

Empowerment and Unlearning: A Departure Towards Inter-Cultural Understanding

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Abstract

This thesis includes two stand-alone articles with the overall purpose of critically exploring experiences related to sport-for-development from the program participants' perspective on the one hand, and from the practitioners' perspective on the other. After outlining the research objectives and present a review of literature, theoretical framework, epistemology, methodology, methods, and analysis, the first article focuses on the YLP participants' experiences with a particular interest on empowerment processes. Specifically, I employed a Critical Youth Empowerment (CYE) framework in relation to youth experiences and larger community involvement with youth programming (Jennings et al., 2006). Photovoice was conducted and supplemented with eleven semi-structured interviews, one focus group and a month-long participant observation. The above-mentioned research was juxtaposed with a second article presenting an autoethnographic account of my own experiences as a practitioner and researcher. My autoethnography mixes theory, methodology, and methods throughout the narrative. My hope was to produce a theoretically rich and reflexive account of the experiences that led me to conceptualize sport-for-development differently. This self-critical piece aims at providing an opportunity for readers to reflect upon and hopefully challenge their own practices, knowledge production, and research orthodoxy.

Keywords: Sport for development, First Nation, Empowerment, Youth

Introduction

The median age of the First Nation, Métis and Inuit (FNMI) population in Canada is 26 years old compared to 41 years old for the non-Aboriginal populations. This very young population is also growing nearly as twice as fast as the mainstream population (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, 2007). In addition to this so-called demographic tsunami (Helin, 2006), and acknowledging that FNMI experience blatant inequalities at all levels, emerging sport/play-based programs are at the forefront of new proposed solutions to provide educational structured opportunities for youth and community well-being.

Sport-for-development initiatives designed with intentions to tackle social issues and inequalities have recently become major tools for community development. More specifically, helping communities to empower themselves through value-based sport initiatives is at the forefront of these innovative and allegedly “apolitical” ways of practicing “development.” A wide range of studies about this sport-for-development trend have scrutinized its practices from the perspective of social control, risk-based prevention, or as assimilation tools (Donnelly & Coakley, 2002; Nichols, 2007); individual positive youth development through life-skills acquisition, to integrate and develop “good” citizens (Coakley, 2011; Petitpas et al., 2008); or from a broader lens of civic engagement, community mobilization, and self-determination (Coalter, 2007; Jennings, Parra-Medina, Hilfinger-Messias, & McLoughlin, 2006). This thesis contributes to this more recent body of works – as currently there is a paucity of research that focuses on local understandings of community mobilization through existing sport-for-development programs.

This study was part of a Social Science and Humanities Research Council and Sport Canada-funded research in partnership with Right To Play (RTP) and Aboriginal communities.

As part of the partnership, an Aboriginal Research Advisory Committee made of 5 members was created to guide researchers towards developing respectful, relevant, and achievable research programs. Following my adaptations to research design as per the Aboriginal Research Advisory Committee's suggestions, I successfully defended my thesis proposal to my supervisory committee and the partnering community's Chief and Council – Whitefish River First Nation (WRFN).

This research focuses on RTP's Youth Leadership Program (YLP) from the Promoting Life-Skills in Aboriginal Youth (PLAY) program. One goal of the YLP is to encourage youth to identify gaps in community sport and play opportunities and plan events that promote community physical activity and well-being. Within this objective, the YLP also focuses on identifying social issues within the community, giving youth the opportunity to plan community events that enhance awareness of the identified issues and, in turn, empowering the youth to be part of lasting change (Right To Play, 2012).

Thesis Framework

This thesis includes two stand-alone articles with the overall purpose of critically exploring experiences related to sport-for-development from the program participants' perspective on the one hand and from the practitioners' perspective on the other. First, I outline the research objectives and present a review of literature, theoretical framework, epistemology, methodology, methods, and analysis. Next, I present my first article, which focuses on the YLP participants' experiences with a particular interest on empowerment processes and outcomes. Specifically, I employed a Critical Youth Empowerment (CYE) framework in relation to youth experiences and larger community involvement with youth programming (Jennings et al., 2006). Photovoice was a focal activity to understand youth stories in relation to their community

experiences. This was also supplemented with eleven semi-structured interviews, one focus group, and a month-long participant observation. The **objectives** of this first study were:

- 1) To understand and document the experiences of youth participants in the Youth Leadership Program from Right To Play;
- 2) To identify and understand expressions of CYE and how they contribute to community building in an Aboriginal context;
- 3) To inform the Youth Leadership Program evaluation and policy.

The above-mentioned research was juxtaposed with a second article presenting an autoethnographic account of my own experiences as a practitioner and researcher. I felt it was necessary to write my narrative because there is a paucity of voices from those who are “doing” the development. The few accounts of practitioners who turned scholars that were found and who provided more reflective works – questioning power relations, questions of race, whiteness and masculinity (Forde, 2013; Heron, 2007), using autoethnographic accounts of their own experiences as “developers” – exemplifies the richness to sport-for-development work.

Therefore, it is believed that this approach can foster a new perspective of sport-for-development programs that aspire to “develop,” “empower,” or further social change.

In this sense, the second paper does not follow a traditional format. My proposed autoethnography mixes narrative, theory, methodology, and methods throughout the narrative. My hope is to produce a theoretically rich and reflexive account of the experiences that led me to conceptualize sport-for-development differently. It is my hope that this self-critical piece provides an opportunity for readers to reflect upon and hopefully challenge their own practices, knowledge production, and research orthodoxy. Therefore, the objectives of my second article were:

- 1) To reflect critically upon my past experiences in sport-for-development and provide an account of sport-for-development practices from the perspective of the practitioner;
- 2) To contribute to a reflection towards decolonizing sport-for-development practices;
- 3) To situate local knowledge within these practices.

Review of Literature

The review of literature will comprise a brief history of sporting opportunities and the shifts that have occurred, tendencies towards programmatic outcomes linked with social capital, and personal character development, which will lend discussion to the need for more sociological perspectives. The subsequent text will then link critical youth empowerment to sport-for-development practices that prioritize community mobilization from a localized Aboriginal context.

Working-class families started to lobby for an increase in recreational opportunities for their children in the latter part of the 19th century. The belief was recreational outlets would provide children with opportunities to better deal with poverty, crime, and disease that plagued their neighbourhoods (Hardy & Ingham, 1983). Although the playground movement originated from this lobby, the persistence of the working class did not initiate the movement: it was the self-interest of middle and upper classes and the subsequent belief to gain social control that would result from supervised playgrounds (Donnelly & Coakley, 2002). Accordingly, “social control was the price working class parents paid—they gave their children up to the double-edged sword of rational recreation and supervision in order to achieve the possibility of recreation” (Donnelly & Coakley, 2002, p. 4). Although social control was a result of the playground movement, the middle and upper class now use sport, physical activity, and

recreation programs for “social development” purposes at a relatively small cost (Coakley, 2011). Thus, the 19th century had an abundance of sport programs developed by individuals – described as sport evangelists – who influenced sport policies because of their beliefs that sporting interventions would “dissipate the lower orders dangerous energies and divert them from licentious social practices” (Giulianotti, 2004, p. 356). Presently, Coakley (2011) defined sport evangelists as having an essentialist view of sport that results in development. Specifically, sport evangelists claim that benefits of development include, “remediation for individuals perceived to need reformative socialization” (Coakley, 2011, p. 307) and the revitalization of communities deemed necessary for heightened civic awareness and participation. The more recent sport for development model has grown from the aforementioned recreational trends, which will be discussed next.

Sport for Development

In recent years, sport has been used as a means for social, economic, and community development in lower socioeconomic communities around the world. The United Nations (UN) recognized sport-for-development programs as innovative and efficient ways to collaborate with existing social development initiatives (UN, 2011). The resulting UN’s Office on Sport for Development and Peace (UNOSDP) acknowledged the use of sport as a cost-effective way to reach the Millennium Development Goals, which focused on child and youth development, peace building, gender, people with disabilities, and health promotion initiatives (*Sport for Development and Peace: International Working Group*, 2008, p. 9). The aforementioned outcomes of sport-for-development working towards the Millennium Development Goals are aligned with Kidd’s (2008) definition, which states that sport-for-development uses “sport and physical activity to advance sport and broad social development” (p. 370). As he argued,

outcomes of sport-for-development are not intended to increase numbers in training and sporting competitions, but are implemented for social development purposes. Accordingly, the UNOSDP defined “sport” as “all forms of physical activity that contribute to physical fitness, mental well-being and social interaction, such as play, recreation, organized or competitive sport, and indigenous sports and games” (UNOSDP, 2011).

Along with the growth of sport for development came a call for academia to assess its relevance and positioning within development orthodoxy. Recent sport-for-development literature has critically analyzed this newly institutionalized phenomenon and articulated the need for more thorough theorization (Darnell & Hayhurst, 2011; Kay, 2009). Darnell (2010) and Giulianotti (2011) were critical of the existing scholarship on sport for development that typically reproduces a Western-based ideology, fails to recognize power structures, and strengthens neocolonial ideals; accordingly, local knowledge and expertise is undermined (McEwan, 2001). Although some sport-for-development programs condemn the notion of development through modernism and economic based initiatives, Giulianotti (2010) argued that sport-for-development organizations are still ruled by neoliberal ideals which are implicit in organizational outcomes. Thus, neoliberal development endures primarily through a capitalist-driven global economy where the world’s poor have “little or no power either to set their own goals or to mobilize the resources needed to achieve them” (McKay, 2008, p. 73).

Similarly, Darnell (2010) and Levermore (2009) argued how sport-for-development outcomes align with hierarchical relations between sport-for-development organizations and intended beneficiaries; for example, developing physical infrastructure, developing capacity-building initiatives that center around economic and social reform, and including corporations in the development process reinforces hegemonic tendencies. Darnell (2010) furthers the

hierarchical relation concept by adding that sport-for-development organizations are based on a Western worldview of competition to encourage development – which fails to acknowledge local needs.

Sport-for-development, therefore, has similar development practices as sport evangelists' youth programming: social capital for a means of increased productivity and civic engagement; personal character development; and improved “at-risk” populations to become mainstream, productive citizens (Coakley, 2011; Coalter, 2007).

Social Capital

Kay and Bradbury (2009) note that the most popular definition in conceptualizing social capital can be described as “networks, norms, and trust that enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives” (Putnam, 2000, p. 17). Putnam (2000) discussed how individuals would become increasingly part of the collective whole through “bridging” and “bonding” and their relative ability to encourage social cohesion and connectedness. In terms of social capital as a result of sport participation, intragroup bonding is evident but there are fewer cases of intergroup bridging (Coakley, 2011). Thus, development practices through youth sport programming are seen as conducive to homogeneous relationships through bonding, which limit civic engagement (Coakley, 2011). Furthermore, the type of bonding that occurs is usually with groups of the same social-economic statuses and ethnic identifications; this does not foster space for bridging differences within and between communities (Kelly, 2011).

Academics who write on this subject have argued consistently for more social research to better understand the relationship between youth sport participation and developmental outcomes (Coakley, 2011; Kay & Bradbury, 2009). Accordingly, research needs to go beyond sport evangelists' claims – which are mainly based on personal testimonials. Further, sport evangelists

have dominated policy and programming over the past century, which has led to common sense notions of the perceived developmental outcomes (Kay & Bradbury, 2009). Providing insight into youth development through sport, however, comes with methodological challenges. Coakley (2011) highlighted the difficulties in proving increased social capital through sport programming because of the hardships that come with critically separating other development sources as compared to sport programming. Youth go through increased change during these years and are influenced by other social forces and structures that can alter social capital. Aside from these difficulties, sociological implications need further theorization beyond what has dominated youth sport research thus far: individual skill development (Coalter, 2007).

Personal Character Development: Individualism and Neo-liberal Tendencies

Most of the literature written about youth development through sport does not employ a sociological perspective (Cronin, 2011); instead, the “relationship between sport participation and a host of personal attributes” (Coakley, 2011, p. 315) is the focus of research. Positive youth development is the main component studied in such research, and is used to understand the extent of skills and assets youth gain for successful functioning within society. Benefits observed include improved health, motor skill development, physical literacy, and increased self-esteem. (Weiss & Wiese-Bjornstal, 2009). Positive youth development intends to further the participants’ productivity in society by advancing their personal skills and attributes (Petitpas, Cornelius & Van Raalte, 2008). Coakley (2011) viewed this approach to research as problematic because not only it subsumes neoliberal ideologies but it utilizes uncritical approaches that position these inherent values as the only and good ones. This shows how belief in sports’ inherent development of personal character is generally accepted by sport organizations to the point of “uncritical and one-dimensional view of ‘sport’” (Coalter, 2010, p. 17). The notion of minimal

reflexivity towards the benefits of the aforementioned programs leads to potential negative impacts in sport for development; for example, the ability to build relationships with non-sport organizations could be jeopardized because of the nominal perceived benefit there is to work with uncritical programs (Coalter, 2010). Considering this, resources, knowledge, and collaboration are seen as limited, which results in programming that does not use best practices and is unable to move towards positive community change (Coakely, 2011).

Neoliberal ideologies that are used to encourage character building also promote increased productivity through individuality; this is highlighted by the positive narratives sport has on development of all socioeconomic communities. For instance, programs that are based in middle and upper class populations intend to develop skills conducive to upwards mobility in society; conversely, sport-based initiatives operating in lower socioeconomic communities aim to control and discipline participants (Coakley, 2002). Yet there are similarities between the outcomes of the two groups: they both are driven by seemingly increased productivity in society through individuality. Thus, development is achieved through the individual's ability to internalize and use the life-skills learned – it is only once this occurs that “positive qualities, decisions, and choices of individuals benefit the communities in which they live” (Coakley, 2011, p. 309). The following section will further discuss the shift away from individual character development in youth sport programming towards sociological perspectives that focus on youth organizing and critical youth empowerment outcomes.

A Shift towards Sociocultural Perspectives – Critical Youth Empowerment

Although psychosocial research on youth development is valuable and needed, an interdisciplinary approach that includes sociocultural implications requires more attention (Christens & Dolan, 2011). For example, research on youth sport-for-development programs

could include the impact they have on “larger issues of social and structural change at the neighbourhood and community levels...[that] involves studies of how young people learn about factors that negatively affect their lives” (Coakley, 2011, p. 316). This emphasis would provide insight into best practices for decision-making about collective change. Youth sport research has not gone beyond personal attributes in the past, but youth organizing and empowerment in other fields has a longer history that can be adapted. A recent example is work by Christens and Dolan (2011), who discussed the benefit of merging separate features of youth organizing into one interdisciplinary approach: “(1) youth leadership development, (2) community development, and (3) social change” (p. 541). The authors argued that incorporating more sociocultural aspects, such as community development and social change, would allow for more effective developmental impact. Similarly, Jennings et al. (2006) developed a framework towards critical youth empowerment. They, along with Christens and Dolan (2011), suggest that programs conducive to individual development of self-efficacy, leadership, social bonding, and interpersonal relations are important, but program outcomes cannot stop there.

An interdisciplinary framework has the potential to inform common practices and research in youth sport programming (e.g., neoliberal policies, positive youth development research, and sport evangelist claims); however, researchers need to be cautious when evaluating the capacity of sport to contribute to the critical youth empowerment process (Spaij, 2009). There is a need for “theoretically informed explanations of the ways that sports and sport participation can be organized and combined with other activities for the purpose of empowering young people” (Coakley, 2011, p. 318). Therefore, this study will frame youth recreation and sport-based programming through a critical youth empowerment lens (Checkoway & Gutiérrez, 2006; Christens & Dolan, 2011; Jennings et al., 2006, Perkins et al., 2007).

Community Development and Indigenous People

Western-based development agencies have historically imposed their ideologies without much consideration of local communities (Nickson, Dunstan, Esperanza & Barker, 2011). These traditional paternalist attitudes towards “development” have shifted towards a more “enabling by stepping back” attitude (Mathie & Cunningham, 2011). To favor this “asset-based” type of community development, new sets of practices and principles should be at the forefront of programming “partnerships” that recognize local leaders and associations as the driving forces. One of the first principles is based on knowing and understanding local leadership in order to transfer a greater control over affairs; for example, Indigenous leaders should have roles in all stages of development work (e.g., grassroots level implementation, program development, and policy-making processes) (Burchill et al., 2006). Local leadership core participation should therefore lead organizations to better adapt to Indigenous epistemology (Nickson et al., 2011). In fact, most development practices are still performed by organizations and practitioners that are unaware of historical exploitation and oppression, resulting in colonialist practices with Indigenous communities (Burchill et al., 2006). Understanding local culture and assets is therefore essential to help non-Indigenous people to situate their own culture, and also learn about Indigenous history and culture, which would in return, help community development practitioners recognize and reposition their practices and convictions within the historical context of a dominant knowledge source (i.e., distance themselves from taken for granted notions of developed and underdeveloped) (Lucashenko & Kilroy, 2005; Briggs & Sharpe, 2004). Recent work actually suggested new approaches that shift away from imperialist notions of development and incorporates an Indigenous knowledge system (Green & Baldry, 2008). Such research suggests Indigenous development models should incorporate more collaboration, partnership,

and commitment grounded in mutual respect and understanding (Sherwood, 1999). External agencies are seen as required to engage in communities with new value systems reflected in actions like conducting “skills and knowledge audits of community members and stakeholders” but also showing respect and authentic belief in local people at the same time as favoring cultural revitalization, tradition, well-being and youth participation (Burchill et al., 2006, p. 52).

More specifically, Indigenous leaders can foster children’s cultural needs by guiding education through history, tradition, and identity what is necessary to “envisage a positive future” (Burchill et al., 2006, p. 53); however, this is a difficult task because of the complexity of social issues, economic inequality, and health challenges existing in Aboriginal communities (Burchill et al., 2006; Canadian Human Rights Commission, 2013). For these reasons, youth are seen as playing an important role in community mobilization and be included in identifying problems, brainstorming solutions, and developing plans to implement programs for necessary change – also resulting in youth empowerment and leadership (Burchill et al., 2006; Moniz, 2010). Building capacity for youth that entails creativity, vision, and motivation through youth empowerment programs could “create opportunities for intergenerational skill transfer; develop self-determination; and foster hope” (Burchill et al., 2006, p. 53).

Conclusion

The purpose of this section is to highlight literature on youth development programs that use sport, recreation, and leadership components. Specifically, I contextualized historical recreational opportunities for youth in “developed” countries, which led to programmatic outcomes centered on social capital and personal character development. This is followed by a discussion on the contentious historical and current trends in empowerment theorization and programmatic implementation. I also discussed how the literature necessitates increased

attention on sociological perspectives of development through sport, recreation, and leadership that lends to the critical youth empowerment's use in exploring Aboriginal youths' experiences in the YLP.

Theoretical Framework

Postcolonial and Indigenous Theories

Postcolonialism refers to “ways of criticizing the material and discursive legacies of colonialism” (McEwan, 2001, p. 94). Postcolonial frameworks problematize Western-based worldviews with the intention of deconstructing perceived “truths, beliefs, values, and norms that are presented as normal and natural” (Chilisa, 2012, pp. 48-49). Furthermore, postcolonial theory engages with notions of power; for example, the binaries that exist to hold power relations between the colonizer/colonized are recognized (Darnell & Hayhurst, 2012). In this sense, understandings of how Western academic discourses are used to alienate Indigenous knowledge, which in turn marginalizes the voices of the colonized systems, can be exposed (Chilisa, 2012).

Specific to development work, dominant discourses are also used to “modernize” “less developed” communities. Western-based development agencies do not consider the knowledge, values, and practices of the global South (McEwan, 2001). In fact, Western agencies characterize the North as exemplifying the only means to become modern because it is advanced, whereas the global South is “primitive and degenerate” (McEwan, 2001). Accordingly, postcolonial theories challenge the colonial discourses embedded in development agencies and their reconceptualization of Western dominant knowledge in so-called “developing” communities. Development work has failed to provide space for Others to share local knowledge and expertise beyond technical means, partially because it may discredit Western academics' sources of truth and knowledge and the power that comes with them (Briggs & Sharpe, 2004; Smith, 2000).

