

Informing Ethical Practice in Adapted Physical Activity through Research

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Summary: The purpose of this paper has been to reflect upon the question: “Does research have a role in assisting us to understand ethical issues in adapted physical activity practice?” We have drawn on a distinction in applied ethics between a top-down and a bottom-up approach, whereby the former is philosophical studies of ethical principles and the latter is studies of relevant empirical cases. The challenges for researchers and professionals alike are in the every concrete, problems encountered in daily practice and the achievement of reflective equilibrium between ethical principles and empirical cases. We have exemplified this by drawing on relational ethics and two of our own studies. The questions we raised must be answered by professionals with reference to the cases they have at hand. Finally, we have outlined some implications for adapted physical activity scholarship.

Keywords: APA - Applied ethics - Embodiment - Engagement - Environment - Mutual respect - Professional preparation - Relational ethics.

La recherche au service d'une éthique de la pratique des activités physiques adaptées

Résumé : Cette contribution visait à répondre à la question suivante : *La recherche joue-t-elle un rôle pour nous aider à comprendre les problématiques éthiques dans la pratique de l'activité physique adaptée ?* Nous nous sommes appuyés sur la distinction en éthique appliquée entre une approche descendante et une approche ascendante, la première reposant sur l'étude philosophique des principes éthiques et la seconde sur l'étude empirique de cas pertinents. Les enjeux pour les chercheurs comme pour les professionnels résident dans le traitement de tout problème concret rencontré dans la pratique quotidienne, ainsi que dans la réalisation d'un équilibre réfléchi entre les principes éthiques et les expériences empiriques. L'éthique relationnelle et la reprise de deux de nos propres études nous ont permis d'illustrer cette affirmation. Aux questions que nous avons soulevées, les professionnels doivent répondre en se rapportant aux cas dont ils disposent. Enfin, nous avons évoqué quelques implications au regard des savoirs concernant les activités physiques adaptées.

Mots-clés : APA - Engagement - Environnement - Ethique appliquée - Ethique relationnelle - Formation professionnelle - Handicap physique - Respect mutuel.

THE focus of adapted physical activity has primarily been directed towards enabling professionals to interact with people experiencing movement difficulties through the application of theory and research (Standal, 2008). Professional practice encompasses the notions of good or best practices, being social organized in their creation and maintenance, reflective of practitioners' understanding and skillful comportment while being continually worked out in new contexts (Benner,

1997). Good practice does not only mean successful or efficient, but it must also involve the dimension of good as what is morally right. It follows that professional practice “attends both to who one is, as well as what one does...” (Bergum and Dossetor, 2005, p. 3). This requires that professional practice in APA is given ethical considerations both from practitioners as well as researchers and educators.

The study of ethics has long been the platform of moral philosophers who debate the moral value of human conduct and the principles and rules that ought to govern it (Hinman, 2008). Nonetheless, we all think ethically and we do it all the time (Bennett, 2010). In our professional lives we are motivated to act in ways that are defensible to our peers (Cote & Levine, 2002). This means that whether one is aware of it or not, one’s professional practice is always already infused with ethical considerations. Thinking about doing the right things for the right reasons underscores our daily engagements with others, but this thinking must be explicitly attended to through ethical reflection. Not everyone is prepared to reflect on pedagogies set in tradition. Reluctance of ethical self-analysis that may be rooted in fear: a fear of facing our motives and actions or inactions that may have resulted in pain, guilt, danger, or doubt in ourselves or in that of others (Fernandez-Balboa, 2009; Hinman, 2008). However, without ethical self-reflection, our work becomes merely technical, allowing a judgment of whether it is well done or badly done but seldom enabling us to judge whether it is right or wrong, bringing our integrity and professional dignity into question (DePauw, 2009).

The capacity to behave ethically and the motivation to do so have been linked to (a) moral knowledge – learning the rules to which morality applies, (b) socialization – learning the rules that are socially binding, (c) empathy – the capacity to perceive situations from the perspectives of others, (d) autonomy – extent to which moral decisions are free from social conformity and group pressures, and (e) basis of moral judgment – contrast between the positions of personal conscience and social responsibility (Waterman, 1988).

