**Re-presenting teachers' experiences of using game based approaches through poetic transcription**

## Abstract

This paper provides an overview of poetic transcription and how I used it to re-present physical education teachers' experiences of teaching games using a game based approach (GBA). Composite narratives derived from a study exploring teachers' experiences of GBA teaching provided the initial storying of experience with three separate teacher capacities for experience identified; that of a *Learner*, a *Collaborator*, and a *Catalyst*. These narratives were then re-storied as found poems. Discussion within this paper comments on the reflexive action I engaged with to transform interview transcripts into poetic form with specific comment offered as to my rationale for use of poetic transcription as well as the process I undertook to re-see teachers' experiences of GBA experience. Comment stemming from a comparison of poems is also offered along with what experimentation with poetic transcription enabled me to "do" with my understanding of the experience of GBA teaching.

## Introduction

Similar to Legge (2015), I am interested in experimental forms of research writing that challenge traditional research conventions in physical education. As part of a study exploring teachers' experiences of teaching games using a game based approach (GBA) the development of composite narratives from interview transcript data offered an initial insight into teachers' capacities for GBA experience. Yet, as an extension of this insight I was interested in developing another equally powerful and engaging means for readers to access and develop their understanding of what it means to

experience GBA teaching. I had recently read Maureen Legge's (2015) paper on her use of poetic transcription to examine physical education pre-service teachers' learning when teaching Māori content in secondary physical education in New Zealand and I was immediately struck by what poetic representations of interview transcripts offered to readers; that being a powerful and engaging opportunity to recreate complex events through which depth of experience was not lost. Legge (2015) commented that the teaching experiences that she was reporting on had been "emotionally charged for the participants" (p. 147) and that she saw fit to "give voice to their emotions, vulnerabilities, and actions; and to reveal something of their perceptions and practices" (p. 143). Thus, Legge's use of poetic transcription to re-present aspects of subjectivity and meaning of experience for two individual pre-service teachers was profound enough for me to consider its use as a means to re-present collective meaning of in-service teaching experience as was the focus of my study.

**Overview of study**

My study focused on the analysis of collective meaning associated with secondary physical education teachers' experiences of teaching games using a GBA. Participants in the study taught in one of two different international contexts, southeast Australia or southeast England, and all had some experience of using a GBA to teach games. Elicitation interview technique, which uses questioning of sensorial context to engage the interviewee in the 'reliving' and verbalisation of past experience, was used to help understand experience "in context" within a phenomenographic research framework with the purpose being to uncover the qualitatively finite number of ways that GBA-related teaching was/can be experienced. The findings of the study relate to participants (N=12) having three separate capacities to experience GBA-related teaching. Each capacity for experience was categorised as being either a *Learner*, a *Collaborator*, or a *Catalyst*. These three categories formed a hierarchy of qualitatively different ways that the phenomenon of GBA-related teaching was/can be experienced that was both inclusive in nature (e.g. those that experienced the phenomenon as a *Catalyst* with a more complex understanding also experienced the phenomenon in part as a *Learner*

with a less complex understanding) as well as parsimonious in structure. A brief explanation of each of the three categories is offered in Table 1:

*Table 1*

*A brief explanation of each category*

| The *Learner* | The *Learner* category represented the view that teachers using GBAs were required, first and foremost, to be *Learners* with conceptions of experience reflecting a more operational understanding. This meant experiencing the phenomenon of GBA teaching at a less complex level with fewer elements of the phenomenon being discerned (e.g. the act of effective questioning) with a clear focus on the actions of self as teacher. |
|---|---|
| The *Collaborator* | The next category, the *Collaborator*, represented the view that a focus on using GBAs required engaging pupils in collaborative learning endeavours with participants delegating responsibility for learning. One of the key variations within this category (in difference to the *Learner* category) was the reliving of teaching experience that depicts a teacher and pupil focused endeavour. |
| The *Catalyst* | The third category, the *Catalyst*, represented the view that through purposeful and collaborative design and action teachers using GBAs can be catalysts for pupils' learning and development beyond the curriculum. Thus, teaching experience was relived as a purposeful endeavour that offered learning opportunities beyond the constructs of curriculum. For the Catalyst self, collaborative and contextual aspects of experience were prominent elements of focal awareness. |

In order to provide further insight into the complexity of meaning attributed to GBA teaching experience over and above more familiar ways of sharing research findings, composite narratives were

then constructed and presented to form an integral part of each category description. A number of researchers (Webster & Mertova, 2007; Clandinin & Connolly, 1990) have used narratives to address issues of complexity and subtlety in human experience with their use in educational research supported by the view that "education is the construction and reconstruction of personal and social stories" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 2). Thus, each composite narrative created for my study was made up entirely from utterances contained within transcript data in an attempt to remain as faithful as possible to the intended meaning of experience as shared by each participant. One of three composite narratives constructed as part of my study (that being the experience of GBA teaching as a *Learner*) can be viewed in Table 2. It was this desire to remain faithful to experience that led me to consider the use of poetic transcription as another means by which the experiences of GBA teaching by participants of my study could be accessed.

