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Everything is at stake; yet nothing is at stake: Exploring meaning making in Game-Centred Approaches

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Abstract

While not wishing to cover old ground in articulating the promise or continued promise of phenomenology within the physical education and sports domains, this paper aims to explore the ‘human’ nature of the Game-Centred Approach (GCA) from an existential phenomenological perspective. In a recent review of literature on the current state of research on game-centred approaches, Harvey and Jarrett (2013) made the call for phenomenological-oriented empirical studies. Urging the academic fraternity to embrace such “participatory epistemologies” (Davis, Sumara and Luce-Kepler, 2000), is an extremely positive and important step by the authors. This is because, although they do not explicitly make the point, to call for the embrace of phenomenological-oriented research into GCAs, the authors are accepting the fundamental importance of individual experience and meaning in games teaching. If we focus on the individual it then becomes a distinct possibility of structuring increasingly meaningful game-centred practice. In this respect we analyze Martin Heidegger's notion of “being-in-the-world”, and illustrate how Arnold’s three categories of meaningful movement – primordial, contextual and existential (1979) – can help facilitate ideas for pedagogical practice and provide an appropriate interpretive lens for future research into game-centered approaches.

Keywords: Game-Centred Approaches; Existential-phenomenology; Meaning-making; Peter Arnold; Physical education

Abstract

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Introduction

In westernized Physical Education (PE) curricula such as Australia, England and North America, games continue to exert a fundamental influence upon structure and provision in PE (Capel and Blair, 2007; Curtner-Smith, 1999). This is not surprising considering their powerful cultural, historical and social legacy. However, molecularised approaches to games

teaching (Kirk, 2010; Rovegno, 2002) that include Direct Instruction (Metzler, 2011) have catalysed the research community into a reconsideration of the pedagogical worth of games within global PE curricula.

This molecular view, reflecting the hegemony of biomechanics, helps teachers break down games content into the smallest component parts of technique before introduction to the game; tactical and perceptual aspects of skills are added methodically to the technique (Kirk, 2010). This process might result in movement patterns becoming increasingly abstract and as far removed from the game to render them meaningless. Affective, social and cultural components of the game are often considered as legitimate casualties of ‘molecularisation’ (Rovegno, 2002). It is these deeply personal affective, social and cultural perspectives of games and game-play that have to be explored in order for meaning to be wrought (Light, Harvey and Mouchet, 2013).

TGfU and other game-centred approaches (GCAs) attempt to address the shortcomings presented by the molecularisation of games, previously described, by placing the learner and the game at the heart of games teaching. It is, relatively speaking, a developing area of academic interest but literature reviews have already illustrated its contribution in engaging young people from a number of theoretical and pedagogical perspectives (Harvey and Jarrett, 2013; Oslin and Mitchell, 2006; Stolz and Pill, 2014).

Werner, Thorpe and Bunker (1996) propose that the traditional and enduring games teaching model, referred to as the Technical Model (TM), typically follows a series of highly structured lessons relying heavily on the teaching of skills and techniques. It is concerned primarily with the development of control and combination experiences through refining and

mastering tasks. They further state that once skills are mastered or refined, it is assumed that these skills can be successfully transferred into game situations. The GCA stands as the complete antithesis of the TM since it starts with a *game form* (Thorpe, Bunker and Almond, 1986) and this contextualises the motor, cognitive or social-affective outcomes of the lesson.

What is really interesting, in the context of our discussion, is the epistemological change that has been undertaken in our understanding of the GCA since its inception. It has gradually shifted to a position that reflects a socially constructed and situated perspective (Kirk and MacPhail, 2002). Light in a number of volumes (2008; 2013) has coined the phrase ‘Complex Learning Theory’ (CLT) to encapsulate the “varied constructivisms” (Davis and Sumara, 2003, p.137) that have helped advance our understanding of learning and knowledge development within GCAs.

Under this broad constructivist banner are included, what are referred to as, *Participatory Epistemology* (see Davis, Sumara and Luce-Kepler, 2000); theories of knowledge that actually bridge the subject-object divide, where meaning is perceived as existing “in potentia”; that is to say the ‘meaning’ of an object or phenomenon does not lie in its measurement but, rather, out there *waiting* to be perceived in subjective experience. It is this *dialectic* between the human mind and the object or phenomenon that ultimately enacts meaning (Tarnas, 1991). All social constructivist approaches reject behaviourist theories of knowledge as pre-determined and external. Instead learning is an active, social and interpretive act.

Knowledge construction, viewed from a situated perspective can be considered as the product of the interaction between the social and cultural environment and the new and prior

experiences of the learner (Kirk and MacPhail, 2002; Wallian, Chang, Nachon, Couty and Grehaigne, 2003). The conception of the GCA within a situated theoretical framework also means a fundamental change in the research design of studies took place during this period; away from knowledge-based approaches that viewed the learner as a passive and abstract performer isolated from their environment, towards the study of knowledge-in-action (Oslin and Mitchell, 2006).