Some of our own research in adapted physical activity highlighted how our taken-for-granted ‘best practices’ *excluded* people with impairments from meaningful participation, social engagement, and a positive sense of self through the use of instructional supports (e.g., peer tutors, volunteers) (Goodwin, 2009; Goodwin, Lieberman, Peco & Johnston, 2011; Rossow Kimball & Goodwin, 2009; Standal, 2011). Standal and colleagues (Hemmestad, Jones, & Standal, 2010; Standal & Hemmestad, 2010) were among the first to apply ethical theory to the roles of leadership in sport coaching. They used the Aristotelian notion of *phronesis* (i.e., practical wisdom) to understand the work of coaches as more than a focus on the technical process of applied human science but rather a context-dependent and ethically charged judgment-based endeavor.

Standal (2008) also looked to ethical theory to critique a controversial call for Evidence-Based Practice (EBP) in adapted physical activity¹. He cautioned that EBP emphasizes the hegemony of traditional science and its medicalization of disability.

1. See Bouffard and Reid (2012) for a detailed discussion of the controversies surround EBP in adapted physical activity.

He further questioned the disavowing of practical wisdom of professionals to guide physical activity interventions.

The aim of this paper is to reflect upon the question, “Does research have a role in assisting us understand ethical issues in adapted physical activity practice?” In doing so, we will discuss the knowledge landscape of professional practice, highlight the need for an ethical turn in adapted physical activity, and attempt to apply the ethical theory of relational ethics (Bergum & Dossetor, 2005) to real life experiences.

KNOWLEDGE LANDSCAPE

In working alongside fellow professionals, we come to learn about the profession. Within this landscape, there is dynamic interplay between *professional* and *practical* knowledge (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996). Professional knowledge is comprised of the traditional world of practice – stories and information of what is right given theory driven views of practice that is reinforced by policy makers and administrators. The professional knowledge landscape becomes the *sacred story* that tells us who to ‘be’ and what to ‘do’. It is comprised of normative rules that guide our actions. The *practical knowledge* is comprised of stories created by practitioners. It is a place where people are generally free from scrutiny and live stories of practice – a place of *secret story* (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996) where professional life narratives emerge. If one is aware of, or anticipates dissension between the sacred story and the secret story, one can live and tell a *cover story*. Moral discomfort may arise when the sacred stories we are told, secret stories we live, and cover story we tell are different.

The *professional knowledge landscape* is comprised of a dynamic interaction of professional knowledge that includes codes of conduct learned through theory and formal educational contexts (the normative rules and ethics of duty) with practical knowledge. *Practical knowledge* of what is good and right or bad and wrong is learned through practice in a space that is private (outside of the gaze of those who disseminate professional knowledge) and integrates personal virtues with relational knowing. Unpacking stories of sacredness, stories of secrecy, and stories used for ‘cover’ is an essential part of the ethical work required in adapted physical activity. Making the stories visible bring tensions and synergies in experiences to light. Holding the stories up against ethical theory can assist our moral knowing and subsequent actions regarding the goodness and badness of intent and the consequences of professional action, thereby diminishing practices that results in *special education damage* (Allan, 2005).

Ethical understanding of *counterstories* constructed from relational stories with and of the lived experiences of persons with impairments may offer alternative understandings and an appropriate ethical platform from which to engage in crucial discussions of professional practice (Clapton, 2003). It is a place for the teller (*i.e.*, people with impairments) and the listener (*i.e.*, practitioners) to come together to begin to undermine the dominant story, undoing it and retelling it in a way that invites new interpretations and conclusions (Lindemann, 1995). “To understand the direction of moral decisions in any person’s life, we need as much knowledge as possible of the forces that shape that person’s life story” (Pellegri, 2000, p. 644).

