

# My PE, My Story: The Use of Vignettes to Understand Student Experiences of Pedagogical Innovation in PE

Ty Riddick and Douglas Gleddie

## Abstract

Our study explores how middle school students experience pedagogical innovation in Physical Education (PE) through the implementation of the Meaningful Physical Education (Meaningful PE) framework. Using a case study design, students participated in eight units throughout the school year that explicitly prioritized meaningful experiences. Data from interviews, reflections, and journals were represented as portrait vignettes that were co-constructed with each student to capture authentic, individualized experiences. This approach highlights students' voices and the evolving meaning they attribute to physical education over time. Findings aim to inform educators' practice and advance research on meaningfulness and student engagement in physical education.

## Introduction

This year was a lot better than my last PE experience! At my old school, the teachers would just chuck a volleyball at us and tell us to go run around and do whatever. But when we stood around, we would get yelled at—the teachers weren't very good at their job. However, PE here is a lot different! It involves participation, and the units are usually fun for everyone and not just some random thing each day.

(Lucy)

Our research seeks to provide an understanding of the way students experience pedagogical innovation in physical education (PE), through the use of vignettes. The innovation in this context refers to the implementation of the Meaningful Physical Education framework (Meaningful PE) (Fletcher et al., 2021). The framework prioritizes the meaningfulness of students' physical education experiences that may lead to continued participation in physical activity both inside and outside of school. While Meaningful PE has been an emerging area of research, much of its evidence resides in teachers' enactment of the approach. For example, Vasily et al. (2021) took an actor-oriented approach to understanding the implementation of the same innovation (Meaningful PE) through the lens of a teacher and pedagogical coach. However, a gap exists in understanding students' direct experiences within the sustained implementation of this framework over time. Through the use of portrait vignettes, this study explores how the Meaningful PE framework shapes the PE experiences of a specific group of middle school students. Additionally, the study may open new avenues for portrait vignettes as a presentation device for future research examining the way students experience pedagogical innovation.

## **Pedagogical Innovation: Meaningful Physical Education**

The meaningfulness of a child's experience with physical activity has a strong impact on how they engage with movement throughout their lives (Ramer et al., 2021; Yungblut et al., 2012). However, it is often reported that students do not enjoy their PE experience and are unwilling to participate in PE beyond the compulsory years (Hortigüela-Alcalá et al., 2021; Ladwig et al., 2018). To better support the different needs and interests of students, there has been a growing movement toward adopting a range of innovative teaching approaches in physical education (Casey & Kirk, 2021; Vasily et al., 2021). Most often, this occurs in the form of model-based practices (MBP) (see Metzler, 2011). The advocacy for the use of MBPs is often proposed as a solution to the lack of inclusion and/or engagement experienced by some students in more traditional approaches to PE (Casey & Kirk, 2021). However, despite not being new, MBPs are often considered innovative, which Casey (2014) attributes to challenges of implementation. The Meaningful PE framework may be considered as one such innovation, as it has been designed to address the pressing issues of declining engagement in PE. However, as a framework without the rigorous guidelines or prescriptive steps often found in MBPs, Meaningful PE allows for more contextual flexibility in the way it is implemented.

To better understand what youth find meaningful in PE, Beni et al. (2017) conducted a meta-analysis of over 50 peer-reviewed studies and identified six key features: fun, challenge, social interaction, personal relevance, motor competence, and joy/delight. These initial features, combined with the pedagogical principles of reflective and democratic practice (Fletcher & Ní Chróinín, 2021), form the basis of the Meaningful PE framework. Fletcher and Ní Chróinín (2021) describe a democratic classroom as one where “pupils are actively engaged, agentic, take ownership of their learning, and are willing and able to use their voices to advocate authentically for their own experiences and those of others” (p. 49). Reflection is the process through which individuals attribute meaningfulness (or lack thereof) to an experience (Arnold, 1979; Rintala, 2009). The goal of the framework is to guide teachers in their pedagogical decisions to help students form a meaningful connection to physical activity that inspires continued participation both in and out of school.

Current research has focused on teachers' understanding of Meaningful PE and the associated pedagogies (Beni et al., 2017, 2019, 2023; Howley et al., 2021; Smith et al., 2023). Recently, Harding-Kuriger et al. (2024) used group concept mapping with Grade 7–9 students in conceptualizing what is meaningful to them, but did not go into depth on how these ideas impacted the experience of students. Other studies have explored implementation challenges and isolated pedagogical strategies such as democratic approaches (Cardiff et al., 2023; Vasily et al., 2021). In the limited research that does highlight the experiences of students (often in specific units), students' experiences of these approaches are presented via themes through thematic analysis (Cardiff et al., 2023; Elnan, 2025). However, few studies have explicitly explored how the implementation of the Meaningful PE framework has impacted individual students' experiences across time. Nor has a research study presented the uniqueness of experience and given voice to the participating students through the use of vignettes.