Conversely, Western academics who deploy a postcolonial framework may indeed perpetuate existing binaries that reinforce control over Indigenous peoples and the colonized; concepts of “family, spirituality, humility, and sovereignty” (Chilisa, 2012, p. 49) may be missed through a postcolonial research framework. Furthermore, Tuck (2009) discussed the tendency in postcolonial research to focus on the historical exploitation that is used to explain current sociopolitical issues. Missing then is the wisdom of the local Indigenous voices of today; a desire-based research framework, therefore, should be employed because desire “is about longing for a present that is enriched by both the past and the future” (Tuck, 2009, p. 417). Chilisa (2012) adopted the desire-based research to coin *postcolonial indigenous theory*, which gives “researchers the tools to theorize indigenous research, indigenous research paradigms, and culturally integrative research approaches” (p. 50). Through the postcolonial indigenous framework, Chilisa (2012) necessitated decolonization and indigenization of dominant research paradigms; thus a variety of qualitative methodologies is critical, and research partnership is “inclusive of all knowledge systems and respectful of the researched” (p. 24). It is only when cultural partnerships that create space to allow for multiple cultures to work “collaboratively to acknowledge and interrogate the theories, the literature, the methodologies, and the embedded ethical and moral issues that decolonization and indigenization can become reality” (Chilisa, 2012, p. 24).

This work was therefore guided by the principles of postcolonial indigenous theory. To ensure this research was working towards postcolonial indigenous theory principles, I worked directly with the Elders of the Aboriginal Research Advisory Committee and the partner community to discuss the relevance of the CYE framework (Jennings, et al., 2006) that was used as my guiding tool for analysis.

Critical Youth Empowerment Framework

Critical social theories focus on the processes that promote action and social justice at the community level, and they have inspired and grounded the development of the Critical Youth Empowerment (CYE) framework (Jennings et al., 2006). The CYE framework highlights these processes and contextualizes how youth are engaged in positive social change and community mobilization. Accordingly, empowerment can be defined as, “individuals, families, organisations and communities gaining control and mastery, within the social, economic, and political contexts of their lives, in order to improve equity and quality of life” (Jennings et al., 2006, p. 32).

Understanding youth empowerment from a collective perspective requires incorporating socio-cultural aspects, such as community development, mobilization, engagement, and social change. The CYE framework therefore encompasses “processes and contexts through which youth engage in actions that create change in organizational, institutional, and societal policies, structure, values, norms, and images” (p. 40). Jennings et al., (2006) present six key dimensions of the CYE framework, which could be discussed and evaluated within the PLAY program:

- 1) A *welcoming and safe environment* is described as allowing space for the youth to feel safe, to be able to take risks, and to have a support system from the family-like atmosphere. Further, youth should feel a sense of ownership, but they are supported through both successes and failures that do not harm their self-esteem or confidence, but provide an opportunity for growth no matter the outcome.
- 2) *Meaningful participation and engagement* refers to programmatic activities that build youth leadership through experiencing roles and responsibilities that excite them and can lead to intrinsic motivation.

- 3) *Equitable power-sharing between youth and adults* is also encouraged. In this sense, “youth-determined and youth-directed activities are essential” (p. 45), and the adult leaders involve youth in decision making by providing guidance without domination.
- 4) If the aforementioned is achieved, *engagement in critical reflection on interpersonal and socio-political processes* can ensue. This involves a critical awareness of the structures, practices, and processes that are needed to enhance community life. Purdey, Adhikari, Robinson, and Cox (1994) argued that empowerment is a reflexive act; thus, youth programming needs to give space for reflection on how activities within the community can be translated in socio-political processes.
- 5) The notion of *participating in socio-political processes in order to effect change* goes beyond youth becoming competent citizens; it places value on youth having the skills to influence their environmental structures and processes.
- 6) Lastly, *CYE integrates individual and community-level empowerment*. Hence, youth need to have civic service opportunities that encourage “stronger ties to the community, a greater understanding of other people’s needs, and a commitment to making that community a better place” (p. 50).

From this framework, if the six components of the CYE framework are addressed through a program experience, “development” transcends personal character development and “critical reflection, reflective action, and social change at individual and collective levels are more likely to occur” (Jennings et al., 2006, p. 50). Because RTP’s PLAY intends to empower youth through their program, this framework is applied, followed by a discussion.

Epistemology

Epistemology refers to understanding the “nature of knowledge and truth” (Chilisa, 2012, p. 21). I comprehend sources of knowledge and how individuals come to understand knowledge through a constructionist lens. Crotty (1998) defined constructionism as the “view that all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices” (p. 42). Thus, we construct knowledge through our world of meaningful symbols – which is inevitably filtered through what our culture deems significant (Crotty, 1998). Moreover, Crotty (1998) goes on to state that constructionism is “misleading if it is not set in a genuinely historical and social perspective” (p. 54). Thus, it was necessary to situate my own history and socially constructed world in relation to Whitefish River First Nation (WRFN); this allowed space to better learn how the WRFN community members come to construct their worldview. In other words, my guided realization that self-reflection on my worldview was important to learn how I understand epistemology. My intention through this process was to avoid perceived understandings of local knowledge production, when in practice I was writing community stories through my constructed reality. By openly communicating with Elders, my host family while living in WRFN, the youth, and other community members, I tried to incorporate local understandings of knowledge production and, by extension, how these notions of production influenced my own actions and thought processes in the research project.

The Program for Aboriginal Youth and Personal Experience of the Researcher

As mentioned above, within a Canadian context, Aboriginal youth in Canada constitute more than half the total Aboriginal population (Statistics Canada, 2006). This expanding youth population confronts a number of serious challenges such as poor education, high unemployment, health inequalities, and psychosocial problems, which contribute to disproportionately high levels of youth suicide (Kirmayer et al., 2007). As a result, recreation-

based programming has been identified as a method to create new experiences of critical youth empowerment. In 2010, Right To Play (RTP), a sport-for-development organization, piloted the Promoting Life-Skills for Aboriginal Youth (PLAY) program, partnering with two participating communities. Today, over 60 communities have integrated the PLAY program for their youth. The PLAY program uses sport, recreation, and leadership activities to promote and enhance youth and community development (Right To Play, 2012). Specifically, the PLAY program has five components: Summer Sun Program, Hockey for Development program, Lacrosse for Development Program, After-school Program, and the Youth Leadership Program (YLP) (PLAY Program Overview, 2012). My research will focus on the YLP, which aims to “enhance youth leadership skills, increase their sense of self-value, and improve their abilities to set goals and create lasting change” (Right To Play, 2012, p. 2). To reach the YLP goals, Right To Play has incorporated three different workshops for the youth: Inclusive Leadership in First Nations, Leadership in Sport and Play, and Promoting Lasting Change (Youth Leadership Overview, 2012). The YLP also focuses on identifying social issues within the community; accordingly, the youth plan events for community members with the hopes of enhancing awareness of social issues, which in turn empowers the youth to be part of possible change (Youth Leadership Overview, 2012).

In early 2012, I was fortunate to receive an internship with RTP’s PLAY program, during which I spent three months in Wapekeka, a fly-in community of around 400 inhabitants in northern Ontario. I worked directly with the community mentor (RTP’s local staff member who implements and delivers programming) with the overall goal of running sustainable programming for the community. During my three months in Wapekeka, we were able to start a successful after-school program, run a hockey-for-development program with a partnering

community, and lay the foundation for a Youth Leadership Program. My experience with RTP gave me a greater understanding of the organization as a whole and of the specifics of the PLAY program itself. Further, because I was able to spend an extended period in Wapekeka, I learnt about the culture and about everyday life in the community while building strong relationships with its members.

Some of my other experiences include 10 years of design, implementation, and delivery of programming for children and youth in sport, recreation, leadership, and play-based initiatives. For example, I spent three months in Thailand on a service learning, cross-cultural experience setting up and implementing play programming with the organization Play Around the World; I returned to Cambodia the following summer as student leader. I have also worked more locally, volunteering with Big Brothers and Big Sisters Hockey Education Reach-Out Society (HEROS) for the past six years.

Methodology

Community-based Participatory Research (CBPR) is a methodology that seeks to balance research power by partnering with community members in all aspects of the research process (Israel, Schulz, Parker, & Becker, 1998); thus the intrinsically linked goals of CBPR are shared power, trust, and ownership (Castleden, Garvin, and Huu-ay-aht First Nation, 2008).

Accordingly, it is imperative that researchers recognize “power differentials while working towards establishing a power balance” (Castleden et al., 2008, p. 1395) so positive relationships are built where trust can then be established. Trust is established when researchers are open and transparent about all intentions (Minkler & Wallerstein, 2008). Furthermore, trust is built when the researcher is involved with community activities, listens to community concerns, and works towards action plans in partnership with the community (Castleden et al., 2008). Ownership by

all partners is favoured if this reciprocal relationship is established with mutuality in the decision-making process (Castleden et al., 2008).

However, balanced power, building trust, and ownership are not enough – Indigenous worldviews, local knowledge, and expertise need to inform the CBPR process so “meaningful research can result... [through] the generation of collective knowledge on community issues” (Castleden et al., 2008, p. 1395). Hence, a Western-based epistemology (i.e., knowledge is individually owned) may hinder the process – a relational epistemology may be better situated in CBPR because the knowledge produced can be culturally relevant and aligned with local Aboriginal worldviews (Castleden et al., 2008; Jacquez, Vaughn, & Wagner, 2013; Wilson, 2008). Although CBPR was developed through Western institutions, it can be used effectively as a collaboration methodology.

Thus far I have discussed CBPR as a methodology for research with Aboriginal populations; next I will frame CBPR’s relevance with youth. Although there is an abundance of academic literature that focuses on youth, a limited number of studies include youth in all aspects of the research process (Langhout & Thomas, 2010). Furthermore, youth are best to share their unique experiences, whereas top-down studies may miss the opportunity to include their voices (Jacquez et al., 2013). In this sense, CBPR has potential to be “an empowering process through which participants can increase control over their lives” (Minkler & Wallerstein, 2008, p. 9); however, this does come with challenges such as an increase in time investment, more effort, and less ability to control the research (Jacquez et al., 2013). Although there are challenges, the potential benefits outweigh them. The subsequent section highlights the proposed five steps phases of CBPR that were incorporated in the research design with the intention of empowering youth in all aspects of research.

First, CBPR calls for the establishment of procedures to allow youth to be actively involved with decision-making processes (Jacquez et al., 2013). For the second and third steps, CBPR involves youth outlining goals and research questions, and how the research should be conducted. For example, in this research when a photovoice activity was proposed, it was set up as a discussion and not a mandatory component of the YLP. Furthermore, a brainstorming session was used collectively to develop the photovoice question. In this session, we also defined guidelines to the photovoice activity and how the youth would like to see it unfold. Considerations included timeframes to take pictures, guidelines for the accompanying descriptions, and what the youth would like to see done with their photos. In this sense, I also took into consideration restrictions due to lack of transportation and other factors; thus I encouraged the youth to ask for help if they wanted to photograph other areas that were not readily accessible.

The fourth CBPR step intends for the youth to be involved with the analysis and interpretation of the data, and the final step incorporates youth in the dissemination of their findings (Jacquez et al., 2013). These steps were incorporated into the photovoice activity as well. The participants decided to hold a community event that provided space for the youth to discuss and share their pictures and the descriptions. The framed pictures were placed throughout the youth center for the event, and a meal was provided for those in attendance (e.g., the Chief, health officials, parents, friends, and other family members). After the meal, each youth had the chance to describe his or her photograph and its significance. Since the community event, a booklet of the youths' pictures, descriptions, and photographs of the community event was created for further use at community events and RTP training and workshops.

Overall, the chances of youth creating change in their behaviour and increasing a sense of

community empowerment can result from CBPR that incorporates the aforementioned process (Powers & Tiffany, 2006). Further, the research results may be more valid and meaningful through the contextualized knowledge that is situated from the youths' perspective (Langsted, 1994). Although this was overall a successful research design to promote community-based research, there are associated challenges in a truly community-based project.

First and foremost, this research was not proposed or discussed by community members at the onset. My research proposal was written and approved by the Aboriginal Research Advisory Council and thesis defense committee before WRFN was identified as the partnering community. Once this relationship was determined, measures were taken to ensure this was for the benefit of the community and youth in the way they saw fit; nevertheless, true community-based research would have included WRFN from the proposal onwards.

Furthermore, as a researcher, I have certain objectives and interests that may not fully align with the community's goals. My interests are in community development and youth empowerment through sport-for-development programs; thus I am, I would argue, both consciously and unconsciously going to guide discussion towards questions that are contributing to these fields, specifically in the brainstorming session that was used as a decision-making tool. For example, if the youth were determined to photograph how community infrastructure connects to youth interactions in a sporting context, I would either have to change my research project to fit the youths' decision, or take away their decision-making power to fit my research objectives – this is not true community-based research. In this case, I was up front that I was interested in the youths' interactions at the community level, which I believe steered the youth and perhaps the overall brainstorming session to identify questions that favoured my existing research interests.

Ethical considerations

Using a postcolonial indigenous lens, the researcher moves away from deficit or damage-centered studies and rather sees more positive trends: building, restoring hopes, and trusting the community capabilities in resolving challenges (Chilisa, 2012). This leads to recognition of the fact that participants play a crucial role in the research design. Ethical considerations for this work follow a relational axiology broken down into four principles: (1) *relational accountability* signifies that all aspects of the research process are relational, thus the researcher is accountable to all; (2) *respectful representation* is needed so the voices and knowledge systems of Others are respected and represented in all aspects of the research process; (3) *reciprocal appropriation* refers to a mutual partnership that is communicated so both researchers and communities involved benefit; and (4) *rights and regulations during the research process* are developed to ensure ethical research is conducted (Louis, 2007). Protocols are needed on the last of these concepts, so the ownership of the research process and the ownership of knowledge incurred are formalized (Louis, 2007).

Methods

This research used qualitative methods and can be described as a program inquiry through community-based youth-centered research (Jennings et al., 2006). This approach intended to integrate the participants in the research design to the fullest degree possible. The main instruments used for data collection are photovoice, semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and autoethnography. These methods were undertaken during my 36-day field placement, which included a community visit in April 2013, attending the RTP youth symposium to build a relationship with the Community Mentor and the youth representing WRFN in April 2013, and in-field data collection in May 2013.

Photovoice

Photovoice has been recognized as a culturally appropriate method for research with Aboriginal communities (Moffitt & Vollman, 2004). The basis of photovoice is empowering community members by becoming actively involved in the data collection process and the discussions on positive community change (Moffitt & Vollman, 2004). Thus, participants use cameras to capture relevant images of everyday life, which are followed by discussions about each picture's context, resulting in others gaining perspective on community life (Wang & Burris, 1996). Photography can provide space for youth to think critically about community issues that may be hard to express through discussion (Wang, 2006). As a result, participants are actively involved with the research process, which empowers them as valued members of the research team. Because youth are actively involved in the decision-making process about issues that affect their community, participants are more likely to harness this power – leading to positive community change (Wang, 2006). Photovoice can therefore contribute to social change by “reflecting on select community issues; encouraging group dialogue on these issues; and influencing policy-makers” (Castleden et al., 2008).

The question that was determined after a brainstorming session with the YLP participants: What does the Youth Leadership Program mean to you?

As noted in the methodology section, once the youth determined the question, we collectively set guidelines for the overall photovoice activity. This included:

- One week from the brainstorming session, the youth would have up to three pictures with a description and/or answer to the photovoice question for at least one photograph.
- Each youth had their own cameras, so none was supplied.

- The photovoice activity was not limited to photography, but included drawing, painting, or any other arts-based project.
- It was made clear that I was available (each youth knew where I lived and had my phone number) if they wanted to photograph outside of walking distance. Notably, four youth reached out for assistance in this regard.
- We scheduled a circle chat for the following week after the brainstorming session to share and discuss the youths' pictures and descriptions.
 - 14 youth were in attendance for the circle chat, which was recorded and transcribed with the youths' approval.
 - If the youth were inclined, they passed around their picture and then discussed its significance. After this was completed, I facilitated a general discussion highlighting some of themes I thought relevant to their pictures and descriptions and also for my research topic.
- The following week after the circle chat was the community photovoice event.
 - I had all the pictures printed and framed in 6x8 inch frames. One of the participants drew a picture that was also framed. All descriptions were also printed and attached to the images.
 - The night of the community event, the youth placed their pictures around the room and were encouraged to chat with community members during the meal about their pictures.
 - A formal ceremony concluded the night and gave all youth who felt comfortable to do so the opportunity to present their picture to community members.
 - Community members in attendance included the Chief, parents, health officials, grandparents, Elders, and other family members.

- A budget was in place to cater the meal (the youth decided I should cook), print and frame all the pictures, and purchase a gift for the community youth center for participating in the event.

Overall, the photovoice activity proved to be a rich tool to gather data. First, it was a simple task the youth enjoyed participating in. Second, the premise of the activities allowed a self-reflection over a longer period that I believe fostered a depth in critical thinking and articulation when we discussed their experiences through the different activities (written descriptions, circle chat, community event, and associated conversations). Although this thesis cannot portray the specific intricacies of the photovoice processes I documented during my data collection, I intend to publish future work that examines those aspects.

Semi-structured Interviews

Another important method that informs this research is the in-depth, semi-structured interview. For me as a researcher, this type of conversational mode is a real privilege and it is humbling. Through in-depth interviews, people share their life stories and points of view. Receiving these narratives requires first the recognition of the gift of people accepting to provide the opportunity for sharing. “In-depth,” “semi-structured,” and “open-ended” are all terms used to express similar practices that are located “somewhere between the fixed questions and forced response of surveys and the open-ended and exploratory unstructured interviews with no fixed interview schedule... They aim to explore the complexity and in-process nature of meanings and interpretations that cannot be examined using positivists methodologies” (Liamputtong and Ezzy, 2006, p. 56).

Furthermore, my intention was to incorporate Chilisa’s (2012) “appreciative inquiry” model. Chilisa (2012) discussed how interviews are, at times, criticized for being “problem

focused, aiming at discovering communities' resource constraints, deficiencies, and unmet needs" (p. 243), whereas appreciative inquiry transforms the interview to an appreciation-focused model. Thus I tried to learn "the best moments in the history of a community...participants tell stories of exceptional accomplishments and discuss the aspects of their history that they most value and want to enhance" (Chilisa, 2012, p. 244).

Eleven interviews were conducted through the one-month period with RTP mentors, YLP participants, the Chief, parents of YLP participants, Elders, and health officials. These conversations were looking for appreciations of the program with a special interest on the community impacts and were guided more specifically by the CYE dimensions of the framework.

Participant Observation

Participant observation was another important method for this research. I will define participation and observation separately to contextualize my approach to participant observation. Zahle (2012) noted participation research aims to "seek out individuals in their own surroundings and to take part in their ways of life" (p. 54). In this sense, participation was achieved through my various interactions in WRFN; for example, I participated in community and family events (e.g., fishing, fish fry, traditional ceremonies, sports, family gatherings, and birthday parties). I was provided these opportunities through the host family I lived with and their graciousness to "treat me like family," as my host parents would say, and through the outreach from many community members. In this respect, I had access to community members' everyday practices and was able to participate in many facets of community life. In terms of the YLP, I participated in all activities while in WRFN. These activities included an all-night sport-a-thon with youth in the community; a youth-led Spring Market that included a car wash, flea market, and barbeque

for community members; traditional components of the YLP such as a sweat ceremony, a sharing circle, and a drumming feast; numerous sporting activities; and weekly youth programming, which I helped facilitate because of my previous YLP experiences. Thus, I was treated as another YLP facilitator, which fostered full participation in the program (Zahle, 2012).