AN ETHICAL TURN IN ADAPTED PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

We contend that more counterstories need to be heard through adapted physical activity research to enhance our understanding of how issues of ethical practice in adapted physical activity *arise*, how they are *structured*, and how they are *managed*. Unpacking stories of sacredness, stories of secrecy, and stories used for 'cover' is an essential part of the ethical work required in adapted physical activity. Making visible the stories of instructors and practitioners can bring tensions and synergies in experiences to light. Holding the stories up against ethical theory can assist our moral knowing and subsequent actions regarding the goodness and badness of intent, means, and consequences of professional action (Goodwin & Rossow Kimball, 2011). The relationship between theory driven knowledge and knowledge gained in practice is complicated. It is not sufficient to say that the aim of adapted physical activity research is to contribute to our knowledge base nor is it sufficient to say that it is to contribute to adapted physical activity practice. The question of what constitutes "good" adapted physical activity practice is in itself both a theoretical and ethical question. It could be suggested that adapted physical activity science be comprised of (a) contributing to better understanding (b) contributing to better practice, and (c) exploring what good adapted physical activity is. The question of importance becomes, "*Is there a definable point at which practical problems become ethical concerns?*" (Updale, 2008, p. 34).

TWO ETHICAL APPROACHES

Professional practice does not sit as the endpoint of ethical reflection, guided by normative principles; professional actions are themselves ethical in formulation (Skrtic, 1995). In order to develop our understanding of ethics, applied ethics suggest that two different and complementary approaches may be pursued, a top-down approach and the bottom-up approach (Beauchamp, 2003; Bergum & Dossetor, 2005). In the top-down approach, researchers work with ethical theories as these are formulated in philosophy and then provide analytical, non-empirical arguments for the application of a specific ethical theory to human conduct. Knowledge of ethical theory, principles, and rules facilitates our conceptualization of what constitutes a flourishing life. Such knowledge alone is not sufficient however, for the promotion of ethical professional comportment and practice (Bergum & Dossetor, 2005). Both are needed - objective abstract knowledge (e.g., principle of autonomy is liberating) and subjective knowledge (e.g., lived autonomy can be isolating). In the Bottom-up approach, the researchers work from the assumption that ethically sound interactions in any APA domain should be informed by the lived experiences of the participants. As lived experiences in specific domains are researched, one may reflexively come to a more generalized ethical knowing and sensitivity.

The two ethical approaches are not to be regarded as successive stages in professional advancement, but as co-existing in ethical practice; offering a way of envisioning and conceptualizing the practice of adapted physical activity (Gadow, 1999). For this reason, neither of these two approaches can stand alone. Beauchamp (2003) pointed out that "*principles need to be made specific for cases, and case analysis needs illumination from general principles*" (p. 10). Moreover, Benner, Sutphen & Leonard-

Kahn (2008) cautioned that reducing the understanding of ethics to principles (for example, biomedical ethics of autonomy, beneficence, nonmaleficence and justice) does not provide a strong enough background for the formation of everyday ethical comportment. Bringing the two approaches together may result in the identification and "*phrasing of problems which can be addresses fruitfully by both*" (Kohlberg, 1982, p. 528). In an attempt to illustrate this process, we will draw on a branch of ethical theory known as relational ethics and combine this with examples from our own research. Whereas the top-down approach would explicate the philosophical positions advanced by relational ethics, the bottom-up approach would research the lived relationality (Van Manen, 1991) involved in the professional practice of APA. Through the application of the a top down and bottom up approach, the application of the ethical theory of relational ethics (Bergum & Dossetor, 2005) we will illustrate the point at which practical problems for students with impairments become cause for reflexive ethical thinking, if not ethical concern.

RELATIONAL ETHICS

Relational ethics places high regard on building relationships and contextually informing our actions (Benner, 2004). Within a relational ethics framework, the traditional understanding of autonomy, or being free from interference, is reconceptualised to reflect the deeply interdependent existence of humans. A focus on individual autonomy is broadened to include social relationships and the power structures that give genuine opportunities for choice and the goal of achieving meaningful self-direction within the overall context of interdependence (MacDonald, 2002). Ethical moments become possible when people connect with one another and create a relational space of trust and become authentically receptive to the interface of the everyday existence of shared physical and social worlds (Austin *et al.*, 2003; Marcellus, 2005). At the root of relational ethics lies the ethical commitment to create a "*relational space for discovering knowledge about others through dialogue and sensitive interaction*" (Bergum & Dossetor, 2005, p. XII).