*Table 2*

*One of three composite narratives constructed from participants' transcripts*

**The first lesson is me instructing…** it was that kind of games teaching session rather than a lacrosse session… **I'm a bit nervous about not really understanding what we're doing because this isn't how I've kind of learnt my own sport…** I explain some modified rules for them… emphasising the key things we have been working on in previous weeks and that I would like to see them utilise them well in this game… **that's why I think it's TGfU because… we didn't have to play lacrosse rules…** So I have given them a clear instruction about how close they are allowed to be to any other person on their own team at any time…. **there are kids that are still barrelling in on top of the ball just like before… to be honest there… they just want to play with the ball and aren't that bothered where they should be…** ultimately I do get the response I am hoping for which is we need to space out more… **I ask specific groups 'what are the issues? Are you working as a team?'**… Maybe that's it – maybe what I've associated as being TGfU is so far removed from what you're expecting…

*Note: The bolding and non-bolding of text is used to separate and highlight the coming together of utterances from different participants' transcripts, but the narrative should be read as one continuous story.*

**Poetic transcription**

Recognised as a form of qualitative research in the social sciences, poetic transcription offers a non-traditional way for researchers to portray their inquiry (Glesne, 1997). These narratives are poetically structured and intended to stimulate readers' reactions and invite a new understanding of research text (Richardson, 2013). The found poetry of poetic transcription is created through the analysis of interview transcript data by selecting and rearranging words to reflect original text meaning (Burdick, 2011). It requires text to be filtered through and by the researcher to reduce transcript data whilst simultaneously "illuminating the wholeness and interconnections of thoughts" held within transcripts (Glesne, 1997, p. 206). Providing readers with opportunities to access and engage with the wholeness of interviewee's thought was also the motivation for Collins' (2015) use of poetic transcription in her re-presenting of an asylum seeker's struggle for survival in a new environment. When discussing its virtues Collins (2015) suggested that use of poetic transcription gave back to the interviewee some of the power to represent themselves and their story even though the selection and configuration of words in poetic form was often done for aesthetic and interpretive reasons. Further comment by Collins (2015, p. 2) also related directly to my use of poetic transcription:

As I coded the transcripts in preparation for a more conventional qualitative write up,

there was something about Peter's words that touched me.

Indeed, my desire to re-story and re-present the words held within interview transcripts from my study was also due in part to there being *something in the words* of my participants. Furthermore, with the point of poetic transcription being less about the final destination and more

about the exploration of "the many paths that may lead the way" (West & Bloomquist, 2015, p. 5), the reflexive action of transforming interview transcripts into poetic form offered a unique way for me to see and re-see teachers' experiences of GBA teaching so that I could better understand their intended meaning. Thus, with poetic transcription done to better understand the richness, subtlety and passion associated with teaching experience (Jones, 2010) the process I undertook to construct each poem requires explanation.

**Composition process**

Similar to Legge's (2015) initial experimentation with a single interviewee's transcript I experimented with the design and structure of utterances aligned to each category of experience. Taking utterances directly from composite narratives I trailed a five or six line design for each poem which reflected the number (more specifically the range) of participants' GBA teaching experiences aligned to each category. This was also done as a means to provide focus on key aspects of participants' lived experience whilst simultaneously highlighting meaningful details of feelings or epiphanies associated with GBA teaching experience specific to a certain category (West & Bloomquist, 2015). As poems took shape they were read and re-read with some lines (utterances) replaced or reordered according to the faithfulness of the prevailing meaning resonating from each read. Consideration was also given to more formal conventions of poetic writing as outlined by Richardson (2003) e.g. the repetition of an utterance to emphasize its role within a specific category of GBA teaching experience.