## Portrait Vignettes as a Presentation Device

Can a researcher become a storyteller? Can storytelling become research? Is it enough just to share the story? Is the story the thing, or is it the telling? (Lewis, 2011, p. 506)

Faulkner and Squillante (2020) describe narrative as more than just voice, with details merely sequentially thrown on a page. Narratives bring personality, highs and lows, insecurities, expectations, and irritations onto the page. A narrative is a “shapely thing: organized, polished, curated, its events arranged so that they will reach us, move us, change us. Simply put, narrative is a story” (p. 1026). What to do, then, with the terms “narrative,” “story,” and “vignette”? Are they synonymous or nuanced? While each may have a common goal of resonating with readers or allowing them to walk in another’s shoes (Bocher & Herrmann, 2020; Kiesinger, 1998), Clandinin and Connelly (1994) distinguish story as the phenomenon that is lived, and often what is to be studied, whereas the narrative is the description of the lived experience. Vignettes, on the other hand, are a form of evocative narrative that vividly describes and aims to capture specific moments of what has been lived, understood, and experienced (Ammann, 2018; Boon & Eloff, 2023; Kiesinger, 1998). Much of the literature related to vignettes positions them as tools to collect research data (Blodgett et al., 2011), where text may be used as a hypothetical stimulus that participants are asked to respond to for the purpose of creating data (Hughes & Huby, 2012; Yungblut et al., 2012). The construction of such vignettes is centered around existing literature and not necessarily the experience of participants, who, when presented with the vignette, may be asked what they would do or how it makes them feel (Barter & Renold, 2000; Hughes & Huby, 2012). We intentionally chose to focus on vignettes as a means to present research data in a way that participants, who may otherwise be voiceless, can be given a voice (Lewis, 2011).

Anzul et al. (1997) provide a useful characterization of the different ways vignettes may be used as presentation devices: a snapshot vignette provides a brief, vivid account of what has been observed in a given experience; a composite vignette describes a mix of different participants’ experiences often united around a central theme; and a portrait describes an individual participant’s experience based on empirically collected data (Ammann, 2018; Anzul et al., 1997). Composite vignettes have been the most prevalent form of vignette utilized to explore a variety of topics related to physical activity and sport (Crocker et al., 2021; McGannon & McMahon, 2022; Nunes et al., 2021; Yungblut et al., 2012). Yet, if the objective of vignettes is to centralize the experiences and voices of students while also making them accessible to those outside of the experience (Anzul et al., 1997; Spalding & Philips, 2007; Yungblut et al., 2012), then in relation to the research question, portrait vignettes are most conducive to understanding the unique ways in which students experience the proposed pedagogical innovation. In other areas, Dubuc et al. (2010) used portrait vignettes to understand the experiences of burnout in aspiring adolescent gymnasts, whereas Blodgett et al. (2011) used portrait vignettes as a narrative strategy to present the voices of Aboriginal community members. However, specific to PE, there is an absence of literature in which portrait-type vignettes, representing the singular experience of one individual, have been used as a way to present research data.

## Methods

We approached our research through an interpretive/constructivist paradigm, acknowledging that “meaningfulness” is a subjective experience that is felt and often difficult to fully articulate (Metheny, 1968). Drawing on Dewey’s (1938) concepts that experiences are both interactive and continuous, this study recognizes that an individual’s understanding of reality is shaped by their interaction with their physical and social environment. As such, a case study approach (Merriam, 1998), with the intention of co-creating stories with students within the case, was employed to capture student participants’ subjective realities. To recruit participants for the study, per school policy, the school’s administrative staff sent a letter explaining the study to all parents in Ty’s Grade 8 PE class (n = 21). As students are under the age of consent, parental permission, along with student assent, was required. At the date of closing, the administrative staff exported an Excel file of responses to Ty, listing the students who had consented to participate. Ty implemented Meaningful PE in each of the eight units taught throughout the school year. As Vasily et al. (2021) point out, there is often a gap between the intention of an innovation and the way it is enacted, and thus fidelity to the innovation is an important consideration to ensure that any claims made regarding the effectiveness are attributed correctly. In remaining faithful to the Meaningful PE framework, each unit emphasized engagement with the features through the development of a shared language and the use of personal reflection in relation to meaningfulness. Additionally, each unit also offered opportunities for students to direct and take ownership of their own learning and reflect upon their experience. Throughout the year, data were collected through two individual interviews (one at the end of each semester) and additional artifacts: two journal reflections, two questionnaires, three exit tickets, and each student’s outdoor education logbook.