"The themes of mutual respect, engaged interaction, embodiment and creating an environment where freedom and choice are found... [are] necessary for a relational ethic to flourish" (Marcellus, 2005, p. 415). Respect for self as well as others encompass the theme of *mutual respect*. Mutual respect provides the ethical space to explore differences between individuals within an atmosphere of interdependence Personal responsiveness, true presence, and empathy are required for authentic connections and *engaged interactions* with others. Engagement enables strangers to engage in ethical way rational and emotional interactions. *Embodiment* acknowledges the interconnectedness of the feeling body and the thinking mind which recognizes that people have storied lives set in historical and social contexts. Knowledge and compassion are of equal status with feeling and emotion in the embodiment of relational knowing. The theme of *environment* ties the relational space of the individuals to a network of relationships to community, services, and beyond giving consideration to the social and political context of the community in which the person finds her or himself (Bergum & Dossetor, 2005). Taken together the four themes of relational ethics (*i.e.*, mutual respect, engaged

interaction, embodiment, and creating an environment characterized by freedom and choice), people come to an understanding of their obligations and responsibilities to others and themselves (Shaw, 2011).

Relational ethics may provide a lens through which to begin to answer the question of how research can increase our sensitivity to ethical issues by focusing on *“what relationships are about, how they are created, what they mean, and how they are sustained”* (Bergum & Dossetor, 2005, p. XII).

ETHICAL PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE IN APA – LIVED RELATIONALITY

Inclusion is said to be an ongoing *“ethical project”* (Allan, 2005, p. 281). To illustrate how relational ethics may awaken our ethical sensitivities, we turn to a quotation from one of our own studies titled: *Inclusive physical education from the perspective of students with physical disabilities* (Goodwin & Watkinson, 2000). Students in grades five and six described their experiences in inclusive physical education. One of the experiences that contributed to *“bad days”* was that of restricted participation whereby participation was inhibited by a lack of support from teachers, a scarcity of engagement from classmates, constraints imposed by the instructional space, or all three. One of the students recalled:

“You know what ticks me off about my classmates and their physical education, ‘cuz I can only go o the tarmac right, and that’s like I can only go on the cement part without someone pushing me. And they want to go to the park all the time and they want to go to the field and then they say, “Oh, you stay here and you’ll find something to do.” Well, you sit there and you do nothing, right. And they don’t really think about that.” (p. 153)

The following relational ethical questions could be asked of the student’s experiences of professional practices of inclusive physical education:

1. In what ways might equality in relationships have been encouraged (student to student, teacher to student)? (Engagement)
2. How might respect for self and respect for others have been developed in this space (student with impairment, students without impairments, teacher)? (Mutual Respect)
3. How might the embodied or subjective experience of the students and teacher be discovered and understood within this context? (Embodiment)
4. How might an environment of choice been created with up-close moments that make a difference in how students interaction with one another and the teacher interacts with the students? (Environment)

Another example from our own research to illustrate relational ethics is from a study entitled *I learned nothing from him. Reflections on problematic issues of peer modeling in rehabilitation* (Standal, 2011). By utilizing phenomenological theories of empathy and the notion of symbolic violence (Frank, 2004) That paper analyzes the relationship between a female wheelchair user –Turid – and two different peers (i.e. wheelchair users who were given a formal position as role model in rehabilitation institutions). Whereas one of the peers was experienced by Turid as *“super-good”* and having skills at an unattainable level, the other peer showed empathy and compassion with Turid’s struggles. The two different experiences of lived relationality gave rise

to two different learning experiences. In conclusion, the paper asks rehabilitation professionals to consider their responsibility when using para-professionals to create learning situations. The study also raises questions with regard to relational ethics:

1. What are the ethical benefits and pitfalls of setting up peer modeling processes in rehabilitation? (Engagement)
2. How can the asymmetrical relationship between a peer and a mentee be established and maintained without inflicting symbolic violence? (Mutual respect)
3. How do we teach professionals and para-professionals to attend to pre-reflective experiences of empathy? (Embodiment)
4. How can rehabilitation professionals best set up a learning environment that facilitates caring and nurturing relationship between participants and (para-) professionals? (Environment).

