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“One Good Idea”:

A Physical Education Teacher Education Project Advocating for LGBTQ+ Students in School Physical Education

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Internationally, there is a growing call for balancing sociocultural and critical approaches to physical education with the more traditional notions of physical activity, bodies and health (Dowling et al., 2015; Gerdin et al., 2020). This needs to be reflected in physical education teacher education (PETE) as we educate and challenge preservice teachers on traditional notions of physical education with alternative and critical perspectives of what physical education is (and can be; Dowling et al., 2015). We (as teacher educators; D.S., C.W., B.M.) have recently been working toward developing our PETE courses from a more socially critical perspective, encouraging our preservice teachers to develop the knowledge, skills and confidence to contribute to more socially just and equitable physical education outcomes (Gerdin et al., 2020).

Loughrey and Cox (2012) suggested that for physical education professionals, “a necessary and critical professional attribute is the firm conviction about the worth of your product” (p. 58). As physical education teacher educators, the product is physical education, and instilling a passion for promoting quality physical education drives much of how our PETE program is constructed and delivered. This passion for physical education has therefore the potential to be converted into a passion for advocacy. Loughrey and Cox provided a starting point for our working definition of advocacy: “the practice of promoting a concept or product” (Loughrey & Cox, 2012, p. 51). As teacher educators, our passion for promoting physical education for all young people drives us to enable our preservice teachers to become advocates for young people, empowering them to take action to operate in the process of making change in and through physical education.

To enable this, we encourage preservice teachers to challenge the dominant constructions of physical education (i.e., traditionally for fit bodies, male dominated, and competitive team games oriented; Green, 2008) through creating a project that would require them to advocate for better inclusion in physical education for a selected group of marginalized school students. The group project was called “One Good Idea” and aimed to support the preservice teachers in developing the confidence necessary to begin to address and act on social inequalities in school physical education. There is a lack of examples of what teachers (and teacher educators) can actually do in their schools, classrooms, or sports halls in tackling social injustices (Gerdin et al., 2020). The “One Good Idea” project was designed to allow the preservice teachers to find their voices as advocates for marginalized school students. This article, co-authored by teacher educators (D.S., C.W., B.M.) and preservice teachers (M.L., P.K., M.M., D.B.), shares a worked example of a “One Good

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Idea” project constructed by preservice teachers and designed to advocate for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning (LGBTQ+) students in school physical education. The intention of this article, therefore, is twofold in sharing an example of (a) an assessment in PETE to demonstrate how we encouraged advocacy in our preservice teachers that can be replicated in other PETE programs and (b) a project that practicing teachers can adapt to their context in advocating for LGBTQ+ students in school physical education. Before the worked example is shared, an outline of the mechanics of the “One Good Idea” project is discussed.

The “One Good Idea” Project

The “One Good Idea” project is situated in a course titled “Youth Sport and Advocacy” that is undertaken in the final semester of the PETE program. This course aims to prepare preservice teachers to become physical activity advocates and change agents within and beyond traditional perspectives of physical activity and physical education programs for young people. Two of the learning outcomes for this course are to (a) recognize the importance of active citizenry and engaged scholarship in advocating for community sport and physical activity provision and (b) illustrate an understanding of forces that shape sport and physical activities for young people. Course content was developed around concepts such as teacher identity, meaningful physical education, ethics and sport, social justice and advocacy. The tutorials were informed by Lynch et al.’s (2020) and Landi et al.’s (2020) papers on “The A-Z of Social Justice Physical Education.” These “letters” encouraged preservice teachers to develop their understanding of what social justice is and what it looks like in school physical education. The “One Good Idea” project captured this understanding and provided evidence of the achievement of the learning outcomes. The project involved the preservice teachers in the following:

Identifying an inequity/challenge/problem and who was most impacted by this issue.

Researching and contextualizing the issue, drawing from journals, books, reports, newspaper articles, policy documents and other supporting evidence and experience.

Making connections with the social justice letters/policy and the proposed issue/group.

Identifying and presenting a rationale informed by the social justice letters for the strategies for action and advocacy that would improve the situation for those who were most impacted by the issue.

Outlining the perceived benefits and challenges associated with implementing their “One Good Idea” project.

A final submission in the format of a 2,000 word written assignment and a 10-min presentation that the students presented to their peers in the final week of semester.