Boon and Eloff (2023) describe how vignettes aim to capture moments of significance. Tesch (1990) considers these as “meaning units”: a piece of data that contains a single thought relating to a specific subject. After data collection was complete, Ty presented each student with a collection of their meaning units expressed through quotations, accompanied by the question, “If we were to tell a story about your experience of Meaningful PE this year, what moments would be important to include?” Students identified the units they would like included and, in some cases, ranked them in order of importance. Ty then created raw vignettes with an aim to portray each student’s character and experiences (Spalding & Phillips, 2007). As Ammann (2018) suggests, in an effort to capture the “unvarnished reality” (p. 9) of an experience, care was taken to refrain from making interpretations, with Ty adding only contextual information to allow the vignette to be more comprehensible to the reader. Anzul et al. (1997) highlight that a challenge facing writers is the fear of misrepresenting the thoughts or feelings of participants. In a similar regard, Ammann (2018) describes the writer’s struggle to constantly search for a word that might more accurately describe the experience. To alleviate this pressure, the students’ own words were used as much as possible. For example, one student vignette (Jasmin) includes the statement, “some days, when something memorable happened, reflecting was a vibe.” Although replacing the word “vibe” with another positively associated word might make the sentence more comprehensible to an academic audience, we felt it was important to leave the phrase as it was in order to maintain authenticity (Lister & McFarlane, 2021). As a measure of validation, the raw vignettes were then presented to each

student, with an opportunity for them to make any changes they felt made the vignette a more accurate representation. For example, when her vignette described something her teacher did as beneficial (based on her response to an interview question), the student (Kelly) noted that “beneficial” was not a word she would use, and suggested that it be changed to “good for me.”

As Dewey (1938) describes, experiences are interactive; they are shaped through the interactions between people and the environment. There is a relationship between my experience of you and your experience of me in a given situation. As the students in the study were experiencing the pedagogical innovation, so was Ty. As Boon & Eloff (2023) write, both learners and researchers are affected by an experience. As such, below each vignette, Ty has included his own thoughts (in italicized text) with respect to the experience of each student. As mentioned, 14 students consented to participate in the study; selecting three for this paper was exceedingly difficult for Ty, as each story means something different to him. The three below were chosen for their diversity as well as their representation of the different ways students experience Meaningful PE.

## Results

### Vignette 1: Jasmin

I think PE is a fun subject, especially when activities are with other people, but sometimes when we do activities where you can't hang out with your friends, and you're just by yourself, that can get lonely. My favorite part of PE is when you get to do things that you normally do by yourself, like dance, and instead do them with a team or a group.

Overall, PE has been positive this year. I was able to participate in activities I'm interested in, build friendships, and feel like I belong. We've had a lot more choices this year. For example, instead of just doing volleyball games, we're actually doing practice and stuff, and you can choose what skills you want to work on or the level you want to play at. Being able to set goals for what I want to work on helps me feel more confident because I know the skill better. However, I would like even more choices to set my own challenges next year.

We spent time reflecting on our experiences this year. Some days, when something memorable happened, reflecting was a vibe, but on other days, I didn't want to reflect when it was not a vibe. I found it challenging to think about what it is I find meaningful about certain activities; sometimes, there was nothing! Other times, it was hard to narrow it down to one main feature. I guess I consider myself an outdoorsy person, as these types of experiences were the ones that were most meaningful to me. Throughout the year, we sometimes took a break from our units to go outside when the weather was nice. One day, we went out to the playground, which I liked because it was nice to go out as if it were recess, like we were in elementary school again. On another day, we went on a walk in the ravine, and it was fun because my friend told stories while we walked. During the canoe trip, we went swimming, which was my favorite moment because I was with my friends. At first, the water was cold, but then I got warmer and felt happy when I was with my friends. I loved canoeing with Crystal because it was fun to talk to her and also learn a new skill with her. Because of the canoeing unit, I think I'm going to go canoeing in my own time with my family and friends.