Returning to the aim of this paper, Does research have a role in assisting us to understand ethical issues in adapted physical activity practice? We would conclude yes. Through research we are able to *"...explore ways to open up our thinking about ethical commitment – nurturing broad discussions, nurturing ethics"* (Bergum & Dossetor, 2005, p. xvii). As educators, one of our greatest obligations may be that of nurturing ethical ideals of those we mentor (Noddings, 1984). Reflexive ethical thinking creates classrooms that are pedagogical spaces for discussions of historically *invisible ethical issues* in the *'third space'* – an environment in which to grapple with concepts not studied elsewhere (Anderson, 2006). Universities play an important role in understanding ethical dilemmas that might contribute to professional misbehavior. Moreover it is our social responsibility to bring *"attention to professional ethics"* (DePauw, 2009, p. 54).

ROLE OF RESEARCH

In summary, adapted physical activity practice and research are morally engaged projects, culturally situated and politically embedded in the positioning of privileged knowledge and voice.

A fundamental ethical position embedded in adapted physical activity practice is the creation and presentation and intervention upon the Other. By studying others; are we creating otherness? Yet, can we engage in good professional and research practice without understanding the life world of others? Lincoln and Denzin (1994) asked, *"Can we ever hope to speak authentically of the experience of the Other? And if not, how do we create a social science that includes the Other"* (p. 577)? They further stated: *"The old ethical codes failed to examine research as a morally engaged project never seriously located the researcher within the ruling apparatuses of society... We now understand that we study the Other to learn about ourselves, and many of the lessons we have learned have not been pleasant."* (Lincoln and Denzin, 1994, p. 561) Our understanding is influenced by our own values and beliefs. By studying the other *"we are learning about ourselves and perhaps the lessons we have learned and will learn will not be pleasant"* (Lincoln and Denzin, 1994, p. 561). Hence to relate to a person becomes not only a question of understanding but also one of ethics. By listening to storied lives, ethics is not confined to abstract discussions, but becomes related to practice.

An interest in ethical practice in adapted physical activity has been made possible in part by the advancement of postmodern research approaches that capture lived experiences (Fitzgerald, Jobling & Kirk, 2003). Interpretive researchers aim to understand the human experience in-depth, its meaningfulness and the *why* behind the meaning (Van Manen, 2001). Interpretive research has been criticized for bringing to light the storied lived experiences of the Other without bringing about change. To bring about change however, it can be argued that we need to know that to which we must bring change. Further, interpretive work provides a backdrop for social criticism and social action that push for action (Denzin, 2000). Interpretive research may be one way of coming to know what we don't know? In turn, ethical theory in turn may be one way of making sense of what we uncover.

Critical social science perspectives which emphasize that moral criticism may shape the foundations of our ongoing understanding of the ethical reality in our field. Engaging in collaborative research with a purpose to *"join with"* rather than *"know and save"* those who have been systematically disenfranchised will shift the focus from *"us"* and *"them"* to a collective reconfiguration of who *"we are"* as relational and interdependent agents (Cannella & Lincoln, 2011, p. 82-83; Bergum & Dossetor, 2005).

Poststructural research will close the divide between science and morality while facilitating the eroding of researcher situated superiority to a more morally aware sacredness of understanding (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Howe (2009) suggests it is time to explore discontinuities, paradoxes, and inconsistencies in our beliefs and our actions or lack of action – by dissolving the disjuncture between the observer and the observed (giving up our privileged expert researcher points of view), moving from participant observer to collaborators in understanding.

Moreover, we may look to the active education of those who experience disability through social and political actions so they may engage in their own social and historical interrogative efforts thereby devising questions rooted in the histories, values, and artefacts of their own communities. An understanding of ethics in research that decolonializes *'research participants'*, leads to healing for those voices who were subjected to research politics, is transformative in its intent, and leads to mobilization may also create a pedagogy of hope that cultivates collective agency through professional practice (Cannella & Lincoln, 2011).

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