Because of this access, I was able to observe rich interactions between community members and their environment. Specifically, observation can be defined as when a participant “takes notice of the individuals she studies as they act and interact with each other and their surroundings” (Zahle, 2012, p. 54). I kept field notes to help conceptualize my observations with the overall intent to better understand the meanings community members ascribed to certain events or situations (Iacono, Brown, & Holtham, 2009). These observations and reflections fostered new questions in my interviews as well as furthered conversations with community members so I could continually learn about local knowledge and practices.

Autoethnography

The more I read about critical studies of sport for development, the more reflective I became of the roles I played through the years, as a sport-for-development practitioner. These reflections led me to develop the second article based on my own critical self-reflective accounts of these experiences. This approach has been referred to as autoethnography, which uses principles of ethnography and autobiography.

Postmodernist thought introduced a crisis of confidence towards social sciences’ epistemological limitations, as facts, truths, or grand narratives were no longer defensible. Social sciences would be shifting towards self-conscious, value-centered knowledge production as opposed to an illusory, value-free production (Bochner, 1994). “Consequently, autoethnography is one of the approaches that acknowledges and accommodates subjectivity,

emotionality, and the researcher's influence on research, rather than hiding from these matters or assuming they don't exist" (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2010, p. 2). "Autoethnography can help explore the links between power, self, culture, and emotion in ways that help us understand the world in different ways" (Forde, 2013, p. 5). Within a critical self-reflexive discourse articulating experiences intersecting an always-migratory identity (Spry, 2001), the autoethnographer retroactively selects meaningful life episodes that are assembled and complemented with interviews, observations, field notes, and other documentary evidence. In addition to reflecting past experiences, these self-reflective descriptions of interpersonal accounts must be grounded in theoretical and methodological frameworks as well as demonstrate a strong knowledge of the existing literature (Ellis et al., 2010). In this sense, autoethnography intends to combine biography with ethnography.

Autoethnography is criticized as not being rigorous enough, too aesthetic, and emotional, and the resulting autoethnographic accounts are dismissed by critics as being narcissistic and inadequate to fulfill scientific scholarly obligations (Ellis et al., 2010). This approach is perceived as an attempt to reach art and science, aesthetics and rigor, analytical mind and emotions. "The question[s] most important to autoethnographers are: who reads our work, how are they affected by it, and how does it keep a conversation going?" (Ellis et al., 2010). Autoethnography should engage with politics and encourage reflections on social justice rather than being obsessed with a discourse on accuracy and the boundaries of scientific research.

Analysis

Thematic analysis is defined as a "method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). I conducted a thematic analysis;

however, I did not specifically follow the six phases Braun & Clark (2006) proposed. I will briefly explain the steps I used to thematically analyze my data.

Thematic Analysis

Braun and Clarke's (2006) proposed first phase was to become familiar with the data. Specifically, they suggest the data should be read repeatedly in an active way. The purpose of this activity is to start identifying possible codes and meanings (Braun & Clarke, 2006). To this end, I actively read about the six phases for Critical Youth Empowerment (CYE) framework developed by Jennings et al. (2006) so these specific themes would be easily highlighted in the data set. Thus when I transcribed the data, which was an important reflection tool, I was already thinking in terms of the CYE framework (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Once the aforementioned was completed, the second phase of generating preliminary codes began. The process of coding allowed me to "organize data into meaningful groups" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 88). This section was framed with the already existing phases of the CYE framework. I continually read through transcribed material, field notes, and descriptions of the photos to code the data in relation to the CYE framework.

Once coding was completed, I searched for patterns within each CYE framework phase; this was done by sorting the codes into their prospective themes. Once I went through all the data and connected the code with its respective CYE theme, I reviewed the material systematically to see if it conceptually aligned with the youths' experiences in the YLP program (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Overall, I went through all themes outlined by the CYE framework with the codes in place to best situate local understandings. Furthermore, once I finished my initial analysis, I had further conversations with WRFN's Community Mentor and an Elder about my proposed analysis and asked for their feedback on the data set. Accordingly, we discussed if my initial

thematic analysis correlated with the community's perspectives, which fostered a rich discussion and more analysis of the CYE framework's relevance and future adaptations for the community.

However, my second manuscript was conceptualized differently. I started documenting my reflections while in WRFN, which led me to re-read past journal entries from my experiences as a practitioner in sport for development. My documented experiences and further critical reflection quickly exposed themes that I thought deserved further articulation and discussion in my thesis. Thus, I continued having conversations on my past and present thoughts and journal entries with community members and scholars while concurrently reading about the experiences in development work of other practitioners turned academics. This overall process framed the emerging themes in my autoethnography.

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Chapter 2:**Experiences of Critical Youth Empowerment in Whitefish River First Nation****Summary**

Most research on youth development through sport employs individualistic approaches that look at how structured programs enable to increase participation in sport, play, and physical activity and contribute at the same time in developing a host of personal “life-skills” and assets preparing successful and productive future citizens. This paper is a contribution to encouraging more sociological approaches using critical social theory, to understand how such value-based sport programs contribute to advance collective empowerment that could lead to socio-political change. This study applies the Critical Youth Empowerment framework (Jennings et al. 2006) developed to analyse community engagement towards socio-political change, and explores the experiences of the Youth Leadership Program from the sport-for-development organization Right To Play, in Whitefish River First Nation, Ontario. A set of photovoice activities, participant observation, and in-depth semi-structured interviews are here exposed to provide a rich account of Aboriginal youth experiences and community mobilisation. The resulting data exposed necessary future adaptations to the Critical Youth Empowerment framework to align local epistemologies. Furthermore, exposed fragmentations of knowledge premise future adaptations to a more relational holistic approach.

Introduction

Youth recreation programs have a long trajectory of structures, purposes, and intentions that became recently appropriated within the rhetoric of “development” or more specifically of “sport for development” (Kidd, 2008; Coakley, 2011). From rehabilitation, prevention or control, youth recreation programs are now centred toward transmitting values, educating, raising awareness, and empowering to foster social change and community mobilisation. A dense and varied literature and analysis have followed these trends, where psychosocial approaches have dominated the field of youth development (Cronin, 2011). More recent research calls for the need to develop and theorise these trends from a more sociological perspective (Coakley, 2011). Critical social theory inclined tools have been used to assess sociopolitical change in youth empowerment based programs (Jennings, Parra-Medina, Hilfinger Messias, & McLoughlin, 2006); however a paucity of sport-for-development research informs local empowerment processes. Based on previous models from various disciplinary backgrounds, the applied framework looks at youth empowerment through a broadest sense, examining not only isolated individuals but identifying collective processes reflected through family and communities. Furthermore, this tool intends to incorporate both economic and political spheres. Jennings, et al., (2006) have therefore ascribed six necessary dimensions that are presented as being conducive of Critical Youth Empowerment (CYE), which are seen as favouring sociopolitical change.

This paper applies the CYE framework through the analysis of a Youth Leadership Program (YLP), a component of the Promoting Life-skills in Aboriginal Youth program designed and implemented by the international organisation Right To Play, in partnership with over 60 First Nation communities of Ontario. This study examines the experiences of

Anishnawbe youth from Whitefish River First Nation, participating in the program for the last three years. The PLAY Youth Leadership Program “builds skills and attitudes for youth to be catalysts of change among their peers and in their communities; (it) inspires and motivates youth to take leadership roles within their community to address pressing community concerns” (PLAY program overview, 2014). Being a catalyst for promoting “lasting change”, the CYE framework seemed like a good model to analyze its processes at work.

Based on one-month participant observation, photovoice activities, and semi-structured interviews, this analysis documents the youth experiences and assesses whether the program provides opportunities for fostering youth empowerment. In addition to evaluating youth empowerment experiences, this paper highlights some issues with the CYE framework when applying it to Aboriginal communities. More than sociopolitical processes, the findings suggest that “culture” and “local knowledge” need to be central to CYE for Aboriginal communities.

Review of literature

The review of literature will broadly discuss empowerment theorization and the debate of its use as a tool for social change. Although there is evidence to support critical reflection as a means for empowerment, the concluding remarks discuss the contentious nature of empowerment practices. Empowerment is then linked to a call for more sociological perspectives in youth sport programming, as currently there is a focus on individual level empowerment (e.g., positive youth development). CYE framework is applied as a means to incorporate these sociological perspectives into sport-for-development programming. Lastly, community building in Aboriginal communities is discussed, where empowerment processes based on local knowledge is encouraged for community mobilization.

Empowerment

Empowerment as a concept, theory, and model has developed substantially over the past 40 years (Batliwawa, 2007; Whiteside, 2002) from an array of disciplines, such as health education, psychology, community organizing, and social work (Wallerstein, 2002).

Empowerment theorists – in initial stages – emphasized both psychological and sociopolitical aspects, but in practice individualistic characteristics were stressed and commonplace (Breton, 1989; Carr, 2003; Whiteside et al., 2011). The debate over individualistic and collectivist approaches guided initial theorization (Carr, 2003; Riger, 1993; Wallerstein, 2002) in which primary empowerment programming did not fully engage with critical reflection of social power influences and had emphasis on individualistic perspectives (Speer & Hughey, 1995). At the center of these individual empowerment programs were notions of self-efficacy, motivation, autonomy, self-worth, and identity (Whiteside et al., 2011), whereas sociopolitical empowerment was concerned with systemic actualities of oppression.

Today, there is much of the same debate over empowerment processes, however, I would argue, like Wallerstein (2002), that an amalgamation of individual and sociopolitical empowerment concepts is an auspicious practice. Numerous empowerment pieces draw from Freire's (1970) seminal work on conscientization theory (i.e., critical reflection of oneself relative to the broader society and the resultant inequalities) as a precursor for social change (Carr, 2003). Academics, overall, have accentuated conscientization in empowerment development; specifically, an abundance of research has necessitated more critical reflections of inequalities from a bottom-up approach that situates the individual in a sociopolitical context (Carr, 2003; Jennings et al., 2006; Rowlands, 1995; Wallerstein, 2002). Therefore, empowerment theorists and practitioners "must involve undoing negative social constructions, so that the people affected come to see themselves as having the capacity and the right to act and have

influence” (Rowlands, 1995, pp. 102-103). Still, critics of empowerment, most notably through development and feminist studies, question the ostensible ease of power-shifts and the seemingly opaque alteration of empowerment use.

Empowerment programs and the practitioners who design, implement, and facilitate them run an inherent risk of subsuming their influence and power, which seemingly eschews self-awareness of resources that can lead to empowerment (Fredericks, 2008; Labonte, 1989; Whiteside, 2011). Practitioners may have the best of intentions, but “the person invoking the ‘empowerment’ may not even be aware of the potential for misunderstanding” (Rowlands, 1995, p. 101). Relatedly, Labonte (1989) discussed how organizations can work towards empowering processes, but notes that it is not through the services provided to the individuals but rather the processes of critical self-reflection and subsequent measures for social change that result in empowerment – a process that is frequently missed within organizations and government policy. Fredericks (2008) conducted research with Aboriginal women in Australia and examined empowerment processes from a health-policy lens; she summed up the former point persuasively:

this is why there can exist so many services for women and so many programmes that state they ‘aim’ to improve health status for women...yet, the health, social, and economic status for Aboriginal women and peoples remains much the same. Policy decisions and funding cannot just be based on health strategies which do not explore or address the systems and theories that keep us in ‘our place’. (Fredericks, 2008, p. 9)

Authoritative systems of best practices, theories, and knowledge production are inherent in this Western mentality of providing services to disenfranchised individuals. In the case of Aboriginal

peoples of Australia, those in decision-making roles for funding retain power of “interventions and quality of life, all the while altruistically professing to implement humanitarian, up-to-date, best practice policy” (Fredericks, 2008, p. 9). In this sense, Payne (2008) and Pease (2002) believe practitioners cannot avoid the inevitable power that comes with their roles. This can potentially idealize local knowledge that comes from ‘true’ empowerment programs all the while perpetuating power dynamics by Western organizations’ naïve perspectives of local community members’ potential power (Kesby, 2005; Pease 2002; Whiteside et al., 2011). We are then left with empowerment that is concomitantly appropriated from the dominant culture (Fredericks, 2008; Whiteside et al., 2011). Necessitating local knowledge in sport-for-development programs that intend to use empowerment theories will be discussed later in the text; however, the proposed use of critical youth empowerment that posits sociological perspectives will be discussed first.

A Shift Towards Socio-cultural Perspectives – Critical Youth Empowerment

Most of the literature written on youth development through sport does not employ a sociological perspective (Cronin, 2011); instead the “relationship between sport participation and a host of personal attributes” (Coakley, 2011, p. 315) is the focus of research. Positive youth development is the main component of such research, and is used to understand the extent of skills and assets youth gain for successful functioning within society; benefits include improved health, motor skill development, physical literacy, and increased self-esteem. (Weiss & Wiese-Bjornstal, 2009). Positive youth development intends to further the participants’ productivity in society by advancing their personal skills and attributes (Petitpas, Cornelius & Van Raalte, 2008). Coakley (2011) viewed this approach to research as problematic because not only it subsumes neoliberal ideologies but it utilizes uncritical approaches that position these inherent

values as the only and good ones. This shows how belief in sports' inherent development of personal character is generally accepted by sport organizations to the point of "uncritical and one-dimensional view of 'sport'" (Coalter, 2010, p. 17). The notion of minimal reflexivity towards the benefits of the aforementioned programs reinforces sport as "universal", a given, which in turn acts as a veil towards Indigenous sport, other types of physical activities, or play that can be more appropriate for cultural differences. This uncritical inner conviction that "sport" as performed in the Western world holds the "right" values and the skills everyone needs to "succeed" leads sport evangelists to implement programs that do not connect nor integrate local knowledge, ways, and views (Coalter, 2010).

Socio-cultural approaches to youth development through sport could contribute to decenter and deconstruct the "whitestream" of such activities, as well as re-center towards more appropriated and alternative ways of playing and moving. Such approaches should first assess the "whitestream" and look critically at sport and health orthodoxy. For example, research on youth sport-for-development programs could include the impact it has on "larger issues of social and structural change at the neighbourhood and community levels...[that] involves studies of how young people learn about factors that negatively affect their lives" (Coakley, 2011, p. 316). This emphasis would provide insight into best practice for guidance towards decision-making about collective change. Youth sport research has not gone beyond personal attributes in the past, but youth organizing and empowerment in other fields has a longer history that can be adapted. Recent examples are Christens and Dolan (2011) who discussed the benefit of merging separate features of youth organizing into one interdisciplinary approach: "(1) youth leadership development, (2) community development, and (3) social change" (p. 541). The authors argued that incorporating more socio-cultural aspects, such as community development and social

change, would allow for more effective developmental impact. Christens and Dolan (2011) and Jennings et al. (2006) both agreed that programs conducive to individual development, such as self-efficacy, leadership, social bonding, and interpersonal relations are important, but program outcomes cannot stop there.

Although an interdisciplinary framework should have the potential to inform common practices and research in youth sport programming (e.g., neoliberal policies, positive youth development research, and sport evangelist claims), researchers must remain cautious when evaluating the capacity of sport to contribute to the CYE process (Spaaij, 2009). There is a need for “theoretically informed explanations of the ways that sports and sport participation can be organized and combined with other activities for the purpose of empowering young people” (Coakley, 2011, p. 318).

Community Development and Indigenous People

Western-based development agencies have historically imposed their ideologies without much consideration of local communities (Nickson, Dunstan, Esperanza & Barker, 2011). These traditional paternalist attitudes towards “development” have shifted towards a more “enabling by stepping back” attitude (Mathie & Cunningham, 2011). To favor this “asset-based” type of community development, new sets of practices and principles should be at the forefront of programming “partnerships” that recognize local leaders and associations as the driving forces. One first principle is based on knowing and understanding local leadership in order to transfer a greater control over affairs; for example, Indigenous leaders should have roles in all stages of development work (e.g., grassroots level implementation, program development, and policy-making processes) (Burchill et al., 2006). Local leadership core participation should therefore lead organizations to better adapt to Indigenous epistemology (Nickson et al., 2011). In fact,

most development practices are still performed by organizations and practitioners that are unaware of historical exploitation and oppression, resulting in colonialist practices with Indigenous communities (Burchill et al., 2006). Understanding local culture and assets is therefore essential to help non-Indigenous people to situate their own culture, and also learn about Indigenous history and culture, which would in return, help community development practitioners recognize and reposition their practices and convictions within the historical context of a dominant knowledge source (i.e., distance themselves from taken for granted notions of developed and underdeveloped) (Lucashenko & Kilroy, 2005; Briggs & Sharpe, 2004). Recent work actually suggested new approaches that shift away from imperialist notions of development and incorporates an Indigenous knowledge system (Green & Baldry, 2008). Such research suggests Indigenous development models should incorporate more collaboration, partnership, and commitment grounded in mutual respect and understanding (Sherwood, 1999). External agencies are seen as required to engage in communities with new value systems reflected in actions like conducting “skills and knowledge audits of community members and stakeholders” but also showing respect and authentic belief in local people at the same time as favoring cultural revitalization, tradition, well-being and youth participation (Burchill et al., 2006, p. 52).

More specifically, Indigenous leaders can foster children’s cultural needs by guiding education through history, tradition, and identity; these factors are necessary to “envisage a positive future” (Burchill et al., 2006, p. 53). However, this is a difficult task because of the complexity of social issues, economic inequality, and health challenges existing in Aboriginal communities (Burchill et al., 2006; Canadian Human Rights Commission, 2013). For these reasons, youth are seen as playing an important role in community mobilization and be included in identifying problems, brainstorming solutions, and developing plans to implement programs

for necessary change – also resulting in youth empowerment and leadership (Burchill et al., 2006; Moniz, 2010). Building capacity for youth that entails creativity, vision, and motivation through youth empowerment programs would “create opportunities for intergenerational skill transfer; develop self-determination; and foster hope” (Burchill et al., 2006, p. 53).

Critical Youth Empowerment Framework

Critical social theories focus on the processes that promote action and social justice at the community level, and they have inspired and grounded the development of the CYE framework (Jennings et al., 2006). The CYE framework highlights these processes and contextualizes how youth are engaged in positive social change and community mobilization. Accordingly, empowerment can be defined as, “individuals, families, organisations and communities gaining control and mastery, within the social, economic, and political contexts of their lives, in order to improve equity and quality of life” (Jennings et al., 2006, p. 32). Understanding youth empowerment from a collective perspective requires incorporating socio-cultural aspects, such as community development, mobilization, engagement, and social change. The CYE framework therefore encompasses “processes and contexts through which youth engage in actions that create change in organizational, institutional, and societal policies, structure, values, norms, and images” (p. 40). The authors present six key dimensions of CYE, which could be discussed and evaluated within the PLAY program:

- 1) A *welcoming and safe environment* is described as allowing space for the youth to feel safe, to be able to take risks, and to have a support system from the family-like atmosphere. Further, youth should feel a sense of ownership, but they are supported through both successes and failures that do not harm their self-esteem or confidence, but provide an opportunity for growth no matter the outcome.

- 2) *Meaningful participation and engagement* refers to programmatic activities that build youth leadership through experiencing roles and responsibilities that excite them and can lead to intrinsic motivation.
- 3) *Equitable power-sharing between youth and adults* is also encouraged. In this sense, “youth-determined and youth-directed activities are essential” (p. 45), and the adult leaders involve youth in decision making by providing guidance without domination.
- 4) If the aforementioned is achieved, *engagement in critical reflection on interpersonal and socio-political processes* can ensue. This involves a critical awareness of the structures, practices, and processes that are needed to enhance community life. Purdey, Adhikari, Robinson, and Cox (1994) argued that empowerment is a reflexive act; thus, youth programming needs to give space for reflection on how activities within the community can be translated in socio-political processes.
- 5) The notion of *participating in socio-political processes in order to effect change* goes beyond youth becoming competent citizens; it places value on youth having the skills to influence their environmental structures and processes.
- 6) Lastly, *CYE integrates individual and community-level empowerment*. Hence, youth need to have civic service opportunities that encourage “stronger ties to the community, a greater understanding of other people’s needs, and a commitment to making that community a better place” (p. 50).