*I have known Jasmin for the past four school years. As PE classes at our school often occur during the same time block, I had observed her participating, but had never officially been her teacher until this year. My perception of her before this year was that perhaps she didn't always like PE, as she didn't appear the most engaged or willing to take on challenges. The first interview I had with her was eye-opening when she stated that during individual activities such as running or gymnastics (in the previous years, gymnastics routines were completed individually), she felt lonely. What I had mistaken as a lack of engagement was perhaps instead a lack of social connection during individual pursuits. To make PE meaningful for Jasmin, it was clear we needed to make it social. The democratic emphasis of the Meaningful PE framework afforded me opportunities to allow students choice to complete certain activities in groups or as individuals. Emphasizing social interaction, taking opportunities to go outside, in ways that were perhaps disconnected from the unit going on at the time, seemed to provide Jasmin a sense of novelty that she really connected with. Three months after completing the research process, although I am no longer teaching Jasmin, her engagement in Grade 9 PE seems to have continued, as I observed her taking on new challenges as she experienced field hockey and rugby for the first time. The inclusion of this vignette highlights that the way students experience pedagogical innovation is often deeply embedded within the social context. As Meaningful PE is something that is done with students, not to them, the approach needed to evolve in alignment with Jasmin's hopes and desires. The research process really allowed Jasmin to advocate for what it is she wanted in PE. Which, as we hope is salient in the vignette, involved ensuring social connectedness was prevalent for her in the units we pursued.*

## **Vignette 2: Isla**

I have always enjoyed playing sports and coming to PE. I am confident in my skills and feel like I can do almost anything! This year in PE was pretty good, but there were definitely highs and lows. We started the year playing flag football, and I just love football. I don't know, there's just something about it. When I was growing up, my dad always watched football, so I've learned about it and been connected to it for like a very long time. However, at that time, the challenges with some of the boys in the class became apparent, as they wouldn't pass to me, were mean, and not very inclusive. I'm not the kind of girl who is into dance and volleyball, which sometimes made it hard to fit in during this class. For these reasons, I appreciated having the choices of parkour or dance during our Aesthetic Movement unit, and being able to choose the level I wish to play at, because I am a competitive person. I love competition, and it's hard for me to be very patient when I am doing sports. Opportunities like these really allowed me to express who I am. As the year progressed, I had a great time at Track & Field, which was very challenging and fun. The choices I had in class helped me discover that hurdles might be a hidden strength of mine, while also improving my javelin distance by five metres from last year!

The canoe trip helped me change my thinking about a lot of the people in our classes because getting to know people better and seeing how different they are from how they are at school to how they are outdoors, and showing who they really are. While swimming, I felt free spirited and myself, it took me back to childhood when we swam a lot. We also spent time reflecting on our experiences this year, which I honestly found as a waste of time. I want to get right into playing! I don't really think about what I find meaningful about stuff. If I like the sport, I am going to play it! Although during our last unit, when I was encouraged to think about how I can be active in my community, it helped me realize that I didn't need to wait for my mom to pick me

up from the rec center, but rather, there was a walking path back to the community, so I walked home for the first time.

At the end of the year, we had some outdoor choices; almost all of the girls were playing grass volleyball, and the boys were over there playing soccer, having so much fun. I was like, “Oh, I want to go play soccer,” but I didn't want to be the only girl, as they would call me a ‘pick me’ or ‘try hard.’ However, one of the boys invited me to play, and finally, they were inclusive! They passed me the ball, and when I scored a goal, they all high-fived me. It was really fun! I hope I have more days like that next year.

*Much like Jasmin, I have known Isla for as long as I have been at this school, but I had not taught her before this year. I would characterize her as a strong athlete who seems to enjoy physical activity. What really stood out to me throughout this process is how Isla repeatedly referenced identity, or PE, allowing her to express “who she was” or finding out about “who others really were.” As you’ve read in her vignette, Isla doesn’t necessarily identify with many of the other girls in the grade. Often, whether it be in flag football, or parkour (when students chose between parkour, dance, or X-disc), it was not uncommon for Isla’s choices to result in her being the lone girl amongst the boys in the grade. In reflection, I wonder if, without the democratic approaches and the ability to make choices in her learning, would Isla still have felt that PE allowed her to express her identity?*

*Understanding how to play with people who are outside your regular peer group is an important life skill for students to develop: for this group, this school year, it was a source of ongoing development. Even at the end of the year, when she really wanted to go play soccer, Isla still expressed worry that boys would call her a “pick me,” which references an incident that occurred roughly eight months prior in October when the boys with whom Isla often chose to participate were not very inclusive. Fortunately, as you read, the situation during soccer turned out much better for her this time around. The inclusion of this vignette highlights the way students’ experiences are influenced by the social environment and how PE can facilitate identity formation. In Isla’s case, the inclusion she felt (finally) at the end of the year was not a matter of chance; rather, it was the product of continuous and intentional actions that aimed to develop and promote a more inclusive environment.*