This prioritization of knowledge-in-action or ‘know-how’, as it is more commonly described, provides legitimacy for the notion of the body thinking (Light and Fawns, 2003). Schön’s, short sporting definition of know-how illustrates this belief: “Common sense admits the category of know-how, and it does not stretch common sense very much to say that the know-how is in the action-- ...a big league pitcher's know-how is in his way of pitching to a batter's weakness, changing his pace, or distributing his energies over the course of a game.” (1995, p. 30). Schön intimates that know-how is more than a mere physical act; it is an *intelligent* physical act.

Perhaps the most vivid and evocative description of this *situated* learning, in a GCA context, can be attributed to Wallian *et al.* (2003) who describe the learner as “... [constructing] his/her knowledge while dialoguing with the context” (p.116). This metaphor of the performer, or learner, actually in communication with the environment, through a process of co-construction facilitated through the Franco phonic Debate-of-ideas (Wallian and Chang, 2007), illustrates the centrality of the learner in a world that he or she is irrevocably part of.

A striking recommendation in Harvey and Jarrett's (2013) review was the call for more phenomenological research that addresses the centrality of the learner within game-centered practice.

The use of research designs and data collection techniques that aid the examination of different philosophical understandings of GCAs (e.g. ethnographic, phenomenological and psycho-phenomenological) is **paramount** [emphasis added] to the further exploration of 'who the individual is' and 'how the learner is motivated to participate'...(p.15).

Indeed Harvey and Jarrett's message to the research community merely echoes and reinforces a growing number of advocacy and research papers within the field of PE and the movement sciences (Allen-Collinson, 2009; Brown and Payne, 2009; Fahlberg, Fahlberg and Gates, 1992; Kerry and Armour, 2000; Standal and Engelsrud, 2011; Stolz, 2013; Wessinger, 1994).

Furthermore, Stolz and Pill (2014) maintain that the learner needs to "see" (p.62) the value and significance of what is presented before them. Nevertheless, with the welcome co-constructed epistemological shift in game-centered practice whereby knower and known, subject and object become indistinguishable and situated (Kirk and MacPhail, 2002; Light, 2008; Light and Fawns, 2003; Wallian and Chang, 2007; Wallian *et al*, 2003) it is also beholden upon the academic and practitioner communities to explore the value and significance of what is presented from the learner's perspective, or to rephrase this: What does it mean to be a learner within a GCA environment? For if we focus on the "centrality of the learner" (Harvey and Jarrett, 2013, p.15) it then becomes a distinct possibility of structuring increasingly meaningful game-centred practice.

It is our contention that Peter Arnold's three categories of movement meaning (1979) – primordial, contextual and existential – can provide an appropriate interpretive lens, and provide a concrete and lucid focus for a future existential-phenomenological research agenda into GCAs. However, before describing these categories in more detail, an explanation of why existential-phenomenology, and naturally existential-phenomenological research, can take account of the centrality of the learner within the GCA is provided by exploring selected aspects of Martin Heidegger's (1927/1962) seminal work, *Being and Time*.

An existential-phenomenological research agenda

At this juncture we must emphasize to the reader that it is not within the scope of this article to provide a comprehensive discussion of phenomenology per se and contrasting phenomenological approaches to research. Authors that address these issues include Standal and Engelsrud (2011) in this journal, in addition to Allen-Collinson (2009) and Kerry and Armour (2000). The focus for this current paper is on the existential phenomenology of Heidegger (1927/1962) which emphasizes the unity of subject and object captured by the phrase "being-in-the-world". Within existential phenomenology a person is an individual but also a part of the world already there, and shared with others. The individual has the freedom and autonomy to act upon the world; to define and choose their future, subject to the constraints in which they were "thrown" (*geworfen*) into the world with. Heidegger (1953/1996) describes these constraints as fore-structures: language, culture, values, expectations, imagination and prior knowledge. Existential thinkers commonly describe this as a state of situated freedom (Fahlberg *et al.* , 1992; Nesti, 2006; Sartre, 1943/1956; Spinelli, 2005).

Individuals who accept their responsibility as existent beings to make choices in their lives are said to be living authentic lives, and experience the accompanying emotions of exhilaration, joy and camaraderie not forgetting anxiety, loneliness and alienation. To resist the hard and difficult decisions "...denies true existence in that it takes away choice and disburdens the individual of responsibility" (Arnold, 1979, p.40). Within a games context authenticity could be interpreted as a teacher giving students greater choice and responsibility with respect to solving problems, it might also manifest itself as a lone student disagreeing with a team strategy and illustrating the courage and conviction to articulate the reasons, or, indeed, a student questioning the purpose or necessity of particular constraints or conditions within a game-form. Yet, to experience this broad range of emotions, representative of an authentic existent being, the individual has to care about their situation. In the context of the GCA, the learner has to be a genuine stakeholder. The game-form must appear real, the decision-making possibilities latent with the potential for joy and jeopardy alike.

If it is our purpose is to explore a future research agenda within the GCA from an existential-phenomenological perspective that focuses on Being, we need to deconstruct Heidegger's a priori characteristic of existence "being-in-the-world". While Heidegger explains, "that it stands for a *unified* [author's italics] phenomenon...that cannot be broken up into its components" (1927/1962, p.49), he adds that "...this does not prevent it from having several constituent structures" (ibid).