The reflexive nature of poetry writing also meant that I took considerable time to form and review each poem. Poems were constructed over a week long period with a consistent six line format eventually adopted for each poem as a means to; 1) help readers consider each poem in a comparative light; 2) to help readers compare and contrast the meanings they assigned to each poem, and 3) to provide readers with an opportunity to "experience" and "feel" what GBA teaching

is/means according to others (Richardson, 2003, p. 197). The composition process concluded with the formation of a six line poem associated with each category of GBA teaching experience.

**Found poems**

Each of the three poems below is suggestive of a range of experiences associated with a particular categorisation of GBA teaching experience; that being experience as a *Learner*, a *Collaborator*, or a *Catalyst*. It is intended that the reading of these poems offers access to a concentrated form of participants' GBA teaching experiences with each poem suggestive of nuanced experience central to experience categorisation.

*Poem 1: Re-presenting experience of GBA teaching as a Learner*

The first lesson is me instructing

I'm a bit nervous

I'm a bit nervous

I explain some modified rules

That's why I think it is TGfU

Maybe that's it

*Poem 2: Re-presenting experience of GBA teaching as a Collaborator*

Without too much instruction

I want them to work it out for themselves

I spoke to them

I questioned more than told

I wanted to understand how I could best help them

'Away you go'

*Poem 3: Re-presenting experience of GBA teaching as a Catalyst*

I'm looking closely

The allocated space is shaping play

They've discovered it

Tell me… identify… have that awareness

'How did that feel?'

No-one seems to notice the cold

**Comparing poems**

The reading and comparing of poems, for me, offered opportunity to uncover some of the many connections that exist between and that help define each category of experience. For example, Poem 1 describes a leap of pedagogic faith whereas Poems 2 and 3 unveil a growing assuredness of action which often accompanies purposeful and deliberate teaching practice. The two latter poems also highlight key principles of effective GBA teaching that are absent from Poem 1 e.g. the act of questioning and the provision of opportunity for pupil-led discussion. Other more subtle connections between poems also exist. For example, all poems are arguably connected by the underlying suggestion that GBA teaching experience relates to a change in the capacity to experience the act of teaching. This can be seen in the change in focus prevalent in each poem with Poem 1 focusing on the actions of teacher, Poem 2 focusing on the teacher and the pupil, and Poem 3 focusing on the pupil and the elements that shape pupils' learning experiences. This conscious, or non-conscious, movement of teachers away from being *the central figure* of learning was of obvious prominence within poems. By no means, though, is suggestive of a developing abdication from teaching responsibility, but instead representative of perhaps more truthful and desired GBA-related teaching practice.

A line-by-line comparison of poems also offers insight into GBA teaching experience but in more concentrated form. For example, when considering the first line of each poem (Poem 1 "The first lesson is me instructing"; Poem 2 "Without too much instruction"; and Poem 3 "I'm looking closely") a focus on teacher action is prevalent with this initial emphasis designed to highlight a key component of effective GBA-related teaching practice; that being the role of the teacher. When considering a comparison of the final line of each poem (e.g. Poem 1 "Maybe that's it"; Poem 2

"'Away you go'"; and Poem 3 "No-one seems to notice the cold") connections here seem slightly more abstract although no less powerful. Here, each comment offers insight into the very nature of experience, from a confused and perhaps even perfunctory perspective in Poem 1 through to a more holistic interpretation of what GBA teaching might offer pupils in Poem 3.

**Experimenting with poetic transcription**

In relation to the composite narratives used to find each poem, the connections that appear (and fail to appear) between poems seem effective in re-presenting experiences of GBA teaching uncovered within the study. Experimentation with poetic transcription offered me a means to re-engage with collective experiences of GBA teaching from which key aspects of experience were then voiced in a dramatic and specific fashion. This process, that of finding poems from interview transcripts, not only helped to reinforce my overall understanding of GBA teaching experience, but will also help to inform my future practice as a physical education teacher educator. For example, through recognition of key aspects of experience it is important that I help pre-service physical education teachers to experience variation in the way they conceptualise GBA teaching as a means to try to alleviate initial nervousness and concern that is apparent in beginner trialling of GBA teaching.

**Conclusion**

Clandinin and Connolly (2000) suggest that the use of composite narratives to *retell* stories of meaning provides opportunities for continued growth and change in our understanding. By taking this premise a step further and re-presenting stories as found poetry, my understanding of GBA teaching experience was heightened through what West and Bloomquist (2012, p. 19) suggest is typical of poetic transcription; that is the bringing to life of "meaningful, rich, lived experiences". Thus, it is hoped that this re-storying and re-presenting of GBA teaching experiences can help to

develop the pedagogical practice of GBA teaching as well as the development of practice of physical education teacher educators.

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