From this framework, if the six components of the CYE framework are addressed through a program experience, “development” transcends personal character development and “critical reflection, reflective action, and social change at individual and collective levels are

more likely to occur” (Jennings et al., 2006, p. 50). This framework is systematically applied in the results section, which is followed by a discussion.

Partnering Community and Program

Whitefish River First Nation

WRFN is located in Ontario’s northern region, off of the shores of Georgian Bay and the North Shore Channel with easy access to Manitoulin Island. WRFN has 1200 Ojibway ancestry members and has a population of 440 living on the First Nation with an overall landmass of 5600 hectares. On the First Nation you can find variety of lakes and an abundance of forest, which inhabits many forms of wildlife (e.g., deer, rabbit, beaver, bear, muskrat, mink, bobcat, and lynx). The community is guided by their dark blue Thunder Bird and white Head of the Water Spirits (Whitefish River First Nation, 2014).

Youth Leadership Program from the PLAY

RTP is one of the leading organizations in terms of number of children the organization reaches on a weekly basis and sport-for-development advocacy. There are over a million children in weekly RTP programming in over 20 different countries. It can be argued they are the most visible sport-for-development organization through their Athlete Ambassador program (i.e., professional and Olympic Athletes support RTP’s work through site visits, wearing RTP apparel, or monetary donations), successful advertisement campaigns with Roots and MasterCard, and other media presence through the Athlete Ambassadors and most notably RTP’s CEO and founder Johan Olav Koss (i.e., he has appeared on numerous talk-shows and had a very successful ESPN 30 for 30 documentary made of his and RTP’s story).

RTP’s Promoting Life-skills and Aboriginal Youth (PLAY) program was launched in 2010 as a sport-for-development program with the aim of building on the “strengths of

Aboriginal youth and their communities, while supporting the value of culture and identity” (Right To Play, 2010). Today there are over 60 First Nation communities involved with the PLAY program. The PLAY program has several components such as hockey, lacrosse, and soccer for development, but here, the authors are particularly interested in the YLP that has a specific interest in lasting change. One such community offering the YLP program is WRFN, which is in their third year of programming. This section intends to contextualize the specific relationship WRFN has with RTP, and how the YLP program is delivered to YLP participants in WRFN.

In terms of the agreed upon contract between RTP and WRFN, the Community Mentor (CM) is locally hired by the Chief and Council and are tasked with managing and facilitating the YLP. Furthermore, the Chief and Council agree to pay for half of the CM wage, while the other portion is RTP’s responsibility. With this contract, RTP only provides one-year support that needs to be renewed annually through an application process. In this sense, the YLP in WRFN is not guaranteed for more than a year at a time.

In regards to the specifics of delivering the YLP program, all hired CMs begin the year with training, which is facilitated by RTP staff. CMs travel to a collective location for a week to learn about the new modules RTP has developed for the upcoming programming year, and participate in sessions to increase the CM professional development; for example, sessions on facilitation, event management, reporting, finances, and monitoring and evaluation are scheduled. CMs then return to their respective communities and deliver the YLP and are encouraged by RTP to adapt the modules to fit the local needs of their community; however the CMs are compelled to follow RTP’s strict reporting and financial procedures, which are directly managed by the Program Officers. Program Officers are hired by RTP and work out of the

Toronto or Thunder Bay headquarters. The Program Officers are allocated a certain number of communities to oversee, thus it is their job to support and work with the CM to ensure a successful program. Furthermore, the program officers plan site visits throughout the year to help the program succeed.

There is a similar CM training at the halfway point in the YLP year, which is followed by RTP staff organizing a youth symposium towards the end of the year. At the youth symposium, two youth and their accompanying CM from all PLAY communities travel to a centralized location, meet with other YLP participants, and partake in activities, and planning sessions. These sessions range from sports, crafts, traditional activities, team building activities, to brainstorming and planning new events in the youths' respective communities.

Specific to WRFN, there are three nights scheduled for the YLP weekly. The groups are separated into two nights by age (9-13 and 14-18 years old) to ensure age appropriate programming is delivered. The third schedule night is open for all participants. A typical weekly program consists of the youth arriving after school and they start cooking supper with the help of CM. This initial time is also dedicated to hanging out around the youth center, talking, playing sports, or finishing homework. After supper, the CM facilitates that week's program, which is planned ahead of time. The YLP modules, which use an experiential learning approach, are typically the basis for planning the weekly program. The program usually involves team building activities, active games or sports, and activities to work towards completing the modules. RTP's model when facilitating activities is "reflect, connect, apply;" thus, the CM facilitates a discussion about the completed activity with the intention of fostering reflection and discussions centered on topics relevant to the youth. Furthermore, with each module the youth plan and deliver a youth-led event. For example, while I was in WRFN, the youth were engaged with

peer-to-peer learning module. As part of this module, the older YLP group was planning a youth workshop to host for younger youth in the community to meet the youth-led event requirement; some of the events organized included, sports, traditional games, beading, arts and crafts, and cooking. Lastly, the youth were planning and had already completed fundraising events to finance their planned year-end trip to Canada's Wonderland.

After conversations with the Chief, the health department's superintendent who oversees community programming, Elders, parents, the CM, and the youth, it was evident that YLP, was well received in the community. The superintendent allocated more resources to the YLP for the upcoming year because community leaders had seen the benefit the program was having on their community. However, it should be noted that although many were happy with Right To Play, stakeholders were quick to say, "if it isn't this program, it will be another." Indeed, the community was playing an active role in engaging their youth and providing a space conducive to youth development, RTP happened to be the current means.

Methodology

This research was conducted under the formal protocol between The University of Ottawa School of Human Kinetics and Whitefish River First Nation Chief and Council in which the authors stipulated the details about: the research question and methods; the researcher's role, participation in the community, activities and collaboration with specific members of the community; and data ownership. The main methods used to collect the data of this research were participant observation, photovoice and semi-structured interviews.

Participant Observation

Participation research aims to "seek out individuals in their own surroundings and to take part in their ways of life" (Zahle, 2012, p. 54). For this particular research, I was able to achieve

this through my various interactions in WRFN during my 36 days in field; for example, I participated in community and family events (e.g., fishing, fish fry, traditional ceremonies, sports, family gatherings, and birthday parties). I was provided these opportunities through the host family and through the outreach from many community members. In this respect, I had access to community members' everyday practices and was able to participate in many facets of community life. In terms of the YLP, I participated in all activities while in WRFN. These activities included an all-night sport-a-thon with youth in the community; a youth-led Spring Market that included a car wash, flea market, and barbeque for community members; traditional components of the YLP such as a sweat ceremony, a sharing circle, and a drumming feast; numerous sporting activities; and weekly youth programming, which I helped facilitate. Thus, I was treated as another YLP facilitator, which fostered full participation in the program (Zahle, 2012).

Because of this access, I was able to observe rich interactions between community members and their environment. Specifically, observation can be defined as when a participant “takes notice of the individuals she studies as they act and interact with each other and their surroundings” (Zahle, 2012, p. 54). I kept field notes to help conceptualize my observations with the overall intent to better understand the meanings community members ascribed to certain events or situations (Iacono, Brown, & Holtham, 2009). These observations and reflections fostered new questions in my interviews as well as further conversations with community members so I could continually learn about local knowledge and practices.

Semi-structured Interviews

Another important method that informs this research is the in-depth, semi-structured interview. For me as a researcher, this type of conversational mode is a real privilege and it is

humbling as it is through in-depth interviews, people share their life stories and points of view. Interviews were conducted towards the end of my time in WRFN. At this point, I had built a rapport with all those involved in the interview process. In this sense, I treated the developed interview questions as a guideline; however in many cases, the interview was a conversation that highlighted community members' narratives in relation to empowerment process and community mobilization.

Furthermore, my intention was to incorporate Chilisa's (2012) "appreciative inquiry" model. Chilisa (2012) discussed how interviews are, at times, criticized for being "problem focused, aiming at discovering communities' resource constraints, deficiencies, and unmet needs" (p. 243), whereas appreciate inquiry transforms the interview to an appreciation-focused model. Thus I tried to learn what "the best moments in the history of a community...participants tell stories of exceptional accomplishments and discuss the aspects of their history that they most value and want to enhance" (Chilisa, 2012, p. 244).

Eleven interviews were conducted through the one-month period with RTP mentors, YLP participants, the Chief, parents of YLP participants, Elders, and health officials. These conversations were looking for appreciations of the program with a special interest on the community impacts and were guided more specifically by the CYE dimensions of the framework.

Photovoice

Photovoice has been recognized as a culturally appropriate method for research with Aboriginal communities as participants become actively involved in the data collection process (Moffitt & Vollman, 2004). Participants use cameras or create a piece of art that answers a question that was brainstormed collectively, which is followed by discussions about each

picture's context, resulting in others gaining perspective on community life (Wang & Burris, 1996). Photography can provide space for youth to think critically about community issues that may be hard to express through discussion (Wang, 2006). As a result, participants are actively involved with the research process, which empowers them as valued members of the research team. Photovoice can therefore contribute to discussions on social change and potential actions by “reflecting on select community issues; encouraging group dialogue on these issues; and influencing policy-makers” (Castleden et al., 2008).

After introducing the YLP participants to the photovoice method, in which they agreed it was something they would like to do, we held a brainstorming session to outline the activities to complete the task. The next paragraphs outline how the photovoice events unfolded.

The question that was determined after the brainstorming session with the YLP participants: What does the Youth Leadership Program mean to you?

Once the question was determined the youth had one week to capture up to three pictures. The participants could also draw, paint, or create any arts-based piece that represented what the YLP means to them – one participant drew her picture, where the rest used photography. It was also agreed upon that the youth would write one description that answered the photovoice question in relation to their art piece. The following week the youth participants and YLP facilitators scheduled a circle chat to share and discuss their pictures and descriptions. 14 youth were in attendance for the circle chat. If the youth felt inclined, they passed around their picture and then discussed its significance, which complemented with a general discussion highlighting some of themes the YLP facilitators thought relevant to their pictures and descriptions and empowerment processes through the YLP and the broader community.

The final stage of the photovoice activities was a community event. All the pictures and descriptions were printed and framed, which were placed around the youth center. Youth were encouraged to discuss their respective pictures with community members in attendance (e.g., parents, grandparents, Elders, the Chief, health officials) during dinner. A formal ceremony concluded the night and gave all youth who felt comfortable to do so the opportunity to present their picture to community members.

Overall, the photovoice activity proved to be a rich tool to gather data. First, it was a simple task the youth enjoyed participating in. Second, the premise of the activities allowed a self-reflection over a longer period that I believe fostered profound critical thinking and articulation when we discussed their experiences through the different activities (written descriptions, circle chat, community event, and associated conversations).

Results

This section discusses youth experiences of empowerment through the YLP. Specifically, the above mentioned six phases of the CYE framework are analyzed in relation to the data collected with WRFN. The authors applied this framework to better understand local empowerment processes in relation to RTP's claims of empowerment through the YLP.

Welcoming and Safe Environment

A welcoming and safe environment is one in which youth feel safe, can take risks, and are supported in a family-like atmosphere. Having this support system encourages youth to express their feelings and gives them the “freedom to be themselves, express their own creativity, voice their opinions in decision-making processes, try out new skills, rise to the challenges, and have fun in the process” (Jennings et al., 2006, p. 41). Through these processes, youth should feel

supported by both successes and failures to avoid decreases in self-esteem or confidence; altogether, this is an opportunity for growth no matter the outcome.

A welcoming and safe environment is co-created by program participants and facilitators. Adults need to ensure that the required “level of support, trust, and encouragement” (Jennings et al., 2006, p. 41) is provided so that the youth can be the principle actors in carrying out the program. Wallerstein et al. (2005) contended that there are many opportunities for youth and adults to co-create space for learning, which is imperative in the CYE framework. Through my interaction with the YLP and the different community members involved, three aspects of a “welcoming and safe environment” were evident: family-like community, co-creation of experiences, and successes and failures evidently supported. Discussion of these themes in relation to the YLP in Whitefish River First Nation (WRFN) will ensue.

A family-like atmosphere within a community program yields a social environment “where youth feel valued, respected, encouraged, and supported” (Jennings et al., 2006, p. 41). The notion of family was apparent in the YLP program – an Elder involved with the program shared how a family is fostered:

Let’s say we all need a doorway to go through something and we all need a key sometimes to get through a door, right? So who’s the door and who’s the key that opens that up? So for them to open that up and go in and gather... for them to go in to this place and gather and feel a part of a place, a belonging, then they found it, so now behind that door, they have all these windows. And they can all be that family. They can all be that family within there. And within that family they can go and experience different things, ‘cause there are times they want to look for this, but they don’t want to go by themselves, so they’d rather

go together because you know that the youth, that's their family now. (Clara, May 27, 2013)

Individuals involved in the program, including this community Elder, highlighted the importance of creating such space congruent to a family-like community, where the youth “feel part of a place, a belonging” (Clara, May 31, 2013) that they may not experience otherwise. The YLP's community mentor illustrated this when she said, “[when] things ain't so good at home, I'm glad that there's somewhere that they can come to. They don't have to come in and tell me all their problems, but they come in and they have a really good time and feel connected again” (Karen, May 31, 2013). Another program facilitator discussed with the youth how it was her priority to provide “a little outlet for you guys, and I hope that we show you that...we are here for you and that this is a safe spot to just be teenagers and to feel what you feel and also to be able to grow and learn” (Morgan, May 21, 2013). Thus, contributing to the family atmosphere is the cognisant intention of the YLP's facilitators, which is evidenced here.

Youth also discussed how the program gave space for new, deeper relationships: “I hardly knew some of you I guess, I am closer now to you” (Gavin, May 21, 2013), which also aligns with a reflection of another YLP participant who discussed what he likes doing within the YLP: “coming down here with my friends and all that...helping each other out and stuff like that” (Jack, May 21, 2013). These statements highlight the youths' experience within the program; they have an appreciation for time spent together, the resultant shared experiences, and an overall closer emotional bond – all factors that contribute to a family-like atmosphere.

Another component of a “welcoming and safe environment” is co-creation of space. The youth take ownership of certain aspects of the program with the intention to build skills and awareness of processes to affect change. To this end, the Community Mentor supports and

encourages the youth; however, the mentor also challenges them (Jennings et al., 2006). A youth noted this process when discussing public speaking:

There was a point where I was pushed, and luckily there are people in the community like [the community mentor] that I got to know, who gave you that push saying that we have your back, and whatever you say won't be wrong and stuff like that. (Lana, May 23, 2013)

This youth recognized how she, and certain community members, worked together for the desired outcome; it was co-created, because Lana was pushed to work on her public speaking, but she felt comfortable doing so because it was a safe space. Similarly, Karen felt that the community recognized the importance of providing space, and within her role of community mentor in the community, she helped create this environment for the youth to explore their leadership attributes because:

they're going to be running things someday, and I feel that they feel very respected and valued. Respected and valued by even our leadership, right? And it's just like sending a message out there that everybody can be a leader in the community; everyone's a leader. (Karen, May 31, 2013)

In sum, the youth participants felt like the YLP was a family-like community, a co-created space that fostered a challenging, yet supportive atmosphere. Furthermore, it was evident that those closest to the program facilitated this atmosphere for the YLP.

Meaningful Participation and Engagement

Meaningful participation and engagement refers to the programmatic activities that build youth leadership and involve authentic contributions from the youth (Jennings et al., 2006). An environment conducive to youth participation in community events and community discussions

provides opportunities for young people to “learn and practice important leadership and participatory skills” (Jennings et al., 2006, p. 43). Moreover, such practice areas can be related to their own lives and motivation to learn such skills; however, the skills learned and practiced need to be determined by the youth, which incorporates a decision-making component into the process. I will next discuss these processes in relation to the YLP.

Jennings et al. (2006) and Pearrow (2008) discussed how youth need opportunities, such as leadership roles during community events, to practice the skills learned in the program. As one youth notes, “I have learned a lot of leadership skills and have been using them a lot around the community... like helping with community dances, and being a role model for the younger ones in the YLP and when we play sports” (Chris, May 23, 2013). Similarly, Jack mentioned qualities he has learned and how he uses those skills “pretty much just being a leader, showing little kids different stuff I’ve learned and all that.” (May 23, 2013). During my time in the community, I also observed the youth facilitating a Sport-A-Thon fundraiser in which the YLP participants played sports from 8:00 p.m. to 8:00 a.m. As part of this event, the younger youth in community attended for the first few hours. I reflected on the event’s first hours and how they encapsulated youth leadership skills practiced in community:

There were 27 kids in total! Our first game was all older youth, and then the younger ones showed. I switched the rules so only the young group could shoot in the basketball game; the older youth reacted in an amazing way. I didn’t see one eye role in this very competitive bunch, and they were so eager to ensure the younger participants felt comfortable by cheering loudly and getting everyone involved in the game, even if they had the ability to dominate. They

were awesome with them...those younger youth felt so welcomed and part of something. (Personal Journal Entry, May 11, 2013)

Now, I am not inferring the YLP was the sole entity producing these leadership qualities, but the module that was facilitated during the weekly sessions at the time focused on peer-to-peer relationships and mentoring where the youth brainstormed, discussed, and role-played how they would want to be a role model and community leader for younger youth. Through this youth-led event, YLP participants were able to use their leadership skills in a community setting, which paralleled with the CYE framework. Recognition of this opportunity to lead was voiced by Morgan when she talked about youth being able to “interact with...other community members, and they get to have a feel, like for how much we have come as youth and what not” (Morgan, May 21, 2013) when hosting events like the Sport-A-Thon. Furthermore, the Sport-A-Thon was created, planned, and led by the youth; this approach enabled more practical leadership experience than a pre-existing template from the YLP programs module would.

These observations highlight how the youth need space to practice their leadership skills for experiences to be purposeful. Another aspect of *meaningful participation and engagement* is that participation should relate to participants’ own lives, thus making motivation intrinsic.

Notably, Karen highlighted her intentions when designing a program that:

still has to be fun...[but] meaningful as far as making life decisions and life choices, like real life choices like maybe focused more on what it is they have to look at as far as peers...So just have meaningful programs to prepare them.”
(May 31, 2013)

Although there are set modules within the YLP, Karen intentionally designs her program so the participants can relate the teachings to their own lives and not just the broader teachings of the

modules. Furthermore, Karen provided space for difficult and potentially more sensitive conversations that may not take place otherwise; the youth then face these challenges together.

While reflecting on “meaningful participation,” I sought what was considered meaningful for the community; the importance attributed to traditional knowledge became evident as not only the Elders and community mentor displayed the importance of local culture and spiritual teachings in the program but also the youth were very aware and keen to learn more about their culture. Sydney eloquently exemplified this:

My mom was doing these teachings and she was saying like our Elders have all of this knowledge and it should be passed down, but our Elders are leaving us and they are leaving the knowledge that is supposed to be passed down, and once it's gone it's lost, so a little bit of our culture goes with it, so I guess it is important. (Sydney, May 21, 2013)

I observed how Sydney's statement was expressed through the youths' behaviours. During my fieldwork, spring ceremonies were celebrated, and as part of the ceremony the Healer facilitated a youth circle, which was advertised to encourage as many participants in the community as possible. Out of the 12 youth who attended the circle chat, 10 were YLP participants. I wrote in my field notes afterwards:

Is this a reflection of the program? It's not like the youth attending were the signified 'good' youth in the community. Around the circle, one had stolen, one admitted to doing drugs and was suspended from school, and another is suspended right now. (Personal Journal, May 14, 2013)

Months later, I think of Sydney's quote and how she voiced the importance of continued learning of culture from knowledge holders – she related this to her own life and was motivated

to seek this knowledge as part of building her identity. The YLP was a platform to explore these ideas, thoughts, questions, and anxieties. Other youth who attended the circle chat with the Healer were seeking what Sydney discussed: they were keen to participate to learn about culture and question how these teachings can be incorporated into their lives – it did not matter whether they were honour students, or suspended from school. The YLP was a space for the youth to come together and share stories of successes and hardships; furthermore, these were stories that meant something to them, as evidenced by the youth explicitly stating that cultural teachings were important. Thus, the YLP provided a space for meaningful participation that related to their own lives, which led to active community participation, but also importantly, which created space to integrate discussions, support experiences, and encourage a continuous effort in celebrating local culture and traditional teachings.