### **Vignette 3: Mike**

I’m an athlete, I enjoy sports, and do a ton of extracurriculars. However, at my previous school, the curriculum was pretty rigid, there was little to no flexibility, and because of that, I found it kinda of boring. Here at this school, it’s a lot different. I have been given ways to have my voice heard. Here, I’ve been able to make choices about what I want to improve on. For instance, in basketball, I wrote I wanted to get better at dribbling, because I want to become a more shifty player, and I think that allowed me to spend my class time wisely, and that also allowed me to know what to work on. Even though I am the type who wants to do everything, choices of which events or stations I can go to are very valuable to me because I can look at what I’m good at, what I may need improvement in, and what I enjoy, maybe what I don’t enjoy. Additionally, being given the choice of social or competitive groups—I think that’s super important, because some days I just kind of want to relax, and some days I’m feeling it—I definitely want to have that decision.

To me, competition and social interaction serve as significant factors, as they are motivators to try harder and become better as an athlete. To provide further context, I observed these “features” most prominently in the Trail Running & Cross Country unit, where I was able to compete with my friends as well as my peers, for the reason that the events were merely physical challenges where I could push myself out of my comfort zone. Also, I’m 50% Native, and Native people are very interested in sports because a lot of the sports just involve being outside, and being outside is so significant to Native culture. I felt like I really was able to feel that connection to nature this year. One day, we were running, and we literally saw a fox skitter across the trail—that was so cool.

During our Outdoor Education trip, we also explored the Badlands. I felt free and happy because I was allowed to hike and push myself outside of my comfort zone, and I felt like I was learning in the moment, and I just discovered new rocks and plants.

Lastly, our final unit of the year really changed my thinking about how I can be active in my community. This unit inspired me to understand different ways to get active, especially locally in my community. Now I understand all the different places on the map of my neighborhood where I could go and all the new things that I can explore, and it helps me to understand the significance of being active in and around my community through different ways, and in ways that we explored during the school year and the unit. Overall, I had a pretty positive experience this year, and with more opportunities to compete with my friends, Grade 9 will be even better.

*Mike was a new student at the school this year. Very early on, I would have characterized Mike as someone who is going to be engaged in whatever it is that we do—he really loved being in PE and being with his newfound friends. To me, Mike represented many students I’ve had throughout my career—the ones who are eager to get to PE, to be active, and get away from sitting in the classroom all day. In the past, I might have thought that these students, like Mike, require little intervention or little support, allowing me to devote my attention to those more in need. However, in going through this process with Mike, I realized that it is a dangerous assumption to make, as Mike commented about the boredom of his previous school.*

*In one of his early reflections, Mike shared his Indigenous heritage and the significance the outdoors holds in his culture. This opened the door to new explorations by being more intentional in highlighting the connection to the outdoors. Our rural campus affords us many opportunities to be outside in all seasons, and whereas the conversations usually revolve around tactics or skills needed for the activity, this year we placed a great emphasis on the in-the-moment embodied experience of being in nature. For Mike in particular, this appears to have led to finding greater connection and relevancy in these activities. The inclusion of this vignette highlights how sometimes our observations of students can be misleading. In considering the implementation of a pedagogical innovation, it is important to consider “who” the innovation is for, which requires us to get to know our students beyond the surface level.*

## Discussion

The purpose of our research was to explore how students experience sustained implementation of Meaningful PE—a pedagogical innovation that prioritizes meaningfulness of student experiences in PE to facilitate deeper engagement in physical activity inside and outside of the classroom. We have found the co-construction of vignettes as a useful endeavor to explore how individual students experience the implementation of Meaningful PE over time, and how that may ebb and flow throughout the course of the year, and in different units of study. While there are 11 other student vignettes, not utilized for this paper, that will certainly provide further insight, the three included here highlight how the experience of the innovation is shaped through interaction with the context of the case. For Mike, we see the value he places on competition with his peers, while the natural landscape of the school’s rural campus allows him to connect on a deeper level with his Indigenous culture. Like Mike, the connection to the outdoor campus was also important for Jasmin as she reminisced about recesses gone by. However, it was a lack of interaction with peers that was initially a barrier to her engagement. For Isla, it was a lack of positive and inclusive interactions that dampened her enthusiasm for PE at the beginning of the school year. However, as education is an act of making “continuous judgments about the why(s), what(s), and how(s) of education” (Quennerstedt, 2019, p. 611), being responsive to these situations helped facilitate more meaningful experiences throughout the school year—perhaps something that might be lost in other forms of data representation. While we often position meaningfulness as deeply personal (Arnold, 1979; Metheny, 1968), as evident in these examples, it can certainly be influenced by the people and places that surround the experience.

