community developed at her placement school allowed her to 'feel secure and at home and everyone welcomed us there'. According to Brenda, this sense of community extended to the student body. She said:

... [The students] were even great to each other; like, we hardly had any incidents where kids had to be sent to the office or there [were no] major situations that happened that you actually had to keep bringing kids aside. [There was] not a lot of that happening and that all comes down to being a good community and getting along with each other.

Similarly, Lynn came to see that developing community *among* teachers could have profound effects on student learning. She used the example of working with a French teacher to 'incorporate some of their content in your classroom. And that way, students are learning French not just in the classroom but in the gymnasium as well'.

Several teacher candidates showed evidence of seeing a sense of community as an overarching approach to teaching, as one that fostered inclusiveness and could increase students' sense of well-being and self-worth. For example, Candace suggested that the practices she observed and had chances to enact in her field experience reflected a meaningful way to approach teaching and learning, 'highly reflect [ing] my teaching philosophy'. She recognised that, although developing a sense of community was not something that was new to her or her ideas about teaching, she felt that seeing it enacted at the university and in schools reinforced the importance

of the idea. She highlighted seeing practices that were informed by the theories behind the community as one of the most important experiences: ‘Seeing a real life example of the importance of building community and how that can make students’ lives easier and your life easier [as a teacher]’. Similarly, Spike recognised that developing community promoted collaboration and cooperation, ideals that he felt reflected his evolving vision of teaching. He said: ‘without a sense of community there tends to be a lot of individualism and students don’t [really] learn in the best manner that they can’. He then recognised how he felt that learning in an environment with a strong sense of community had positively impacted upon his own learning.

Like participants in the study by Beck and Kosnik (2001), Brenda also recognised how the campus-based course had helped her come to be more comfortable around her peers at the university, which impacted upon her interactions inside and outside of the classroom:

We always had a really close-knit class but after this course I feel like everyone is expressing themselves more, and expressing their knowledge on different topics ... I’m learning more things – I’m learning just as many things from other individuals in my class than I am from Tim and that surprised me ... because I thought I knew every individual well enough [from] being together for two years now.

Importantly, Brenda’s comment highlights that these interactions not only helped teacher candidates to ‘get along’ with each other, but also promoted social learning by encouraging individuals to express themselves and to share their knowledge and experiences with their peers.

In summary, most participants felt strongly about: (a) their positive experiences as learners in an environment that fostered community, and (b) the likelihood that they would prioritise community building when they were practicing teachers. Some also claimed that fostering community provided them with an overarching vision for teaching. However, it is important to note that during the interviews, several participants claimed to realise the importance of community building before enrolling in the course. As such, we are unable to claim to have made major changes on teacher candidates’ thoughts or beliefs about teaching. Further, we can conclude that only some teacher candidates completed the course with the understanding (albeit partial) that developing a sense of community was a practical and proactive way to manage classrooms and deal with student behaviour. What we felt we were able to do, however, is to provide teacher candidates with language that allowed them to name aspects of their pedagogical practice. Several teacher candidates came to articulate that community building was central to their teaching philosophy and, importantly, they were able to recognise and enact practices that reflected aspects of that philosophy. In this way, teacher candidates’ knowledge of classroom community and organisation and their ability to articulate that knowledge was moving from tacit to explicit, bridging theory and practice.

## Discussion

Recognising the importance of developing a sense of community *and* providing concepts and strategies to develop a sense of community are important experiences for teacher candidates to understand and to be able to enact in practice. Our main findings indicate that teacher candidates came to value a sense of community from their

experiences as learners, while also realising how they might begin to foster a sense of community in their developing teaching practice. As such, we feel our study provides an example of how teacher educators can enable teacher candidates' learning of the 'hows and whys' of classroom community and organisation (Loughran, 2006).

The teaching of classroom community and organisation *through* fostering classroom community and organisation was explicit as both a theoretical and practical approach to teaching. Teacher candidates who participated in the research were able to identify specific approaches taken to build community in the physical education methods course, and once placed in a local primary school, were able to recognise both similar and different approaches taken by their supervising teachers to meet the same ends (i.e. a sense of community). Small group work and having students feel valued in the class using a variety of methods (such as getting to know students personally or calling on class demonstrators) were identified as particularly useful approaches to foster community. Moreover, teacher candidates came to feel that they had the ability to be able to name and enact aspects of their views of teaching, allowing them to make explicit their knowledge of classroom community and organisation. In this sense, teacher candidates left the course feeling that they had a solid basis to be able to foster community following graduation, something identified by Elliott et al. (2011) as being quite lacking in teacher education programmes. Yet, there was little reference to using community as a way to manage classrooms or as a way to proactively deal with student behaviour or issues related to discipline.

Some teacher candidates were able to see community beyond the practical, with several acknowledging how strategies to foster community could reflect individual teaching philosophies or values. However, few participants made specific reference to ways in which the concept of community had applications that extended beyond the immediate classroom context, involving other teachers in the school *or* other teachers who might be members of the broader community of physical education teachers. Although this was discussed by Tim in the methods course, it did not receive the same level of emphasis or attention as concepts such as belonging, attachment, interactions, and relationships. In this sense, it may be surmised that we paid closer attention to the micro aspects of community rather than the macro. This realisation has led us to focus our future practice on a blended approach that is attentive to both the micro and the macro aspects of community building; in particular, emphasising that a sense of community can and should be viewed as one way to manage classrooms.

As with research conducted by Beck and Kosnik (2001), there was intent in the ways that Tim went about fostering classroom community in the pre-service course. This intent was framed by the idea of making explicit priorities in teacher education (Kosnik & Beck, 2009), and we feel that both teacher candidates and the teacher educator benefited from this approach. This is an important element of the study, as the intent with which a sense of community was fostered may have influenced the mostly positive responses from teacher candidates. Beck and Kosnik (2001) also reported an overwhelming positive response to purposeful efforts to establish a sense of community in the pre-service cohort in which they work at University of Toronto. This may also explain why there was little reference to the messiness or complexity of building community that was described by Farr Darling (2001) or Sumsion and Patterson (2004). Importantly, both of those studies fall closer to a community of challenge on the community 'scale' (Farr Darling, 2001), rather than a community

of compassion, which is closer to where we would place our approach. One shortcoming of going too far to the compassionate ‘extreme’ may be that teacher candidates did not have extended opportunities to experience being challenged to think differently, encounter and respect differences of opinion, manage conflict, and so on. However, it is our feeling that perhaps once a compassionate, caring community is formed, these experiences may more likely surface and be dealt with respectfully and in a meaningful way than if solid foundations for respect and trust are not established early on.

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