The last aspect of meaningful participation is for the youth to have “authentic contributions to the program” (Pearrow, 2008, p. 516), where the youth determine activities, have varied opportunities, are part of the decision-making process, and are supported to overcome challenges (Jennings et al., 2006). Community leadership has recognized the importance of building the confidence in youth to foster leadership development and has identified the YLP as one platform for achieving this outcome. The Chief described how he views the program as designed by the youth, likening it to “giving them a fresh piece of paper and giving them the confidence to work on that piece of paper,” and with that blank piece of paper, “it’s really coming from them, that is what the Right To Play program does, you know that’s what I have seen it do here, the metamorphoses from hand-out, to hand-up” (Chief Shining Turtle, May 29, 2013). Accordingly, the youth are not looking for people to take the initiative for

them; this is inherent in the program through the youth-led events, which are designed, implemented, and facilitated by the youth.

Notably, I listened to the youth share their story of the hockey net. The youth, as per one of their modules on community change, wanted to update the existing hockey nets on the outdoor rink; they were ripped and rusted and had the same use as a pylon. The youth approached the Chief and discussed changing the nets. The Chief thought it was a great idea and had the maintenance department purchase and exchange the nets. Although this was a positive, the youth felt dissatisfied: “we were supposed to help out with that but then he got someone else to do it” (Christy, May 21, 2013), which was followed by Bryn’s remark, “we told him (the Chief) we wanted to do it” (Bryn, May 21, 2013). The YLP participants wanted to do the research and find what nets were best suited for the outdoor rink, buy them, and set-up the new ones. This short anecdote highlights the youths’ sincere desire to determine the activities in accordance with the YLP and their eagerness to be part of the decision-making processes.

This section offered insight towards the youths’ perception of their participation in the YLP. Community members involved in implementing and facilitating the YLP also shared their perspectives on the role they had in delivering a meaningful program to the community’s youth. Themes that emerged from the stories were the importance of being visible in the community and participating in community affairs, being able to relate the YLP teachings to the youths’ lives, and how youth should determine the activities and have an active role in the decision-making process. The last of these themes is closely tied to the next dimension in the CYE – equitable power sharing between the youth and adults.

Equitable Power Sharing Between Youth and Adults

Youth programs that are based on empowerment should encourage leadership roles; this is apparent in the YLP. However, balancing power between youth and adults is a difficult task that involves intentional practices. Comparing youth and adults in societal practices, adults are more apt to hold power when compared to youth, and in doing so to subsume responsibility for decisions and actions. Yet, with this power, adults are also able to implement effective strategies to share power with youth participants (Jennings et al., 2006).

A dangerous tendency within this dissemination of power is to perceive shifts, when in reality the power is maintained by the adults. Adult leaders have the societal status to project the appearance of a power-sharing platform within their respective organizations through monitoring and evaluation practices, reports to funders, and media interactions, when in practice there is a dearth of evidence to support such claims (Checkoway 1998). In most cases, adult leaders do not intentionally hold power over the youth; however, reasons such as being over-worked and under-funded and not having the capacity to recognize the benefits of such initiatives affect power-sharing initiatives. Indeed, it is a very difficult skill to promote and facilitate, and it takes time and commitment so the youth experience and learn to use this power intrinsically. Arguably, when adult leaders cannot promote programmatic activities conducive to true power sharing, exaggerated claims can seemingly demarcate best practices.

There are three themes demonstrated in the YLP that distinguish its approach towards true power-sharing practices: providing support for shared leadership (Jennings et al, 2006), transferring decision making over time (Cargo et al., 2003), and structural change to existing assumptions of power balance between youth and adults (Wheeler, 2003). Although these themes typify a shared power between the youth and adult leaders, I will end my discussion with the

limitations of ostensible power when taken from the youth and the subsequent response – which led to some leaving the program.

Providing Support for Shared Leadership

Supporting youth in their initiatives without being overbearing is difficult; it may require “considerable flexibility to effectively facilitate, teach, guide, mentor, encourage, provide feedback, keep youth focused and on task, yet exert authority and control when needed” (Jennings et al., 2006, p. 45). Indeed, a dynamic, reflexive leader, or team of leaders, is needed to ensure power is shared. One parent of a YLP participant discussed how she saw this transpire in WRFN:

I think we are very fortunate [to see] where our youth are today...how they are able to speak to the Chief on that level, you know letting them know what it is they need and not him telling them, ‘okay this is what you have to do’, or somebody else coming and saying what the youth need. (Deanne, May 16, 2013)

Meetings with the Chief were indeed introduced through the YLP, which is backed by the approach Candice took in facilitating the YLP:

Because they [youth] get to plan their own stuff, they get to address what issues they have personally in their community as youth, there’s a number of things as an adult I’m not aware of, of what their world is like, or what their reality is in our community. (Karen, May 31, 2013)

Karen acknowledged that instilling a top-down approach to the program would limit the participants’ voice and power, and maybe more importantly, miss what are the real issues the youth are facing, since she is not their peer and cannot determine what is important for the youth.

These examples show an intentional balance of power that is exemplified by Karen and the other involved adults (e.g., the Chief) dedicated to supporting the youth. Moreover, the very nature of the youth-led events embedded in the program provides a structured environment encouraging power sharing. This component of the YLP will be discussed within further key dimensions of CYE.

Decision Making over Time

Although the older youth (14-18 years) were the main group involved with this study, I was also concerned with the younger age group (10-13 years) from the YLP. My study consisted of attending their weekly sessions, facilitating games, helping with their youth-led events, attending traditional ceremonies the youth attended, and going to their movie nights. From these interactions, I was able to observe how this group operated differently than the older youth group. Notably, Karen took a different approach with the younger group, as they did not have as much responsibility and leadership roles compared to the older group; for example, Karen would have a larger say in their activities, and during events would help MC the event or make more of the logistical decisions than a youth-led event that was facilitated by the older youth.

Furthermore, after discussions with Karen and the youth, I think it is fair to say that as the youth got older they were pushed, yet supported, to take on larger leadership roles in the community as the program evolved. A component of this transformation is taking what was learned in the program and applying it to decision-making situations.

Cargo et al. (2003) discussed how over time, and through the on-going support offered through the program, youth would learn how to effectively make decisions and enjoy an increase in decision-making power. My point here is when the youth first start in the YLP, there may not be a power balance between youth and adults; however, as the youth become more involved and

use the skills they learn, the decision-making power of the youth increases. For example, some of the older youth would speak in front of large crowds at community events. When talking to some of the youth who spoke at events, they mentioned how nervous they were and how uneasy the task was at first. Furthermore, the youth discussed how Karen was the one to take this lead when the program first started, but over time, she encouraged others to speak at public events where Karen coached them through the process. As part of this learning process, the youth also started to decide what needed to be said collectively, rather than dictated by Karen. Currently, the older youth who are comfortable speaking now help the younger participants through this process, which fosters increased leadership and decision-making skills for all youth.

The shared power and space for decision-making capacity evidenced in WRFN is more likely to be found in smaller, localized settings because youth tend to be more engaged and able to participate in meaningful ways (Royce et al., 2004). Accordingly, these smaller efforts “may be a starting point for changing the fundamental structures of governance needed to support young people in leadership and decision making roles” (Jennings et al., 2006, p. 41).

Changing the Fundamental Structures

Changing structures is, primarily, to change the processes in communities in order to increase youths’ ability to engage in power-sharing opportunities. In this sense, “structural change addresses a fundamental shift in assumptions about adult privilege and youth responsibility, a shift that must occur in order for youth to participate genuinely in leadership and civic engagement” (Wheeler, 2003, p. 7). This leads to increased power sharing. Jennings et al. (2006) and Wheeler (2003) suggest ways to address existing structures that perpetuate adult dominance: utilizing communication methods similar to youth, providing space for youth to sit on community decision-making committees, and being cognizant of the youths’ schedule to

increase opportunities for power sharing (Jennings et al., 2006; Wheeler, 2003). I will touch on these points next.

I previously described the Sport-A-Thon that occurred during my stay in WRFN – I neglected to state that it was almost cancelled. It was a very rainy day, and the youth envisioned the event running outside, where it would appeal to a greater number of participants from the community. That day, Karen wrote a message on the YLP group page on Facebook that the event might be cancelled due to weather. Within minutes, Karen was receiving text messages about this news. The youth voiced their displeasure and were actively seeking other means to hold the event; this was all done through Facebook and text messages with Karen. After a number of conversations, Karen looked at me and said, “*well they [the youth] still want to do it, let’s make it happen*” (Personal Journal Entry, May 12, 2013)

Karen ensured the youth knew they could contact her at any time about their concerns. The youth texting Karen exemplified their level of comfort in voicing concerns and not being complacent with the suggestion to postpone the Sport-A-Thon. The increased participation in decision making is evidenced by the facts that Karen communicated with the YLP participants through means familiar to the youth, and that the youth, in turn, were comfortable in communicating their feelings to her (Jennings et al., 2006). It is apparent that Karen is intentional of her practices to foster these relationships.

As mentioned above, for youth to be part of structural change, leaders need to be aware of conflicting schedules as they relate to participation in decision making (i.e., meetings being held during school hours). Community leaders must also foster communication where the youth can openly share their voice. There are opportunities for youth to converse and participate in

decisions that have historically privileged adults in WRFN; the Chief's interaction with the YLP is an example:

our chief comes in to do a check-in and they prepare everything for him in advance through the program. What it is they would like to address to him or talk to him about, he usually comes and sits at supper with us. (Karen, May 21, 2013)

Chief Shining Turtle has a young family and is involved with many extra-curricular activities outside of his role as Chief; however, he still finds time to meet with the youth on their schedule. Furthermore, it would be easy for the Chief to ask for a quick update on paper and he could look it over at his convenience; this doesn't happen, as he stated, "I go and support them. I think they need that, I think they need to be assured that leadership is listening to them" (Chief Shining Turtle, May 28, 2013). Thus, he understands the benefit of having mutual space for the youth to feel their voices are heard, in this case, through finding time on their schedule.

I have tried to highlight how the YLP is moving towards a CYE framework by equalizing power sharing between adults and youth. Individuals involved in the YLP evidenced support for shared leadership through fostered decision making over time, and methods used for structure changes that have historically privileged adults. However, this sentiment was not always the case; there were times youth felt their voice was appropriated. I discuss these implications next.

Voiceless Power

During the sharing circle, I asked the youth if they felt their voices were heard in the community, and my question produced varying responses. Indeed, I have touched on some positives previously in this paper; however, there were also strong negative feelings expressed, when youth felt ignored, or worse, had the perception of power and voice, only to have it later

removed by community leadership. Bonnie, an 18-year-old who participated fully in the first year of the program had only sporadic attendance in the second year; she explains:

Well the reason I stopped coming is because we got let down, like they said that the band was going to pay for our year-end trip and so we stopped fundraising and then like a week before we go they were just like ‘oh we aren’t funding you guys’...I felt so crappy about myself. (Bonnie, May 21, 2013)

Morgan followed Bonnie’s comment, explaining that “everyone felt let down, and lost interest” (Morgan, May 21, 2013). These powerful quotes highlight the importance of honouring the youths’ voice. In other words, if the community leadership promises something, they need to live up to it because, if not, the result will be difficult to overturn. Bonnie, in this case, did not see the point of participating in the YLP if the leadership teachings would not actually be recognized in the community, since decisions and her voice were only listened to when it was convenient for the adults.

Furthermore, this act shifted how the youth worked through funding their year-end trip in subsequent years. Yes, the Chief and other community leaders were viewed as positive people to guide them through other projects, but the youth would not ask community leadership to help them with their year-end trip again in case by chance they would be let down. What is important here is the adults need to be aware of the effect of their actions when making commitments to the youth; for example, if through some other scenario the youth felt their power is removed, they may react similarly and not feel comfortable working with the community or may even quit the program – this would be a backward step towards CYE.

Overall, the community leadership, Right To Play community mentors, and Elders involved in the program are striving towards equitable power sharing. I have provided examples

of situations when the youth felt voiceless; however, it is evident that the youth are empowered through the YLP because of the support they have from adults, having space to make meaningful decisions, and from the adults awareness of the structures that limit youths' involvement and their engagement in practices designed to make this change.

Engagement in Critical Reflection on Interpersonal and Sociopolitical Processes

The CYE's overall goal is to mobilize individuals to participate in processes that can lead to positive community change; as such, youth critical reflection is an integral aspect of the process and one that has been given limited attention in youth programming (Jennings et al., 2006). Critical reflection is necessary because it helps youth "come to see and understand the very structures, processes, social values, and practices that they seek to alter" (Jennings et al., 2006, p. 47). Freire (1970) builds on this point: individuals who are not aware of the structures and processes that influence social institutions, or their role within these processes, would have limited success in empowerment programs. Accordingly, Purdey et al. (1994) describe how a "repetitive process of analysis, action, and reflection" (p. 330) will result in empowerment, since empowerment is a "reflexive verb, signifying that individuals can only empower themselves" (p. 330).

Most youth programs do not engage with reflexive activities; reflection does occur, but the focal point is on program activities. Youth programs aiming at encouraging empowerment processes could purposefully provide "youth opportunities to engage in an integrated participatory cycle of critical reflection and reflexive actions with the goal of creating change in sociopolitical processes, structures, norms, and images" (Jennings et al., 2006, p. 47). For the aforementioned to occur, adult facilitators need to understand sociopolitical realities and be

comfortable with, and in possession of the associated skill-set for, leading critical examination sessions (Jennings et al., 2006).

In regard to the YLP, there are critical reflection examples from the youth, which will be considered next, but overall, the WRFN experience shows that this reflection is limited to interpersonal processes and discussions around everyday lives, family, and friendships and how to deal with peer pressure. Subsequent text offers insights from the community mentor and describes how these reflections help shape the program. This section will end with a discussion about positioning sociopolitical processes and what they could potentially look like.

Individuals involved with the YLP discussed their increased interpersonal critical reflection; for example, Corrine shared that the:

YLP has reminded me how it feels to be a youth in the community; it makes me feel welcomed and cared for and it teaches us how to handle tough situations in life like peer pressure, substance abuse or relationships or anything really.

(Corrine, May 21, 2013)

The perceived skills Corrine gained from her participation in the YLP helped make her interactions with peers more reflective and positive. She is aware of increased interpersonal skills that guided her decision making in tough situations – like peer pressure and substance abuse – to perhaps produce different outcomes. Similarly, Morgan highlighted how the YLP “has helped me be open-minded of others and understanding that everyone comes from different backgrounds” (Morgan, May 21, 2013). This reflection demonstrates how an increased awareness, in this case an open-minded approach, will help Morgan interact with others in a more positive way. These two quotes are similar to other youths’ reflections on the YLP.

Similarly, talking with youths' parents, they mentioned changes like better behaviour with siblings and increased awareness of personal consequences when faced with difficult decisions such as drug and alcohol use. It is important to not paint a false picture, some participants still smoked drugs and drank alcohol, but through conversations with parents and the youth, the YLP participants were guided to reflect more on their actions. Accordingly, the youth felt more responsible to behave in ways congruent with their reflections on community interactions.

Despite these opportunities, more critical reflection and processes could be encouraged; the YLP could potentially incorporate modules, games, discussions, and general activities with this in mind. Karen discussed how reflection could be incorporated into the program:

it would be interesting to see if they were to level up what they were learning, I guess. More reflection I guess when it comes to just living life or being out for the first time on their own or making those choices about sex or anything like that, it would be interesting...It would be great for them to have that knowledge and kind of at least...go into it with all the skills knowing what the consequences are, you know? And really having that embedded in their head, you know like 'ok if I don't protect myself this is what's going to happen' you know?. (Karen, May 31, 2013)

There are limits, though, to the way the youth can be encouraged to express their feelings and reflect critically on their interpersonal lives, as this practice can sometimes awaken deeper feelings and more traumatic experiences. For example, Karen discussed why she is hesitant to incorporate reflexive practices that can be personal and have negative impacts if not carried

through properly. She responded to a question about if and how reflexive practices on interpersonal and structural processes could be incorporated in the YLP:

Yeah, to a certain extent. And at the same time I don't want to go too deep with them either, because if you go too far then... do I need more workers here? So that's why we kind of implemented the circle once a month so at least it's during that time where I can have support workers come in you know like Jenny and Rose so that if it's something that touches on... if it's really personal with them, to the point where they're so upset, I feel like that the support workers are there to help with that. (Karen, May 31, 2013)

The YLP modules, which provide an overall structure and specific activities to meet the goals of the program, use the “reflect, connect, apply” methodology. If the youth are asked to play a team-builder game or role play a peer-pressure scenario, a facilitated conversation follows that intends to engage the youth to reflect on the activity, how it connects to their personal life, and what can be learned and applied in the future. This reflection, again, is not an easy task for the community mentors to facilitate but does intend to engage with interpersonal and sociopolitical processes; however, as Karen mentioned, the nature of this reflection may be problematic if the right support is not present. The YLP would need full support from community workers on a regular basis when such conversations are occurring, which is not always realistic. Furthermore, many of the Program Officers (based out of Toronto, Ontario) who are tasked with overseeing the program activities in community and supporting the community mentors are not trained to train community members on potentially traumatic issues that may arise through the “reflect, connect, apply” approach. Even though the Program Officers are

compassionate and great facilitators, they may not be equipped to handle the potentially powerful stories and feelings that may stir with reflection on interpersonal and sociopolitical processes.

To move towards critical reflection on sociopolitical processes would require a strong commitment, time, and facilitators who have the knowledge, the right skills, and the creativity to find ways of critically positioning emerging issues such as drug addiction. Resisting peer pressure in relation to addiction practices leads to interpersonal discussions, but facilitating a circle sharing that would raise questions that would lead participants outside of their firsthand peer relations could be a start towards sociopolitical awareness. For instance, when talking about addiction, discussions on “what makes our community vulnerable to drug consumption”, “why are Aboriginal communities of Ontario, of Canada, from the world, more vulnerable to drug abuses”, “what in our history could have impacted negatively in our people”, etc., would lead to a totally different reality and awareness of sociopolitical processes.

Critical reflection “is required to help youth come to see and understand the very structures, processes, social values, and practices that they seek to alter” (Jennings et al., 2006, p. 47). Admittedly, this level of reflection would be a difficult task: critical reflection of sociopolitical processes for the purpose of systemic change is complicated and intricately related to many facets. In this case, some of the important movements, historical events, assimilationist programs, exclusionary processes and related conditions situating the Aboriginal people of Canada are considered crucial. Canada is perceived by most of its citizens and by the international community as an enlightened society which takes pride in human rights and which welcomes multiculturalism (ACAP, 2010). Notably eschewed is the dark history of oppressive practices with Aboriginal peoples of Canada; this history includes “dishonoured treaties, theft of Aboriginal lands, suppression of Aboriginal cultures, abduction of Aboriginal children,

impoverishment and disempowerment of Aboriginal peoples” (ACAP, 2010). The aforementioned practices have shaped policy, education, and general perceptions of the relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples of Canada. Canadians and “white” organizations know very little of the shared history between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples of Canada: a co-operative relationship based on honoured treaties at first contact with European settlers, which quickly shifted as the domination of original inhabitants became normalized through mythopoeic ideologies of European supremacy. This very brief overview of a complicated history defines sociopolitical structures today. Our Canadian education system evolved through a paternalistic system which has yet to fully honour history of Aboriginal peoples; this distorts knowledge because it is being shaped only from one dominant and exclusionary worldview.