Narrative representations, such as vignettes, attempt to combine a succession of events into a unified episode of thick description (Merriam, 1998; Polkinghorne, 1995). The process of data collection progressed throughout the year, which allowed for a flow of continuity—how one happening may connect to another. For example, we see examples of how students connect experiences in PE to desires for future participation, which is ultimately the goal of this innovation. Mike and Isla are better able to recognize opportunities to engage in physical activity within their local communities in response to the democratic and reflective approaches applied during the Active in My Community unit, whereas Jasmin expresses a desire to continue canoeing with family and friends in response to our Alternative Environments unit.

Stone (1997, as cited in Bochner & Hermann, 2020) describes how to find the story in the experience and make it accessible to the reader can be burdensome. Certainly, as a researcher, Ty felt the weight of trying to tell the story of each student as accurately as possible, while, as the students’ teacher, he was also actively trying to ensure that the story was filled with meaningfulness. The co-construction of the vignette, having each student identify the quotes that best represented their experiences in PE, generally speaking, as well as in relation to the pedagogical principles of democratic and reflective practice, was essential to achieving accuracy.

Boon and Eloff (2023) describe the inter-experience of the research process: “Neither the child nor the vignette researcher remains unaffected by their experience” (p. 48). Several months removed from the study, Ty often reflects on how this process has changed him as a teacher and as a researcher. He finds himself challenging his own perceptions of the students he meets. While he has always valued relationships, he is now investing more time in establishing deeper relationships with each student. For the students who participated in the study, there seems to be a lasting connection—warm greetings, a “dap,” invitations to upcoming events, etc.—perhaps a result of shared experiences co-creating their vignette and honoring their voice throughout the process. Bochner and Hermann (2020) describe how, when a story is told, it becomes constitutive of the storyteller’s life (here, we position students as the storytellers): “The story not only depicts life; it also shapes it reflexively” (p. 292). As these participants have been encouraged to voice their experience, how has this process given meaning to the events in their story? By telling their story, has their understanding of themselves changed? These vignettes are, perhaps, not just a recounting of what happened in response to a pedagogical innovation, but a tool through which students can actively construct and express their own identity. In the search to prioritize meaningful experiences for students in PE, in what ways was the process of co-creating these vignettes meaningful?

As Ty welcomes a new group of students this fall, we wonder what stories might be told of their experiences. How will those stories be shaped by the physical and social environment? How might they inspire future participation in physical activity? How will the telling of those stories shape their identity? And, how will those stories shape Ty? Beyond accuracy, the quality of a vignette is often judged on its ability to resonate with the reader’s own experiences (Bochner & Hermann, 2020) or, for teachers, perhaps the students they have experienced. We are hopeful these vignettes have done so for you.

## Conclusion

Kretchmar (2000) describes how a meaningful experience moves us along; a meaningful life is a story—connecting “who we were, who we are now, and who we are becoming” (p. 5). We have found that vignettes have been a valuable tool to understand the way that students have been moved along through their experience of pedagogical innovation in PE. The process of co-constructing vignettes with students has allowed us to understand how innovations are situated contextually and, by placing students at the center of experience, how innovative approaches such as Meaningful PE may evolve in response to students’ needs. In addition to the purpose outlined in this research, vignettes, such as these, may serve as a useful feedback tool and may be used as a source of professional dialogue in team meetings or workshops (Ammann, 2018). For those interested in similar approaches, consider how you might ask students to reflect on their experience utilizing elements of stories. For example, *what moment from this lesson was a storyworthy moment for you? Who are you as the character of the story? What are your superpowers? What moment from this unit represented the climax for you?* Artificial intelligence may also prove to be a useful tool for both teachers and students, used for compiling a collection of thoughts and events, then crafting them into stories that are representative of their experiences in a way that is less time-intensive and more accessible to practitioners. However

researchers and teachers choose to use vignettes, we are confident in the benefits of this reflective practice for both practitioners and participants.