Throughout the project, the preservice teachers were encouraged to reflect on their school placement/practicum experiences and think about issues or populations they had encountered that they felt they should advocate for. Once the preservice teachers identified such experiences, they identified which social justice letter(s) were most meaningful to them and how this could push their thinking in *how* they could advocate for their selected population. In this way, the social justice letter(s) acted as a lens to reflect on their identified experiences. The following section highlights a worked example of a “One Good Idea” project that four preservice teachers constructed and present here.



One Good Idea: “How We Can All Be Allies”: Advocating for LGBTQ+ Students

Though there is the limited research on LGBTQ+ students’ experiences in school physical education, the existing research highlights how physical education is not a safe or welcoming space for these students (Ayvazo & Sutherland, 2009; Garcia, 2011). Landi’s (2019) research informs us of how traditional practices, or “straight” pedagogies (Fitzpatrick & McGlashan, 2016), in physical education can limit and discourage LGBTQ+ students’ engagement. With this research in mind and reports (Gay and Lesbian Equality Network, 2016; Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network, 2013) that highlighted how LGBTQ+ students have negative experiences in school and physical education, we (M.L., P.K., M.M., D.B.) decided to create an LGBTQ+-inclusive week for our “One Good Idea” project titled “How We Can All Be Allies.” This title was chosen because it unites the whole student body and supports the inclusion of LGBTQ+ students in school. Research has shown that more positive experiences can help LGBTQ+ students flourish personally and academically in school (Page, 2016), and this is what drove our advocacy project.

Though the purpose of the inclusion week is to advocate for a more inclusive environment for LGBTQ+ students in school physical education and the broader school community, this project also intends to educate students outside the LGBTQ+ community on the correct use of pronouns, language and issues such as transphobia. To achieve this inclusion, this project aims to (a) educate all students about how they can be allies to the LGBTQ+ community, (b) educate the students through various activities such as informative workshops and mixed-gender sports tournaments, and (c) create a safe space for LGBTQ+ students in physical education class because research has highlighted how LGBTQ+ students feel that discrimination has prevented them from full and safe engagement in

physical education and sports (Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network, 2013). Young transgender students, who are often excluded in physical education class based on gender norms, are most notably affected. Therefore, by focusing on mixed-gender sports and physical activities and addressing the issue of the changing rooms in physical education, we propose to make physical education more welcoming for transgender students, LGBTQ+ students and all students (Ahmed, 2020). Ahmed’s (2020) work encouraged us to seek alternatives (if needed) for the changing room for queer and transgender students; for example, a gender-neutral cubicle option. These issues will be highlighted with school management throughout the week.

Working through the infographic (please see Figure 1), Day 1 will be an introductory day in which the week and its purpose and intentions will be explained to the students. Students will be prompted to contribute to a five-finger contract (Lund & Tannehill, 2015) that will outline the students’ commitment to an inclusive week. Drawing on aspects of the teaching personal and social responsibility model (Hellison, 2011), students will take part in a workshop that will educate them on the correct use of pronouns and language, encouraging students to respect each other.

Activities shared by Harrison and Shipley (2019; please see reference for further social justice ideas to be used in physical education) have been used to form Day 2. The activity is titled “Privilege Through Games” (Harrison & Shipley, 2019). In this activity, the students play a game of basketball in which they are divided into two groups: red and blue. The red group is given modified rules that will disadvantage them in the game; for example, only allowed to walk and no jumping. After this game, the teams will come in for a group discussion. The red team will be asked how they felt and questions on fairness. The blue team will be asked how it felt to see their classmates in that disadvantaged position. A group discussion will be encouraged on relating this game to life experiences,



Figure 1.
Visual poster of the “How We Can All Be Allies” week

particularly LGBTQ+ experiences; for example, how are LGBTQ+ experiences relatable to this activity. Issues of privilege, representation in professional sport and/or transgender exclusion in professional sport may be raised. Harrison and Shipley (2019) posed a reflecting question to be used with the students: “Reflect on the activity we did today and how it related to society as a whole and specifically the LGBTQ[+] community. Thinking about our group discussion today, what is one thing you can do to help support the LGBTQ[+] community?” (p. 259).