The point here is critical reflection of sociopolitical processes in the YLP would need more intentional practices from an Indigenous worldview that is also honoured and adopted by an organization (such as RTP) that is concomitantly Western in its approach. There are identifiers that show RTP’s desire to learn and to adapt their program; for example, since my fieldwork, the PLAY program has implemented an *Indigenous Knowledge PLAY Guide* that was created by Aboriginal scholars, Elders, and PLAY community members. This provides a resource for Community Mentors and PLAY staff that “acts as a starting point, opening up discussions on the many ways in which culture is embedded or how we can contribute to the restoration of culture in the work that we do” (Right To Play, 2013). This guide will contribute to the implementation of sociopolitical reflections that subsumes an Indigenous worldview. Much more work is needed to fully incorporate an Indigenous knowledge system in the YLP; however, these types of resources and continued support by Elders, and by individuals trained to facilitate

such conversations from an Indigenous epistemology, will espouse sociopolitical reflections. Although critical reflection on sociopolitical processes is continually gaining traction in the YLP, which is evidenced by the *Indigenous Knowledge PLAY Guide*, current critical reflection is mainly restricted to the youths' interpersonal lives.

Participation in Sociopolitical Processes in Order to Effect Change

As discussed in the last section on CYE, it is evident that increased awareness of sociopolitical processes and structures is critical. Thus engagement in these processes for community change is the next step (Jennings et al., 2006). This is different from what the goals of civic service programs have generally mandated over the past few decades – which has subsumed a neoliberal push to help “adolescents become competent, engaged, and responsible adults” (Roth, 1998, p. 423). Rather, critical social engagement urges empowerment where the youth have the “capacity to address the structures, processes, social values and practices of the issues at hand” (Jennings et al., 2006, p. 48). CYE engages youth to have an increased critical understanding of the aforementioned and to gain practical experience in these areas so transformative social action can occur. Before providing examples of social action in WRFN, it is important to quickly highlight the mentality shift within the community to incorporate youth voices.

Why Youth-Driven

WRFN have invested in their youth because previous cohorts did not have the same sort of support. Increased youth suicide devastated the community, necessitating a paradigm shift with youth relationships:

It became a priority, it became a number one priority which was to really pull together and find out what is happening with our young people and how can we

put forward or how can we heal, how can we prevent, it was a lot of meetings, a lot of planning, a lot of interventions, a lot of making sure we have on-call workers in place specifically for suicide and talking about it, just bringing more awareness of it. (Clara, May 27, 2013)

With this increased attention on youth in the community came more investment in youth-driven programs. The YLP fit into the new approach and was appropriated by the community to fit the new mandate. I want to be clear, if it wasn't the YLP, it would have been something else, perhaps created by the community or another program of some sort that fit what the community voiced as needed. But right now, the YLP is part of a positive solution for change in the community:

They just need a place to talk about it; it's all about confidence, and giving them a place of confidence...the part that is so exciting for me is that they have solutions, right. 'Fix this Chief, fix this Chief. We see this and we want to fix this'; that is a big transformation. (Chief Shining Turtle, May 28, 2013)

The youth, in this respect, have used the YLP to express their thoughts and take action in their community.

Participation in Community Building

Although discussions on increased reflections about sociopolitical realities in the YLP are needed for a CYE framework, there are still examples of participation in community building activities that go beyond typical civic service. Notably, one of the YLP modules – *Leadership in First Nation Communities* – favours community mobilization. To achieve this goal, there are many steps outlined in the module: first, the youth identify personal leadership qualities and how they can use such skills for change; second, the youth brainstorm and ascertain issues in

community that they want to address; the youth then identify stakeholders who can help; and finally they create and implement action plans for change on the issue identified (Right To Play, 2013). The WRFN youth went through this process and decided on a plan to remove an abandoned building – the story of “The Shed” exemplified participation in sociopolitical processes to effect change.

The shed was “being abused” (Bryn, May 21, 2013); “like they go and smoke-up in there” (Bonnie, May 21, 2013). Chris described why the youth wanted to take action: “we’ve been realizing that a lot of kids would go to that building for drugs and alcohol and stuff like that, so we want to take it down” (May, 21, 2013). The youth identified something that they wanted to change in their community, but more importantly, the youth went about this project as community leaders; they wanted everyone to know they were aware of these issues and striving for change in community. The youth met with the Chief:

so their voices can be heard and to know that they are important, they do have an impact...I think it is really important that the Chief and Council are on board with that and give them the time, because they do have a lot to say. (Karen, May 31, 2013)

Because of this fostered relationship, the youth have a more accessible platform to engage with processes to effect change with community leadership. The Chief reflected on his meeting with the YLP participants in regards to the shed:

The youth see it as a way of making a statement in the community, that they are not defined by the actions of a few, right. And they can help send a tone, and a message and it’s a powerful one, a message of change, a message of hope, a message of this is their identity. (Chief Shining Turtle, May 28, 2013)

Part of this meeting's agenda, which was drafted by the youth, was ensuring the Chief knew they wanted to be part of the whole process; for example, when the shed demolishing proposal was presented to Chief and Council, the youth wanted to ensure their voices were heard, that it would be the youth who would demolish the building, and it would be the youth who would explain their reasons for tearing down the shed to the community.

In this respect, the Chief learned that the youth were eager to be part of these community processes. The result was more meetings with the youth because he saw their desire to be part of change and recognized that the youth had valuable ideas: "they are organized, they are structured, and they have meaning, the part that is so exciting for me is that [the youth] have solutions" (Chief Shining Turtle, May 28, 2013). Furthermore, when I discussed the purpose for meeting with the YLP participants, the Chief stated:

It keeps me very young and focused where the different pieces of the community are. I guess it's walking the talk. Well people say what do the youth want, well go and ask. So that is what I do, I know what they want because I go and ask, I sit there and I listen and really pay attention to what they are saying. I don't pay lip service to them, I tell them that, I will treat you with the utmost respect, I will treat your ideas and concepts seriously, and we will rigorously explore back and forth, but it goes both ways. As I hear things and see things being brought into focus I will share them with you, it's a two way street; they have accepted that, I am great with that. So it's just another tool, another opportunity to help fill that...I cherish that time, it gives me a chance to connect with them and understand from their perspective and you get to see what they are seeing you know, and how they perceive things and how they are

developing things and it gives me a chance to develop ideas, you know what if we were exploring this, how would this feel. Try this on; try this shoe on.

(Chief Shining Turtle, May 28, 2013)

These actions, one could argue, are the start of systemic social change. The youth are acting to reduce drug and alcohol use in the community, and are doing so by ensuring their voices are heard from community leadership; these actions can lead to policy-change so future decisions by Chief and Council will incorporate youth perspectives. Furthermore, community leadership is proactive and seeks the youths' thoughts rather than reacting after decisions have been taken. Indeed, the Chief has started this process with the YLP, and with this continued dialogue, new policies may lead to further youth presence in community mobilization practices outside of the YLP. This is not to say intentional dialogue would foster increased awareness of sociopolitical processes. Similar to critical reflection, the individuals involved with the YLP could provide opportunities for youth to reach deeper understandings of the issues they have identified in community. This would add another level of empowerment and help move the program towards the CYE framework.

Integrated Individual and Community-Level Empowerment

As part of the CYE framework, youth empowerment programs should provide space for individual and community-level development (Jennings et al., 2006). Individual skills, such as self-efficacy, can be an empowerment program outcome; however, programs that provide “stronger ties to the community, a greater understanding of other people’s needs, and a commitment to making the community a better place” can encourage “collective- and political-efficacy” (Jennings et al., 2006, p. 49) for a diverse group in the community. Hence, critical social empowerment integrates individual and collective perspectives to increase the capacity of

community members to contribute cooperatively for community mobilization (Pearrow, 2008). The notion of collective community mobilization through youth-based empowerment – from a critical social theory perspective – can integrate “critical reflection, reflexive action, and social change at individual and collective levels” (Jennings et al., 2006, p. 50). Certainly, youth will be able to seek community change if they understand the sociopolitical undertones that have created such issues (Freire, 1970).

This development of critical awareness is a consistent CYE theme and has been discussed in relation to the YLP in WRFN in the previous two sections. However, central to a nuanced discussion are the actualities of creating relationships that foster community-wide empowerment with diverse populations (Zeldin et al., 2003). Community-wide relationships can take many forms: bridging groups of youth that traditionally have not interacted (Coakley, 2011) and youth advisory structures with community leadership that intend to foster healthy development through skills gained are examples. The succeeding text will discuss findings of community empowerment in WRFN through built relationships.

One goal of the YLP was community exposure: “if there’s an event or something that’s happening in the whole community we always get involved in some way; we also kind of jump on any kind of opportunities that the community has to offer” (Karen, May 21, 2013). This increased presence built different relationships with individuals and groups in community and “engaged [the youth] with diverse sectors within the local community” (Jennings et al., 2006, p. 49). Specifically, the youths’ increased profile in the community fostered opportunities for relationship-building with Elders, parents, and individuals in community leadership roles. Community members saw firsthand the youth planning and facilitating intergenerational events

for all community members, which gave exposure to their leadership skills and their desire for community building.

Accordingly, community members would recruit YLP participants to help with events such as community-facilitated sweat lodges. When the community was preparing for these ceremonies, some of the youth were asked to help with gathering rocks, birch trees, birch bark, cedar, and firewood; preparing the fire and the accompanied feast; and the actual building and dismantling of the sweat lodge structure. Moreover, one day, three YLP participants and I agreed to help an Elder with some of her spring cleanup as she and some other community members were preparing to build a sweat lodge on her property. These youth did not have to give up a day on their weekend, but I do believe they saw it as an opportunity to continually build their relationship with community members, to show respect, and to learn. Yes, part of the day was hard labour – which has its own teachings – but it also included other traditional knowledge teachings about the different ceremonies the Elders planned on sharing with those who were interested. That same night, the three youth, other community members, and I participated in the sweat ceremony. I believe the day evidenced community-level empowerment. During my time in WRFN I witnessed other similar examples. I observed YLP participants help with Fish Frys (locally caught fish are fried and sold as part of a meal for other community members), where I was told the proceeds – depending on the fry – would help schooling costs and health-related expenses, among others. Furthermore, many YLP participants were highly involved in sport, and started to give back to the community through coaching and helping with sport tournaments. The intergenerational relationships engaged through these processes foster steps towards community-level empowerment.

Furthermore, relationships between different youth cohorts were evident. Clara discussed how exposures through the YLP lead the youth to:

teaching others, supporting each other outside of the program, I think that one is a really big one. It's created connections amongst all of them; some of them have been in different cliques before and never really interacted with each other. (Clara, May 27, 2013)

Bridging groups through the YLP has positive implications for community building. Jennings et al., (2006) highlighted the importance of a greater reach through youth empowerment programming, because more individuals may participate in the mobilization process. This advantage was evident in the YLP because it brought together individuals from different cliques; I wrote in my field notes:

This group [YLP] rarely excludes anyone, they are always asking each other to participate and encourage others if perhaps one of their friends isn't comfortable with the activity. They shared these sentiments during the photovoice sharing circle, talking about not knowing everyone before and now feel like it is a little family. (Personal Journal Entry, May 24, 2013)

The quotations above provide insights of community relationships that can contribute to community mobilization. Indeed, developed critical awareness of “processes, structures, social practices, norms, and images that affect them [youth]” is needed so “they can determine how to live productively within those social spaces, or better yet, how to change them for the benefit of all” (Jennings et al., 2006, p. 50). There is a paucity of critical awareness in the YLP, which would contribute to a CYE framework in WRFN; however, the built relationships discussed do contribute to community-level empowerment.

Discussion

The analysis of the YLP participants' experiences in WRFN was conducted following the CYE framework, which suggests that the six presented dimensions play a key role in effecting interpersonal and sociopolitical change. The interpretation presented here was directly conducted following the definition of each dimension and presented the experiences of this structured program as voiced by its own actors. Despite being able to identify opportunities and examples reflecting most of the key dimensions, several improvements and recommendations could be provided to help facilitate an environment more conducive to CYE.

As we could see, several of the YLP experiences were clearly integrating and laying the groundwork for the attributes of each of these dimensions to happen effectively. However, in terms of the specific dimension that promotes power sharing, it is important to note that in some cases the youth felt community leaders removed their power, which had a harmful effect on the youths' perception of decision making. In this sense, methods and opportunities to promote conscious power sharing should be reinforced. Furthermore, despite some evidence of sociopolitical processes awareness shown through the youth council creation and the acknowledged importance for youth to have their voices not only respected by the community but also integrated within the governance system, some more work could be done to encourage discussions and reflections identifying and situating broader goals of critical thinking while contextualizing sociopolitical processes. In that respect, the mentor was aware of the program's lack of human resources to help support the youth in some of these reflections that would most likely awaken deeper wounds through processes such as self-reflection, awareness, and sense of purpose. In relation to this perceived risk, reflecting on interpersonal, peer, family, and community relations through a self-awareness process can even trigger emotionally harmful

reactions from the youth. Therefore, after duly informing the community youth services stakeholders of the potential benefit of raising consciousness on sociopolitical processes, a dialogue discussing the requirements and resources needed to implement and integrate these elements could follow. Some of the themes could be training local mentors to raise awareness about the role of increased power sharing and its effects or instructing and enabling mentors to facilitate conversations, games, and activities that would go beyond reflecting on interpersonal relations with their peers, families, and the community to transposing their experiences to broader sociopolitical processes pertaining to a more general reality of Aboriginal youth and population.

At the same time as the analysis was made following the CYE framework, an assessment of its applicability and relevance for Aboriginal youth emerged from the research fieldwork. The literature that was the basis for the development of the CYE framework appears to have been developed on the assumption that youth are “white” and “privileged”. “White” here would refer to Canadian mainstream citizens and their related Western value system and worldview, while “privileged” refers to average Canadian youth coming from a wide diversity of socioeconomic and ethnic environments or, “socially included” Canadian citizens that have adequate access to basic services such as: education, health, social services, employment, or proper housing (Kelly, 2010); come from relatively functional families providing emotional support; and would be provided with opportunities allowing political engagement and sense of power (Donnelly and Coakley, 2002). If representative of First Nation reserves of Ontario or of health and socioeconomic inequalities experienced by the Aboriginal people of Canada, this analysis showed that youth in First Nation communities come from a completely different sociocultural, political, and even epistemological situation. The CYE framework should provide space to

conceptualize historical and cultural factors; for example the history of oppression, politics of assimilation, land right struggles, or the reserve system that confines First Nation communities to be highly dependent on the white “benevolent” governmental system had extreme sociocultural effects on the Aboriginal communities. These reflect the long and challenging list of economic, employment, health, housing, justice, and safety and social inclusion inequalities experienced by the Aboriginal population of Canada (Canadian Human Rights Commission, 2013).

The CYE framework seemed sometimes inadequate to the complex challenges facing these youth. Even trying to organize a “welcoming and safe environment” within a First Nation community can be a major challenge. WRFN’s governance is extremely supportive and committed to the YLP and has provided important resources and support for the youth, but in general, the life hardships experienced by the youth and the community make it difficult to simply apply the CYE framework. We have to be aware of the Aboriginal youths’ potentially troubling context of trauma. Before being able to think about political processes, recreational practitioners must be aware of the fact that most youth have experienced or are experiencing deeply distressing experiences. Mentors report dealing frequently with “behaviour management” issues, as we would call them, but would more accurately be compartments related to multiple traumas and personal fears. How could youth even consider reaching these proposed levels of reflection on political processes when they most likely have to deal with deep wounds? How can you move away from trauma when you are experiencing it as part of your everyday life?

Tantrums, mood swings, youth reproduce violence that is lived in their environment because that’s what they know, that’s what makes them feel safe. So hurting a peer, attracting the attention negatively, disturbing, bullying, are all states that need to be treated carefully. What triggers a sudden tantrum,

closeness, cries, hyperactivity, are all related to trauma, grief, dysfunctional families...A “safe environment” is a place where the drum will calm them, the stories of the Elders and the teachings of their culture and tradition. This is the very first step towards breaking the cycle of trauma. (Clara, March 4, 2014)

Jennings et al. (2006) proposed in the first “welcoming and safe environment” dimension that space has to be created so the youth are free to be themselves in a space that increases self-confidence and opportunities for growing (p. 41), as well as favours positive identity development (p. 51). In a “normal” Canadian setting, creating such space can be seen as the simplest dimension to implement, but from the perspective of the local Elders, it was the most important and central stage of the framework where “safety” is relevant to “culture and grounding.”

What is it to know your environment? It is to know who you are, being able to articulate it and celebrate who your ancestors want you to be, determine and understand your “relations,” your connections; know that your environment is also nature, your relationship with and teachings of nature. It is also to establish the foundations of a strong grounded being that is in good relation with others, with its ancestors, with nature. (Clara, March 4, 2014)

So this welcoming and safe environment echoes with finding who you are, and for this, youth need to reconnect with the Elders, the knowledge keepers; youth need the drum; they need to get through this re-grounding process that would give them a fundamental strength to become great leaders. Interestingly, “knowing our relations” echoes Wilson’s (2008) depiction of Indigenous epistemology, where he suggests:

An Indigenous paradigm comes from the foundational belief that knowledge is relational. Knowledge is shared with all of creation. It is not only interpersonal relationships, not just with the research subjects I may be working with, but it is a relationship with all of creation. It is the cosmos, it is with the animals, with the plants, with the earth that we share this knowledge. It goes beyond this idea of individual knowledge to the concept of relational knowledge...". (p. 74)

Experiencing many cultural ceremonies, being confronted daily with this different epistemology and observing youth's involvement, commitment, and dedication made me reflect on the centrality of culture and traditions within the discussed pathways to youth empowerment. This excerpt from my field notes was inspired by these reflections:

Knowing who you are is being able to present your 'bundle': here's my bundle, this is who I am. This is the first step to breaking the cycle of trauma; accept and sustain the gift of life: know who you are where you belong, know your role and responsibilities. Once this is reached, here's the revolution where young people stand. This is when youth proceed to develop whichever critical thinking and reflect on further socio historical and political contexts; recognizing trauma and move away from it; educating 'ourselves' on treaties, on land rights, on human rights, on Aboriginal demographics and youth on decolonizing processes; on the Idle No More; on activism; on revolution.

(Personal Journal Entry, June 3, 2013)

Overall, the framework enabled an interesting analysis as it allowed the expression of local voices and highlighted rich experiences of the YLP, though the fragmentation of these

experiences within six interconnected dimensions felt sometimes inadequate or unsupportive of a more holistic and relational epistemology. Perhaps an idea would have been to provide a richer description of fewer situations in which two or three dimensions could have been analyzed and discussed simultaneously.

Conclusion

This paper systematically applied the CYE framework to a First Nation youth leadership program illustrating experiences conducive to youth empowerment. The discussions referring to the attributes of each key dimension and the fieldwork in general led to the assessment of the effectiveness and relevance of the framework for Aboriginal populations. It was argued that for a CYE to enable collective efforts to create sociopolitical change, a healing through culture and grounding dimension should be considered as a central empowering process. It would also be interesting to think about how the framework could be more flexible and integrate local epistemologies, which would avoid fragmenting experiences, relations, and knowledge by revealing a more relational and holistic analysis.