## References

- Ammann, M. (2018). Leadership for learning as experience: Introducing the use of vignettes for research on leadership experiences in schools. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 17(1). <https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406918816409>
- Anzul, M., Downing, M., Ely, M., & Vinz, R. (1997). *On writing qualitative research: Living by words* (1st ed.). Routledge.
- Arnold, P. J. (1979). *Meaning in movement, sport and physical education*. Heinemann.
- Barter, C., & Renold, E. (2000). "I wanna tell you a story": Exploring the application of vignettes in qualitative research with children and young people. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 3(4), 307–323. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13645570050178594>
- Beni, S., Fletcher, T., & Ní Chróinín, D. (2017). Meaningful experiences in physical education and youth sport: A review of the literature. *Quest*, 69(3), 291–312.
- Beni, S., Fletcher, T., & Chróinín, D. N. (2019). Using features of meaningful experiences to guide primary physical education practice. *European Physical Education Review*, 25(3), 599–615.
- Beni, S., Ní Chróinín, D., Fletcher, T., Bailey, J., Fraise, L. C., Down, M., Hamada, M., Riddick, T., Trojanovic, M., & Gross, K. (2023). Teachers' sensemaking in implementation of Meaningful Physical Education. *Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy*, 30(6), 593–606. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17408989.2023.2260388>
- Bochner, A. P., & Herrmann, A. F. (2020, September 2). Practicing narrative inquiry II: Making meanings move. In P. Leavy (Ed.), *The Oxford handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed.) (online). Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190847388.013.19>
- Boon, W., & Eloff, I. (2023). Using vignettes to understand the social-emotional experiences of three-year-olds in diverse language contexts. *Journal of Education (Durban)*, 93, 43–63. <https://doi.org/10.17159/2520-9868/i93a03>
- Blodgett, A. T., Schinke, R. J., Smith, B., Peltier, D., & Pheasant, C. (2011). In Indigenous words: Exploring vignettes as a narrative strategy for presenting the research voices of Aboriginal community members. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 17(6), 522–533.
- Cardiff, G., Ní Chróinín, D., Bowles, R., Fletcher, T., & Beni, S. (2023). "Just let them have a say!" Students' perspective of student voice pedagogies in primary physical education. *Irish Educational Studies*, 42(4), 659–676. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03323315.2023.2255987>
- Casey, A. (2014). Models-based practice: Great white hope or white elephant? *Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy*, 19(1), 18–34. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17408989.2012.726977>
- Casey, A., & Kirk, D. (2021). Why models-based practice? In *Models-based practice in physical education* (1st ed., pp. 1–15). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429319259-1>

- Clandinin, D.J., & Connelly, F. M. (1994) Personal experience methods. In N. Denzin & Y Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 413– 27). Sage.
- Crocker, B., Duncan, L., & Chard, S. (2021). Composite vignettes of challenges faced by Canadian collegiate student-athletes negotiating the demands of university life. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, 55. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychsport.2021.101937>
- Dewey, J. (1938). *Experience and education*. Kappa Delta Pi.
- Dubuc, N. G., Schinke, R. J., Eys, M. A., Battochio, R., & Zaichkowsky, L. (2010). Experiences of burnout among adolescent female gymnasts: Three case studies. *Journal of Clinical Sport Psychology*, 4(1), 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1123/jcsp.4.1.1>
- Elnan, I. (2025). Pupils' experiences of aquatic education as a meaningful activity in physical education. *Sport, Education and Society*, 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13573322.2025.2532137>
- Faulkner, S. L., & Squillante, S. (2020). Creative approaches to writing qualitative research. In P. Leavy (Ed.), *The Oxford handbook of qualitative research*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190847388.013.4>
- Fletcher, T., & Ní Chróinín, D. (2021). Pedagogical principles that support the prioritisation of meaningful experiences in physical education: Conceptual and practical considerations. *Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy*, 27(5), 455–466. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17408989.2021.1884672>
- Fletcher, T., Ní Chróinín, D., Gleddie, D., & Beni, S. (Eds.). (2021). *Meaningful physical education: An approach for teaching and learning* (1st ed.). Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003035091>
- Harding-Kuriger, J., Gleddie, D., Ni Chróinín, D., & Lessard, S. (2024). Using group concept mapping to conceptualize meaningfulness in physical education with secondary students. *Journal of Teaching in Physical Education* 44(3), 1–10. [10.1123/jtpe.2023-0343](https://doi.org/10.1123/jtpe.2023-0343).
- Hortigüela-Alcalá, D., Barba-Martín, R. A., González-Calvo, G., & Hernando-Garijo, A. (2021). “I hate physical education”: An analysis of girls' experiences throughout their school life. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 30(6), 648–662. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09589236.2021.1937077>
- Howley, D., Dyson, D., Baek, S., Fowler, J., & Shen, Y. (2021). “This is not gym”: Enacting student voice pedagogies to promote social and emotional learning and meaningful physical education. *Frontiers in Sports and Active Living*, 3. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fspor.2021.764613>
- Hughes, R., & Huby, M. (2012). The construction and interpretation of vignettes in social research. *Social Work & Social Sciences Review*, 11(1), 36–51. <https://doi.org/10.1921/swsr.v11i1.428>
- Kiesinger, C. E. (1998). From interview to story: Writing Abbie's life. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 4(1), 71–95. <https://doi.org/10.1177/107780049800400105>
- Kretchmar, R. S. (2000). Movement subcultures: Sites for meaning. *Journal of Physical Education, Recreation & Dance*, 71(5), 19–25.
- Ladwig, M. A., Vazou, S., & Ekkekakis, P. (2018). “My best memory is when I was done with it”: PE memories are associated with adult sedentary behavior. *Translational Journal of the ACSM*, 3(16), 119–129. <https://doi.org/10.1249/TJX.0000000000000067>