On Day 3, a guest speaker will be introduced to the classroom. This guest speaker could be, for example, a famous LGBTQ+ sports person, a leader in an LGBTQ+ charity organizations or a past LGBTQ+ student. This person will talk to the students about their time in school, being part of the LGBTQ+ community, and their life

as an LGBTQ+-identifying person in their current role; for example, a sports figure. Students will be given time after this talk to reflect on what was said and how it has challenged their thinking and to make one commitment to how they can be more of an ally going forward. Students will then complete an LGBTQ+ representation board in the physical education hall. In groups, the students will research LGBTQ+ sports figures and construct infographics of such figures. Students will be asked to reflect on why there is a lack of representation of LGBTQ+ sports figures in professional sport. Harrison and Shipley (2019) provided further questions for this activity: “Ask what their thoughts are on the fact that many gay and lesbian athletes stay in the closet for fear of being harassed, demeaned, or even physically harmed. Ask if athletes should solely be judged on skill, talent, and character?” (pp. 259–260).



On Day 4 there will be a Tag Rugby tournament for all students. Tag Rugby is one of the leading mixed-gender activities and, as such, can be gender inclusive. There will be a number of Tag Rugby games occurring simultaneously with different challenge levels; for example, a competitive game and a participatory game. Students will choose which game they would like to be involved in. In all games, students will write their preferred pronouns on a sticker and place it on their back. This will encourage their teammates and opponents to use (and respect) their preferred pronouns. The focus here is not the content (i.e., Tag Rugby) but rather the encouragement of using pronouns in a sporting context. This intention could be used in other physical education contexts; for example, adventure education. We chose Tag Rugby in this case to demonstrate *how* this can be done in traditional physical education (i.e., sports).

Day 5 is Pride Day. The school will be decorated with LGBTQ+ flags and banners. Students will be encouraged to wear colorful clothes in support of their fellow LGBTQ+ students. Students will also take part in a “color run.” Students can participate in this color run however they choose: running, walking, jogging, etc. On conclusion of the week, all students will receive a “How We Can Be Allies” certificate that credits them for taking part in the inclusive week.

Reflection on the “One Good Idea” Project: “How We Can All Be Allies”

There is a need to advocate for students of the LGBTQ+ community, help these students feel more included in the physical

education setting, and educate all students on LGBTQ+ matters such as the correct use of pronouns and about homophobia and transphobia. The core message is “We Can All Be Allies.” There needs to be more advocacy work for LGBTQ+ students in physical education (and schools more generally). Physical education should not be a space for certain “dominating” (i.e., traditional, competitive team games) sports where a certain type of student will always have an advantage. Other movement forms such as dance, yoga, educational gymnastics and informal sports are viable options to encourage engagement of all students. Students should be listened to in class and the curriculum should be negotiated and co-constructed with students (Lund & Tannehill, 2015). Our inclusive “How We Can All Be Allies” week can not only help both students and teachers be more aware of LGBTQ+ issues but also provide transferable means of listening to (and acting on) student voice.

The hope is that our inclusion week can help all students. It is intended that students outside the community will have a greater appreciation for their peers who are members of the LGBTQ+ community and learn something during the week that they can develop as they move forward in their allyship journey. It is also intended that the students in the LGBTQ+ community will feel more welcomed in schools and in physical education settings. We truly believe that this project will have positive influences in advocating for students of the LGBTQ+ community but this week should not only be a week — its principles should be embedded throughout the school year. Recent research published in a report by Just Like Us (2021) stated, “Pupils in schools with strong positive messaging about being LGBT+ have drastically improved wellbeing and feel safer — regardless of whether they are LGBT+ or not” (p. 7). Though it needs to be acknowledged that this inclusion

week is not enough to make the change needed, we are encouraged by Fitzpatrick and McGlashan's (2016) notion of "small practices" in physical education that can, over time, make a difference, and we believe this "One Good Idea" advocacy project is a baby step in the right direction for advocating for LGBTQ+ students.

Conclusion

The overall aim of this "One Good Idea" project was to encourage our preservice teachers to engage with social justice issues and to develop their advocacy skills. This course assessment was designed to allow the preservice teachers to think outside the box in advocating for certain disadvantaged populations. By sharing the assessment design in this article, we encourage other physical education teacher educators to adopt and adapt this practice to their respective PETE programs and to provide preservice teachers space to engage with social justice issues and to advocate for certain populations through "One Good Idea."

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