Further studies could lead to a remodeling of the approach to “empowerment” within the context of Aboriginal populations. Even though this analysis cannot claim to be representative of the whole Aboriginal population, research and other experiences show that these highlighted differences can be recognized in many other First Nation communities.

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Chapter 3

Unlearning Through Experience: Understanding My Right To Play

Summary

This autoethnography moves through the author's experiences as a young practitioner and academic in the sport-for-development field. Herein, the author reflects on his time spent with a fly-in community in northern Ontario interning with the sport-for-development organization Right To Play's Promoting Life-skills in Aboriginal Youth (PLAY) program. The author's internship is discussed in accordance with later ethnographic experiences in Whitefish River First Nation and the local PLAY program as a part of his Master's degree research. This paper intends to contribute to a paucity of academic writing discussing critical reflections of privileged and Western discourses missing in the sport-for-development field; as such, the desire to contribute to community development through sport and the seemingly concomitant expert and benevolence discourse that justifies most practices working with marginalized groups are questioned. Furthermore, the binary between mainly privileged sport-for-development practitioners/academics and the communities served are deconstructed to highlight how outside practitioners/academics procure benefits that do not always reach intended program participants. The author concludes with a conceptualization of unlearning through experience; arguably, this notion lends to relational practices and power-sharing in sport-for-development delivery.

The -30oC air felt harsh on my sweat-soaked face: the moisture from my heavy breathing started to form icicles on my beard, and the ice socks and mitts that were supposedly able to keep you warm in all temperatures, according to the SportChek salesman, were slowly failing my numbing feet and hands. To take my mind away from the cold, my thoughts ironically fell upon memories of playing hockey on my family's pond with all the friends I could convince to bear the Alberta winter some 15 years ago. I was a lot tougher then, I thought to myself. My thoughts quickly came back to the present hockey game on this northern Ontario reserve's outdoor rink. It was a pick-up game, but I still took every chance to set my teammates up for a goal so they would feel inclined to invite me back for future games.

The rink was quite worn down: the nets were rusted and the mesh weathered, the uneven boards were layered with graffiti, and cement patches on the rink's surface proved to be an added challenge to our hockey game. It was 11:00 p.m. on a Saturday night, and the rink was the busiest place on reserve. I looked over at the group of teenage girls hanging out in the players' bench with some of the guys who were taking a break from the ongoing match; I couldn't believe they would brave this cold, but then again, if they weren't here they would have to be at home because the youth center had not been operating for some months now.

I had been living in this community for close to 2 months, and I felt proud that the youth knocked on my door to see if I would join the hockey game; this was quite a different experience than my first hockey game on reserve. I reflected on that first game when Josh, who was one of the youth to knock on my door this night, refused to tell me his name. I think it was after my third failed attempt to learn his name that I realized it wasn't because I was mumbling or spoke too softly – he really didn't see it as necessary to share. After the fact I thought to myself that it was a bit rude not to share – especially since we were teammates and I kept passing to him. He didn't

even give me a chance; however, as that first hockey game was at the onset of my placement, I reflected that the negatives could have been compounded ten-fold, yet it wouldn't have mattered: I was working with Right to Play!

This narrative is from one of my experiences during a three-month placement working in a fly-in Indigenous reserve in Northern Ontario, Canada (Community #1¹), for the sport-for-development organization Right To Play (RTP). I came to know RTP through various academic activities while studying at the University of Alberta's Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation. These activities influenced me to pursue working with RTP after I finished my degree. I was not a keen academic; however, I found myself wanting to learn, research, study, and do well with anything that related to sport-for-development and community development – and RTP, in my eyes, was the leader in these areas. Although I had a new academic passion, I was attracted to practical experiences and thought academics would give me the credentials needed for a career in sport-for-development. Thus I took every opportunity to gain practical experience, in accordance with my education, with the overall intention to build a resumé conducive to securing a job at RTP.

I traveled to Thailand and Cambodia during two different summers with Play Around the World², and I also received a diploma from the International Youth Leadership Education Program, International Academy in Denmark, where we studied sport for all models from an international perspective. Locally, I volunteered with Edmonton sport-for-development organizations such as Hockey Education Reaching Out Society, and I improved my skills as a

¹ I will be referring to this Northern Ontario reserve as Community #1, because we currently do not have permission to use the community's name.

² Play Around the World is a service-learning course offered by the Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation, University of Alberta, that sends students to Asia to help deliver play, recreation, physical activity, and sport to children and youth of all abilities.

sport instructor and facilitator through numerous jobs. My education and practical experiences solidified an in-field internship with RTP in January 2012, and I felt this was the next step in a career as a practitioner in sport for development. I excitedly quit my job as a program supervisor for Sports for Kids to start my internship in Community #1. The foundation of this paper is from my time in Community #1; however, it has been my studies in the University of Ottawa's Human Kinetics Master's program and conducting community-based research with Whitefish River First Nation (WRFN) that have provided me the space to process critically my previous experiences as a sport-for-development practitioner and junior researcher.

While I was living in WRFN, it quickly became apparent that I was there to learn and not to share my "expert" advice. As a result I became determined to change my seemingly naturalized desire to speak for others. Conversations I had with, and teachings I subsequently received from, WRFN youth, parents, Elders, and community leaders along with fellow academics instilled in me a desire for decolonizing practices (Brigg & Bleiker, 2010; Chilisa, 2012; Darnell & Hayhurst, 2012; Kay, 2009). I could no longer justify providing recommendations to WRFN RTP programming based solely from my worldview. Furthermore, I feared an injustice to those who shared their stories if I proceeded from my privileged space of uncritical whiteness. I felt this did not encapsulate the intricacy of my proposed sport-in-community-development research, as these layers of inquiry needed to start from my own experiences, not from the experiences of those whom I perceived as needing the "development." I was humbled by this guided approach to research, which also directed me to an exploration of methodologies conducive of self-critical inquiry that intended to honor the shared stories I had the privilege to hear. After I returned home from WRFN, I would take every opportunity to engage with these issues through continued reading and conversations with fellow students and

academics, along with continued reflections of my experiences and conversations while in WRFN.

One such inquiry exemplified the influential dialogue I was seeking. I presented my research at the North American Society for the Sociology of Sport conference, describing my time in the field with RTP as an intern and academic. The panel of presenters was asked questions, mostly centered on sport-for-development and Aboriginal communities. A doctoral student then commented about his perception of the mainly white scholars working, theorizing, and “developing” Aboriginal communities. He expressed his level of concern and inner struggle with this notion. He went on to state, “in all of this work, what is missing are the voices of the people who are conducting research and doing work in our communities; we need to hear your voices as well.” This man’s thoughtful comment was one of many stories and conversations that inspired my attempt at writing an autoethnography.

Deciding to write autoethnographically was, nevertheless, not an easy decision, as there is a level of vulnerability in self-reflection and requires a different style of writing to adequately represent my experiences and those of the people who were involved. I can say confidently that the aforementioned qualities of vulnerability and reflexivity are not regularly ascribed to me. Even though I do think I am a reflexive person, expressing these thoughts through narratives is not something I’m intuitively inclined to do, as my professors would attest. For me, however, the fear of failing is not adequate to justify avoiding this endeavor, as I believe it is a necessary and productive way for me to articulate the findings of my research.

Since I had no previous exposure to autoethnography, I began to read academics such as Ellis and Bochner (1996, 2006), Sparkes (1996, 2000), Anderson (2006), Brigg & Bleiker (2010), and Forde (2013). These authors influenced my proposed approach to autoethnography,

which I understand to be positioned along a spectrum. Debate over what constitutes an autoethnography developed distinct differences: most notable is Anderson's (2006) analytic autoethnography contrasted with Ellis and Bochner's (2006) claim for a continuation of evocative autoethnography. Similar to Forde (2013), I find myself variously situated along the evocative/analytic spectrum; however, I am perhaps more drawn to an analytic approach, as I worry an evocative autoethnography of my privileged space will uncritically espouse my own whiteness by "using feelings of guilt to restore my own agency" (Forde, 2013, p. 5), concurrently missing the purpose of challenging oppressive practices (King, 2005; Razack, 2007).

Furthermore, I worry that my perceived critical self-reflexivity will unintentionally eschew the perpetuated colonized/colonizer binary by a simple acknowledgement of my place within it, which inadvertently justifies my research and work with Indigenous communities (Allen-Collinson, 2012; Mykhalovskiy, 1996; Sparkes, 2000). Indeed, the reader may miss my intention to "recursively draw upon personal experiences and perceptions to inform broader social understandings and upon our broader social understandings...which enrich our self-understandings" (Anderson, 2006, p. 390). For this reason, I believe the analytic autoethnography element has the potential to "not only truthfully render the social world under investigation but also transcend the world through broader generalization" (Anderson, 2006, p. 388).

The subsequent text will move through my experiences as a young practitioner and academic in sport for development and chronicle the accompanying struggles, teachings, and reflections thereon. My intention is to discuss, as an outsider (a white middle-class male working with Indigenous communities), the desire to contribute to community development through sport. Although I do not question my intention, or that of others in the field, for community

development, I do hope to expose and confirm neo-colonialist practices in sport-for-development that may resonate with other students, academics, and practitioners (Darnell & Hayhurst, 2011; Guest, 2009; Hayhurst, 2009). I start by explaining my desire to help and to make a difference, which suggests a sense of benevolence – dangerously minimizing empowerment and local voices and knowledge. Yet I continue to justify perusing Aboriginal-based community development work through my ostensibly concomitant expertise (Darnell, 2007).

Next, I will discuss the development beneficiary dichotomy: certainly I, as an outsider practitioner/academic, procure benefits both professionally and personally through work experience and societal constructs of working in “exotic” sport-for-development locations; however, unequivocal benefits cannot always be claimed for the partnering communities (Forde, 2013; Tiessen & Heron, 2012). My personal and professional benefits are demarcated through societal perceptions of development work and neo-liberal policies (Hayhurst, 2009).

I will conclude with my paradigm shift through graduate studies research that led to a humbling unlearning experience. I propose that this shift is necessary for relational and power-sharing practices in community development through sport. Although I struggle with the explicit statement of “future practices in sport-for-development,” as I am still in the unlearning process (perhaps one that may endure for life), in this moment I do believe there is a place for an outsider working and researching in the sport-for-development arena. Overall, I will deem this research successful if critics are able to reflect on their own practices in research in the field and, perhaps more importantly, engage in building mutual relationships and dialogue. Brigg & Bleiker (2010) exemplify this point gracefully:

Knowledge is social and relational, we will never be able to step beyond questions of power and legitimacy in the production and reception of knowledge. But this is precisely

the reason why autoethnographies are useful: they can expose and perhaps even shape these relations. (p. 791)

I continue my narrative in RTP's high-rise office in downtown Toronto.

Twenty-three-Year-Old Expert: Interning with RTP

I spent a week in Toronto for training delivered by the RTP staff before traveling to Community #1 to commence my internship with the Promoting Life Skills in Aboriginal Youth (PLAY) program. It was all a bit surreal, staying in downtown Toronto, being in the RTP office over-looking Nathan Phillips Square, having Johann Koss (former Olympian and founder / CEO of RTP) stopping by the boardroom to see what was going on, and experiencing the overall culture that RTP has built.

I quite enjoyed the week of training: the individuals who facilitated it were very talented motivators and facilitators. I came out of that week very confident in what I would be able to “bring” to the community in terms of capacity support, programming, and sustainability as a 23-year-old practitioner. I wrote in my journal, “I’m inspired to put all I have into this community. I want to walk away thinking I left everything I could” (personal journal entry, January 15, 2012), which was quite a naïve comment and a perpetuation of a perceived expert discourse, since I thought I would be the one to leave everything (i.e., my skills and talents).

After 2 days of travel, my intern partner and I landed in Community #1 and were greeted by Barry, the local community mentor. Barry's role was to facilitate RTP modules for the youth in the community through a partnered wage from RTP and the local Band and Council. It was our job, as interns, to help get the RTP programs off the ground and leave them sustainable after our departure. In theory, we were to find ways to build capacity for Barry to run the programs that RTP had deemed conducive to youth development. I worked closely with Barry, and we

made it our first priority to build relationships with community members. On the first day in the office, we were handed a community events calendar (craft night, flea market, movie night, etc.). I was surprised and happy to see the various events planned, as I had assumed there would be none. I recognized that these events would ease my community relationship building, as I would be welcomed in these spaces. Unfortunately this was not the case, as most of the events did not run. I turned this response – through my seemingly altruistic expert status – into a rationalized space in which sports and recreational activities I offer will be beneficial for the community and be part of the developmental process so badly needed (Darnell, 2007; Forde, 2013; Hartmann and Kwauk, 2011). Through this process of appropriation I wrote in my journal, “I came in feeling super confident, and I’m still confident I could run programs, but they need to last!” (journal entry, January 28, 2012). Ironically, my journal entry was similar to those of other RTP volunteers, about whom Darnell (2007) wrote, “there is a prescriptive tone regarding the correct means of undertaking (sport and/or development) activities, based on the rational knowledge of northern expertise” (p. 569). Through my privileged position as a white male, one that RTP accentuated through training, I was able to justify my actions as an expert even though I possessed minimal knowledge about local idiosyncrasies. This thought-line is canonical to neo-colonial practices in sport-for-development, and has been forewarned against as aversive to local empowerment (Darnell & Hayhurst, 2011; Guest, 2009; Nicholls, Giles, & Sethna, 2010).

Indeed, I went through my 3-month placement with this bestowed expertise paralleled with a sense of benevolence – my actions were self-justified because I always had the best interest of the community at heart. For example, as part of my role I was to gauge the feasibility of implementing a Youth Leadership Program (YLP) in the community. In accepting this challenge, I felt entitled – because of my benevolent nature and expertise in sport for

development – to report on how a YLP would be successful in Community #1 based solely on a few interactions with youth and no real counsel from the community mentor or other community leaders. I noted in my journal, “I don’t know how we can reach the youth. I can see how I want to build the program in my head, but to get the others to see it as something worth dedicating time to, and keep running after we are gone, seems ambitious” (personal journal entry, February 13, 2012). Certainly, I felt my expertise was the best solution for a sport in development program that would work for the community. Furthermore, since the youth were “hard to reach” and I showed frustration because “they are just logs and so unmotivated even when we try to appeal to what they want” (personal journal entry, February 19, 2012), I felt able to report to RTP that merely getting the youth to play sports and recreate constituted development and should be incorporated into the workplan. The fact that RTP was listening to my opinion, in the face of both my obvious desire to impress the organization by stating solutions and my lack of communication with local leaders and community workers, is a blatant perpetuation of historical power-relations between Indigenous communities and western practices, even with best intentions in mind (Darnell & Hayhurst, 2011; Levermore, 2009).

Darnell (2007) similarly discussed the problems of this simplified notion of using sport in development. In terms of my actions in Community #1, I postulated a type of development because I determined that the youth in the community did not have many opportunities to play. In other words, I defined the type of change necessary so youths’ lives could be positively impacted. Furthermore, taking the attitude of a sports evangelist (Giulianotti, 2004), I postulated that the mere fact of youth participation in a sport would constitute a successful sport-for-development program. By taking this attitude I was “depoliticizing the structures of

marginalization and oppression” (Darnell, 2007, p. 569) through a narrowed, Western worldview and, concurrently, reinforcing neo-colonial practices (MacEwan, 2001).

Where Is My Professional Development? The Development Beneficiary Dichotomy

While interning with RTP I focused much of my attention on building relationships with RTP staff and ensuring I was viewed as an asset to the organization; my goal was to separate myself from the other interns. Because of this attitude, I was more concerned with appealing to what I believed was RTP’s mandate than with listening to community members. I did not think it was necessary to learn about working with Aboriginal communities, colonialism, the residential school system, current oppressive policies, living in a remote area, oxycontin, and land-claims, among others. I would say all the politically correct statements: “I want to work in a Canadian setting because there are issues here in our backyard that should be focused on instead of only ‘third-world’ countries,” and “I am keen to learn and be an ally towards positive change for Aboriginal populations.” Although I truly desired to “make a difference” and work with marginalized populations, my actions were designed to position myself ahead of others for the career I felt I deserved. Through my internship I was determined to prove I could be successful in sport-for-development programming and management. Relatedly, I decided to study at the University of Ottawa because I felt a Master’s degree, and being able to continue working with Right To Play through my academics, would enable me to get a better job and eventually move up through RTP’s organization or one similar. The actual schoolwork was more of a formality.

Although I believed I was working towards positive change and thus benefiting the communities, my actions were always conducive to personal and professional gain. Tiessen and Heron (2012) discussed this sentiment: I was able to justify my actions because I was learning important skills beneficial in the Canadian job market even if the sport in development

participants' quality of life was minimally affected; thus, "what is learnt and the long-term impact of this learning...assumes a greater importance" (pp. 48-49). Furthermore, I was rarely asked to justify my actions in community because sport-for-development NGOs, funding agencies, government, and/or the media view such programs as inherently valuable. In this sense, my use of scarce resources and funding that could have been allocated to local indigenous NGOs is rationalized because my personal learning will seemingly benefit all Canadians (Tiessen & Heron, 2012).

Similarly, I felt naturally able to justify my sport-for-development work and research because it perpetuates "a celebration of abundance" (Cameron & Haanstra, 2008, p. 1476) of the West. Thus I am not questioned because individuals who support the organizations I work with, or support my endeavors, are "encouraged to imagine development awareness and charity as sexy" (Cameron & Haanstra, 2008, p. 1478) and to feel gratification for "helping" the disenfranchised populations. I perpetuated this sentiment in my conversations and interactions with others while in community and upon my return. I talked with family, friends, and individuals working with organizations I would like to be employed by, and through social media platforms, about the hardships I endured while working in "tough" or "exotic" locations: I gained personal and professional credentials (i.e., from potential employers, friends, and the people I met in general) to have lived such experiences. For example, during my time in Community #1, I wrote in my journal:

I am living in a place that was, overall, robbed of their dignity, traditions, and culture.

There is a lack of human spirit here and at some point it gets passed down to the

children...I need to keep this all in mind when I'm working with the community. I need

to be patient, compassionate, and resilient. I need to show I'm not going anywhere, even if I get brushed off all the time. (March 4, 2012)

I do not intend to minimize the historical context of social inequalities in Community #1. Western-driven residential schools removed traditions and culture, which led to a sense of shame for many Indigenous peoples; however, my patience and compassion were recognized as genuine, and seemingly guided the community towards a regained “human spirit.” In this context, it was my words and conversations with other “settlers” that justified my actions. Furthermore, my actions were contextualized to be in the best interest of the partnering communities through my shared privileged “abundance” with those who helped me along the way (i.e., by donating resources, money, or simply conversing with me). Yet the consequential focus is on my perceived benevolence: I procure personal and professional benefits by sharing these stories and my “selfless” acts. Coinciding is minimal awareness – or change – of social structures and processes in Community #1; this is a development beneficiary dichotomy.

I Benefited from Playing, Why Can't You? Reifying a Neoliberal Discourse

I previously discussed my personal and professional benefits from working in the field and how easily my actions were justified and accepted by larger society in general. Moreover, I indicated that offering sport and recreation programs to youth who do not have such opportunities posits a type of development. This line of thinking, one that I perpetuated, exemplifies a sport-for-development neoliberal discourse (Hayhurst, 2009). Indeed, the development beneficiary dichotomy can transcend personal benefits and be demarcated in the larger socio-political context. By providing space for youth to experience their right to play, sport-for-development organizations “engender the ‘right’ environment for individuals to lift themselves (and eventually) their communities out of their otherwise challenging and

marginalized circumstances” (Hartmann & Kwauk, 2011, p. 288). The programs I tried to implement encapsulated a sport-for-development policy norm of “leveling the playing field” so marginalized communities, if they take the opportunity, can “be on par” with their more “affluent” counterparts – like mine. This neoliberal paradigm has become the unconscious norm, where sport-for-development policies, rhetoric, and programming focus on the people’s innate desire to have a lifestyle similar to one idealized in the West – where local knowledge is left to the margins.