- Lewis, P. J. (2011). Storytelling as research / research as storytelling. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 17(6), 505–510. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800411409883>
- Lister, K., & McFarlane, R. (2021). Designing for wellbeing: An inclusive learning design approach with student mental health vignettes. *Open Praxis*, 13(2), 184–200. <https://doi.org/10.5944/openpraxis.13.2.126>
- McGannon, K. R., & McMahon, J. (2021). (Re)Storying embodied running and motherhood: A creative non-fiction approach. *Sport, Education and Society*, 27(8), 960–972. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13573322.2021.1942821>
- Merriam, S. B. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education* (2nd ed.). Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Metheny, E. (1968). *Movement and meaning*. McGraw-Hill.
- Metzler, M. W. (2011). *Instructional models for physical education* (3rd ed.). Holcomb Hathaway, Publishers.
- Nunes, E. L. G., Ciampolini, V., Palheta, C. E., Nascimento, J. V. D., Milistetd, M., & Santos, F. (2021). Composite vignettes of former Brazilian high-performance volleyball athletes' perspective on life skills learning and transfer. *Journal of Sports Sciences*, 39(23), 2674–2682. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02640414.2021.1951054>
- Polkinghorne, E.D. (1995). Narrative configuration in qualitative analysis. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 8(1), 5–23. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0951839950080103>
- Quennerstedt, M. (2019). Physical education and the art of teaching: Transformative learning and teaching in physical education and sports pedagogy. *Sport, Education and Society*, 24(6), 611–623. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13573322.2019.1574731>
- Ramer, J. D., Houser, N. E., Duncan, R. J., & Bustamante, E. E. (2021). Enjoyment of physical activity—not MVPA during physical education—predicts future MVPA participation and sport self-concept. *Sports (Basel)*, 9(9), 128. <https://doi.org/10.3390/sports9090128>
- Rintala, J. (2009). It's all about the -ing. *Quest*, 61(3), 278–288. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00336297.2009.10483616>
- Smith, Z., Carter, A., Fletcher, T., & Ní Chróinín, D. (2023). What is important? How one early childhood teacher prioritized meaningful experiences for children in physical education. *Journal of Early Childhood Education Research*, 12(1), 126–149.
- Spalding, N. J., & Phillips, T. 2007. Exploring the use of vignettes: From validity to trustworthiness. *Qualitative Health Research*, 17(7), 954–962. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732307306187>
- Vasily, A., Fletcher, T., Gleddie, D., & Ní Chróinín, D. (2021). An actor-oriented perspective on implementing a pedagogical innovation in a cycling unit. *Journal of Teaching in Physical Education*, 40(4), 652–661. <https://doi.org/10.1123/jtpe.2020-0186>
- Yungblut, H. E., Schinke, R. J., & McGannon, K. R. (2012). Views of adolescent female youth on physical activity during early adolescence. *Journal of Sports Science and Medicine* (11), 39–50.



**Ty Riddick** is a PhD candidate at the University of Alberta as well as a middle and senior school physical and health education teacher. Ty has been teaching for 14 years, having spent eight years teaching abroad at international schools in Hong Kong and South Korea. Ty's teaching and doctoral work are connected to gaining a deeper understanding of how the prioritization of meaningfulness impacts the physical education experiences of students. Additionally, Ty co-hosts the *Meaningful Podcast Experience* with Dr. Gleddie, dedicated to exploring meaningfulness in a variety of research and teaching contexts around the world.



**Douglas Gleddie** is a professor in the Faculty of Education at the University of Alberta. He teaches physical education curriculum and pedagogy to undergraduate students. He also teaches graduate courses in health and physical education, reflective practice, physical literacy, and research methods. Dr. Gleddie's research foci include narratives of physical education, school sport, physical literacy praxis, meaningful physical education, and teacher education.