Such policy and sport-for-development rhetoric has been largely scrutinized; for example, the notions that “cost effective” development programs will thus lead to decreases in government social welfare funding (Hayhurst, 2009), that the perceived individualism in a neoliberal system inadvertently perpetuates power relations between dominant and marginalized groups (Darnell, 2010), and that such programs will “socialize” participants to fit the mold of a contributing member of society, thus contributing to neoliberal agendas (Hartmann & Kwauk, 2011). By merely providing space for children to play, be physically active, and gain the supposed skills from teamwork, sport-for-development programs are seemingly reducing participants’ burden on the health system, teaching behaviors and skills conducive to economic prosperity, and allowing participants to independently remove themselves from the structures that hinder change. This type of development espouses a development beneficiary dichotomy, which reinforces a neoliberal discourse. As a practitioner, I am able to be part of a program that provides children the same sporting opportunities I had growing up, which leaves me personally satisfied with my work, thus advocating for RTP’s methodology and inadvertently increasing their public image as agents of change. Once again, the tangible benefits of structural change with partnering communities are minimal.

Unpacking Privilege

This paper, thus far, has reflected my experiences before attending graduate school; however, the richness of personal and intellectual growth from my graduate school interactions has guided a self-reflective critique of my experiences in the sport-for-development field. This section will now focus on my fieldwork in WRFN, the teachings I received, and my path towards unlearning. First, I would like to conceptualize what I mean by unlearning.

I grew up in a rural Alberta town with an amazingly supportive family and community. I have pictures of both my parents coaching my little league baseball team; we have a running joke that at age seven I was a better skater than my dad, but he coached anyways because other parents would not commit the time; and I have countless memories of sport with friends and family at ball diamonds, gymnasiums, tracks, and arenas all over western Canada and the United States. Within this context, my parents taught me about volunteerism, giving back to the community, and striving to be a good person – as they truly exemplified themselves. However, my upbringing, my sporting experiences, my education, and my community interactions constructed a distinct worldview and privilege within me. Although I have the determination to “make a difference” in the sporting context I know best, it is still distinctly from my Western worldview. Furthermore, my privilege has subjugated my reality to the extent that I feel entitled to impart my understandings of community development and empowerment through sport – even when I am working with people who have a vastly different epistemology and worldview. This approach risks perpetuating invisible oppressive behaviors, where in contrast, deconstructive practices should be the norm (Bishop, 2002).

I am forever grateful for what my parents and community have taught and provided me – the desire to live with integrity and compassion will always be with me – but I have come to

learn that I need to unpack my privilege and unlearn my oppressive tendencies. Indeed, I learned about such topics as post-colonial and indigenous theory in my graduate school courses, which started my critical self-reflection. In reading this literature, I realized there was much more to sport for development than having a good attitude and a desire to influence positive change; however, it was during my field work that I came to conceptualize my own, drastically new path to sport-for-development as a researcher and practitioner. Thus, my path to unlearn privilege started when I made it my priority to “listen and learn and trust that the people who are central to the event know what they need” (Bishop, 2002, p. 124); the following text is the start of my journey.

Unlearning through Experience: Fieldwork in Whitefish River First Nation

In May, 2013, I traveled to WRFN and was greeted by my host family; they were a kind, welcoming family who made countless efforts to integrate me into the community: this included attending birthday parties, barbeques, and fish fries, fishing, going for drives to learn about the land, and watching National Hockey League playoff hockey. Along with my host family, many other community members went well out of their way to teach me about the traditions, spirituality, and community of WRFN. These teachings were accentuated through the spring ceremonies held during my fieldwork. Examples of these events included sweat lodge ceremonies, a drumming feast, family and individual sessions with the traditional healer, and youth circle chats. Specifically, my teachings came quickly in terms of the spring ceremonies as I was asked to help build a sweat lodge on my first weekend in WRFN. At this point I had an idea of what a sweat lodge was, but I had never built a lodge or participated in a sweat before. I wrote in my journal that night about my experience:

I started out the day helping build a sweat lodge; we picked rocks and gathered wood, while others found birch trees and gathered cedar. The eight men and I then attached the birch trees and made a round hut – tobacco layered the ground along with cedar. We put tons of blankets and tarps over the birch tree structure that then made a dome. Outside of the sweat lodge a fire was started and 20 round rocks were placed into it. We then went inside the cottage near the sweat lodge and made our offerings – a birch bark basket (one inside out for the spirits, one bark side out for the physical self). Inside the basket was a tobacco offering and some food to feed the spirits, because they need energy just as much as the physical body. I then threw the physical birch bark basket in the fire, placed the other basket near the fire, and entered the sweat lodge. Jon (the traditional healer) right away looked at me and said ‘right here boy’ and tapped the seat to his left. The other guys had been bugging me that I was in for a rough go and had been making jokes all day about being the newbie, and how white I am. I liked it because it felt like an initiation or sense of acceptance that I was present. Once the rocks (which I found out later are called “the Grandfathers”) were in and the door shut, it was completely black except for the glowing red Grandfathers; I have never seen rocks that color before.

Jon then proceeded to pour cedar water on the Grandfathers – the heat hit like a wall. Jon started drumming and singing with the other men using their rattles and singing as well. The Healer would stop and share with us the spirits that entered the lodge and why they were there. Some men came to the sweat because they had gone through loss and it was part of the grieving process, some because something happened in their personal life that they wanted spiritual guidance and others because it was a part of their

spiritual practice. Each of us had a chance to speak about what was on our minds and the reason we thought the spirits had brought us to the lodge.

I was told before the sweat that each of us has a spirit name that is used as our communication channel to the spirits. For example, when I speak to the spirits I start by saying my name. The lodge is a place that the healer gives names to people who do not already know theirs to strengthen the connection to the spirits. When it was my turn to speak, I asked Kenny if he could ask the spirits for my name. He handed me a rattle and we all started singing, drumming, and using our rattles. After we sang for awhile, Jon started speaking in a deep raspy voice in Anishinabe – he was saying the name the spirits had chosen for me and my clan. *Oh-zhaash-squo biness indizh-nikaaz mahengun dodem*. In English, “my name is Blue Thunderbird of the Wolf Clan.” Later that evening, Jon told me I was given that name because he could feel my closeness with family, which represented the Wolf Clan, and he said I have the ability to see into the future that represented my spirit name: Blue Thunderbird.

I cannot put into words the feeling I had during this whole experience: the pounding of the drum, the singing, the profound smell of cedar, the raw, deep heat, the sound of Jon’s voice speaking of the spirits, the men singing and drumming to help name me. I could feel the deep spiritual tie the men had to the ceremony; it was an experience like none I had before. (personal journal entry, May 12, 2013).

My sweat lodge experience evidenced that the way I construct health, well-being, healing, and spirituality is vastly different from how the people of WRFN do so. Reflecting on my first week in WRFN – specifically on the conversations I had with Charles (my host father) about spirituality, his traditions, his upbringing, and my experience sweating – I quickly learned

I was no longer the expert, but the student. By letting me into the community and showing me that I could view this experience as a learning opportunity, Charles helped me shift my thinking to reflect on my current and previous actions instead of focusing on my assumed priorities: program evaluation, community support of the program, and RTP's role in the community. In other words, situating my own privilege and worldview into my work was necessary because merely being an objective observer, researcher, and development worker would not stimulate critical reflection or relationality between the community and me (Wilson, 2008). Furthermore, if I continued with an expert mentality, I would perpetuate an ideological power "that allows an individual or group to influence others' concepts or reality and their idea of what is possible and valuable" (Bishop, 2002, p. 51). My intent is not to imply that the community members I was interacting with would allow such actions. In contrast, I suspect my actions were viewed as oppressive and would dismantle any potential positive relationship; however, acknowledging the potential negative effects of such oppressive attitudes could procure my continued path of unlearning both privilege and my seemingly invisible oppressive behaviors (Bishop, 2002).

Similar to the teachings I received from the healer, my host father, and other community members, were the influential interactions with the youth participants in RTP's program, as they were the focus of the research project. During my first 2 weeks, I helped facilitate the YLP, which ran 2 nights a week, and I also attended and helped with the sport-a-thon fundraiser. By participating in the sport-a-thon, in particular, I established a rapport with the youth as we played 12 hours of sport together over the span of one night. Through these interactions, I found myself quickly focusing on the similarities between my upbringing and community rather than the youths' experience in WRFN; however, it was necessary to once again espouse a critical approach that does not focus on my own ideas of youth development.

Along with my personal experiences and teachings from community members, the youth and their openness guided me to learn about their spirituality and realities growing up in WRFN. For example, the community held a youth circle chat with the healer which I also joined after Karen (the community mentor of RTP's local YLP) asked the youth if they felt comfortable with me being present. I wrote in my journal after the events:

Tonight was the youth circle with Jon. These events are for everyone in the community and advertised; however, of the 12 youth that attended, two were outside of the YLP program.

It started with Jon giving teachings about the feather, sweat lodge, clans, colours, and so on. He then passed the feather around and the youth didn't say much. Christy then asked about one of her dreams, which then led to an hour and a half conversation with the youth asking many questions, and were totally engaged. Jon started talking about addiction and how the Anishnawbe people are vulnerable to it. They need to honour those spirits as well (e.g., the alcohol and drug spirits). Another girl shared about a recurring dream she was having; Jon was very assertive and said this is about suicide. He gave her a large handful of tobacco and told her to burn it as an offering to the spirits. She was deeply moved by this and is now attending the sweat later in the week.

Although I see many similarities between youth sport-for-development programs here in WRFN and my own childhood, there is a distinct epistemological difference, one that I have read about, but this was not realized until I felt and experienced it. And when I say experience it, it took the youth and the larger community to allow me this opportunity beyond just "playing sports" and "researching" sport-for-development

initiatives but to feel and learn about a different worldview, to conceptually think differently about community development. (personal journal entry, May 15, 2013)

My Contribution and Community Recommendations: Dirty Words?

I credit the aforementioned experiences in WRFN and other relationships I built through graduate studies for my shift in thinking. Indeed, I am still in the process of understanding my contribution to community development in a relational approach, thus my intent is not to conclude with proposed best practices in research and community development as an outsider, but to highlight my ongoing process of deconstructing a deeply engrained oppressive structure and the community's role in this process. Bishop (2002) succinctly noted, "because we carry the role...of oppressor very deeply rooted in us, it becomes very difficult for alternative ways of functioning. Cooperation, equality, consensus, negotiation, and power sharing are constantly sabotaged" (p. 71). Sadly, the qualities that are "constantly sabotaged" are exactly those which the WRFN personified and which I enjoyed while living in the community and conducting my research project. There was an openness that afforded a level of communication, which was not a power struggle, but a dialogue between the community and me that defined the relationship. Moreover, I was treated with equality. A Chief from a British Columbian reserve was invited to speak at a community event. What I wrote about the event in my journal exemplifies my point:

Today I attended a guest speaker who was invited by the community. The premise of it was Aboriginal economic prosperity and argued reserves should be independent of "white person handouts," and community leadership should promote Aboriginal-owned and -operated business. I agree with many of his comments, as everyone should have equal access to business opportunities; however, while talking, the

speaker had a very distinct “us vs. them” approach and argued Aboriginal peoples “need to take back what is theirs” because “white people are taking our jobs and opportunities.”

Clara, after the talk had finished, came up to me and gave me a big hug. She then looked at me and said, “You know, Jared; I have a sense that you have been here before and I appreciate everything you’ve done, and others have told me this too. So when he talks about “the white guy,” we do not see you that way; we see you as part of the community no matter the colour of your skin.” (personal journal entry, May 28, 2013)

All of my experiences in graduate school, most notably during my time in WRFN, compound a rich experience that allowed space for me to think critically about my actions and about how, moving forward, I wanted to be in relation to those with whom I worked. Thus my promise to WRFN and others who were part of my journey is to continually unlearn, reflect on my actions, be open to the people I work with, ask questions, be vulnerable, and try to look introspectively before I react, because my actions and reactions may not have the effect I intend even if I mean well. Through this promise, I plan to continue my path to deconstructing oppressive actions and achieving a relational approach to research and community work.

In return, my recommendation to WRFN and other Indigenous communities is to afford similar opportunities to other outsiders. My hope is for communities to understand that as outsiders doing community work, we want nothing more than to see healthy families. What needs to be deconstructed is how we view and work towards reconciliation and healing through a different worldview and culture, which is no easy task. Thus, if communities show the same humility, patience, and openness that were afforded me to other outsiders, I feel that holistic positive change can be achieved. However, I worry this recommendation, once again, positions Indigenous communities as the ones who need to change to fit into a Western system, one that

encourages recursively living past, colonial ideals. Furthermore, I worry my recommendation can be misconstrued as meaning that Indigenous communities seemingly need to work harder towards reconciliation, while more privileged citizens do not. Euro-Canadians of generations past constructed this reality, one that has been engrained into society's everyday practices, and have conditioned us to think that to ask for more is selfish. But I guess I am asking for more: for Aboriginal peoples to continually be patient, humble, and stronger than one should ever have to be.

Outsiders, for the most part, truly have the best of intentions. Similarly, the intentions of Western organizations in sport-for-development (e.g., Right To Play), are altruistic. What needs to change is "best of intentions" mentality to a relationship so that Indigenous communities benefit and prosper. Thus, I feel having similar opportunities and relationships I was able to build would garner a different approach to community development holistically. This could take shape through various means, but what is important is the openness on behalf of outsiders to different ways of knowing, and the patience and guidance of the community to offer these teachings.

Conclusion

This autoethnography's purpose was to share my journey as a young practitioner and researcher in sport for development. I reflected on previous field placements, my benevolent attitude, and my overall desire to help, which framed a discussion highlighting the negative effects of such attitudes on local knowledge and empowerment. This attitude, and perceived local benefits of my expertise, created a development beneficiary dichotomy where, as a sport-for-development practitioner, I benefited both professionally and personally, whereas local communities received minimal benefits.

I attribute these reflections to my guided realization that for me to be a researcher and practitioner from a distinctly different worldview, I need to work within myself before “contributing” to the sport-for-development programs in Aboriginal communities. I cannot put into words the gratitude I have for WRFN and my overall graduate studies experience to allow me the space for self-inquiry, all the while being challenged to go deeper to start the process of deconstructing a lifetime of learning.

My overall goal is to advocate continually for equality with and empowerment within marginalized populations through sport-for-development programming. This sentiment has been reinforced through graduate school, but with a new desire to conceptualize best practices in a relational context. Yes, I am likely to make decisions that are not in the best interest of the communities in the future – I am not suddenly a model citizen for community development. The risk of working against the best interests of a community does not sit well with me; however, being complacent and perpetuating Canadians’ seemingly great ability to personify equality and human rights while pleading innocent to ubiquitous colonialism, would be far worse, and so I am driven to continue unlearning oppressive practices. This, I hope, will be my contribution to true equality through the sport-for-development field I know best.

Thus, my hope for this paper is to allow space for a continued reflection towards deconstructing this oppressive system within us, which will lead to beginning the process of decolonization in sport-for-development research and programmatic practices (Darnell & Hayhurst, 2012). If this goal were actualized, we would see a more relational approach in practice, and as outsiders we would be more inclined to advocate and build sport-for-development programming through local understandings of current sociopolitical realities. Further, we would see a more concentrated effort in advocating for and ultimately living where

cultures can safely develop, shift, and prosper within localized contexts – a vision that can be supported by all individuals.

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General conclusion

The overall purpose of this thesis was to explore sport-for-development experiences from the perspective of WRFN YLP program participants and from the perspective of a sport-for-development practitioner. This was accomplished through two stand-alone manuscripts. The first applied a CYE framework to the youths' experiences in YLP. The second manuscript was an autoethnographic account of the researcher's experiences in sport-for-development.

In terms of the first article, the research intended to contribute to the paucity of literature on local understandings of sport-for-development that employs sociological perspective (Coakley, 2011). Specifically, the youth were able to share and reflect on their YLP experiences through the photovoice activities. This was also supplemented with rich observations by the researcher of the empowerment processes the youth identified. Although aspects of all six steps of the CYE framework were identified, adaptations would ensure the model supported cultural grounding and traditional knowledge that were identified as main contributions to youth empowerment in WRFN. The CYE framework, in this sense, lacked adaptability for local knowledge.

The first manuscript was then juxtaposed with an autoethnography. I felt this self-reflexive approach epitomized my overall graduate school experience: it was challenging, rich, and unexpected. It was my attempt to articulate these challenges in a way that I hope honours WRFN community members and their gracious, humble, and open way of guiding me to think differently. Moreover, when I arrived to start my graduate studies, I was quickly surrounded by people who challenged and pushed me intellectually. My research team, the Aboriginal Research Advisory Committee, Right To Play staff, among others continually challenged me "to go deeper". In ways, this autoethnography was as much for me as anyone else, as I hope through

this self reflection I will continue to unpack my privilege and strive to work in true partnership with communities; however, I do hope this paper serves a dual purpose. I hope practitioners and academics can relate to their own practices and experiences through this narrative that perhaps engenders certain self-reflection.

Future Directions

The data collected through this research has laid the groundwork for future papers. Notably, future research could explore adapting the CYE framework to incorporate cultural grounding and traditional practices in youth empowerment programs while taking into consideration the diversity of localized Indigenous knowledge. Also, the CYE framework was mainly looked through the experience of one community. Through the research program and partnership with RTP, it would become possible to look into a wider number of community experiences and see how CYE is experienced. Furthermore, the photovoice events that materialized with the YLP participants were only mentioned in this thesis. The quality of reflection, power-sharing in the research process, and the ability to highlight the youths' strengths in community through photovoice could be documented. In this sense, future publications can articulate the intricacies of the experience of conducting photovoice in WRFN.

Appendix

Ethical principles

1. Relational accountability implies the fact that all parts of the research process are related, from inspiration to expiration, and that the researcher is not just responsible for nurturing and maintaining this relationship but is also accountable to ‘all relations’

- Always negotiate with the community the parameters of the research project. Recognition that partnered-research starts with community.
- Negotiate and discuss research needs with the community and organizational partner prior to beginning research.
- Presentation of project information sheet
- Forthright that Research is for public dissemination.
- Clarity about use of data: transparency about intention purposes (who will be using the information and for what purposes).
- Community involvement, participation and consultation are required throughout the whole research process.
- Research must respect the privacy, protocols, dignity, and individual and collective rights of Aboriginal Peoples.
- Community interests should be supported, benefits maximized and harm reduced or avoided.

2. Respectful representation should be supported through every aspect and partners of the research, through humility, generosity, patience and openness to any prevailing ideas and worldviews

- Awareness around language & terminology being used.
- Understanding of historical context
- Respect protocols of oral tradition.
- Include community partners in the production of knowledge

3. Reciprocal appropriation assures ongoing and mutually beneficial outcomes for communities, institutions and researchers.

- Community Document: discuss prior option to produce separate deliverable for community (doc. Video, PP presentation)
- Clarify what are the benefits for the community

4. Rights and regulations refer to the fact that Indigenous communities must own and control data through reporting and publication:

- Ensure community partners have the right to edit and to review interview notes.
- Ensuring full communications with community/participants about dissemination plans.
- Data will be accessible to the participants, all published reports will be cleared with the community before publication and findings will be shared and accessible to the community (i.e., copies of project, conference papers, and published material will all be made available locally).

- Authorship process to clarify. Students are single author however future publications can be co-authored.
- Understand the difference between student thesis process and academic publishing
- Free, prior, informed consent
- Build in funds to involve participants in dissemination (ex: attending and co-presenting at conferences)
- Authoring, conferencing, ownership, accessibility, data collection process, preparation, communications and transparency.

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