Firstly it has a spatial characteristic ("In-the-world"). This locates Being in a particular setting or context. Therefore human experience must be explored within the context of the world and not in isolation from it; furthermore an account of experience must be provided within the socio-cultural and historical milieu (Fahlberg *et al.*, 1992). The second characteristic, "Being", implies a temporal quality, but also, as Heidegger states (1953/1996),

a mode of being, for example, teacher, student, official, game-player, spectator, etc. The third characteristic (“Being in”) can be thought of as our Being in relation to another; Heidegger refers to this as “Being with” (mitsein). Thus we arrive at an inter-subjective quality; the lived inter-personal space that we share with others (van Manen, 1997). This makes sense when we consider the nature of the GCA when viewed within a situated learning frame (Kirk and MacPhail, 2002).

Thus far we have established why an existential-phenomenological lens can be considered as providing an appropriate and insightful interpretation of GCA practice because it allows us to explore lived meaning of participants' “being-in-the-world”. Indeed this form of social practice can be seen as a microcosm of human existence (Arnold, 1979). Moreover the breakdown of “being-in-the-world” into “fundamental lifeworld existentials” can prove especially constructive when reflecting upon a future research agenda (van Manen, 1997). What does it mean, therefore, to become an authentic existential being within this situation that the learner finds him or herself?

We consider that Peter Arnold's (1979) three categories of movement meaning provide a lens that is useful in furthering our discussion. This lens brings the notion of “being-in-the-world” into a sharper, narrower and more lucid focus because of his emphasis upon the movement disciplines of sport and PE (see Table 1). Crucially, Arnold's philosophical sympathies lie closely to our own; indeed the influence of existential-phenomenological philosophy in his account is very clear.

An Arnoldian existential-phenomenological lens

Arnold's (1979) comprehensive philosophical articulation of movement meaning holds particular relevance to this discussion because of the existential and phenomenological framing of his account. Arnold influenced by Heidegger, amongst others, defines three categories of meaningful movement forms (primordial, contextual and existential) that come about because of one's experience of the world through the lived body. Indeed, we are not the first authors to consider the value of this specific Arnoldian frame of reference. Wessinger (1994) used the three movement categories to further her analysis of the lived meaning of scoring in the games world of fourth grade -children.

Primordial movement meaning ("in-the-world")

These forms of movement have the potential to provide meaning because they are good in and of them-self. Although it may have started out as having some instrumental purpose it is now deeply engrained and a part of ones being. Primordial movements are spontaneous, creative or skilled movements assimilated into the concreteness of one's own existence and become "mine" (p.31). He explains these forms of movement meanings are 'banked' and can be drawn upon whenever the subject is in need of "kinaesthetic pleasure" (p.26). He adds that, "A skill is a part of a person's autobiography of consciousness and therefore affects the way he [*sic*] views the world..." (p.31). Primordial movements are, hence, borne of the world and can play a part when a person is "thrown" into the world in the project of becoming an authentic sportsperson or games-player. An example within a games context might be performing 'Keepie Uppie' on the beach or in a park; once it might have been practiced as a part of intricate ball control, a means of outwitting an opponent, or even fundamental, in a modified and aesthetic sense, to a games very essence. Yet now it is performed for pleasure and the way it feels – it defines you, embodies who you are and what you are about.

Contextual movement meanings (“being-in”, “in-the-world”)

These are tied to particular movement frameworks, and have no meaning divorced of the specific situation itself (e.g. the rugby drop goal, the cricketing leg glance, the volleyball spike). Arnold insists in the case of soccer, for example, that one must first appreciate the rule bound social realities of the game. Rules are necessary for the game to exist at all: “I as a soccer player have to find my actions contextually meaningful within the rule structure of *this* [author’s italics] game (Arnold, 1979, p.36). This also applies to the tactics and strategies. Meaning comes from the efficacy of one’s own sub-projects (strategic and tactical propositions) and how these are accepted by the community and become fulfilled by being part of larger collaborative projects. As Wessinger (1994) observes:

Perhaps it is this aspect...that is particularly important. In the game of kickball, I *know* (authors italics) that all eyes are on me as I make it to first base, as I catch the ball for the out, as I successfully outrun the baseman, as I score a run for my team. Everyone knows that I have been successful in my individual project and in so doing I have also contributed to the actualization of my team's project. The worth of my existence is affirmed by my teammates. And I feel especially good if my achievement, my value, is noted by the teacher or someone I like a lot (pp. 435-436).

Naturally contextual movement meaning has beautiful symmetry with Kirk and MacPhail’s (2002) theory of the GCA as a social and situated construction. A learner-as-novice on the periphery of the community of practice may make a genuine and meaningful contribution in actualizing a solution to a tactical or strategic problem, and by his or her actions become an autonomously functioning agent.

Existential movement meaning (“Being”)

This refers to the lived, existent decisions that have to be made in sport and other movement contexts *in the moment*. Such existential dimensions include: freedom; responsibility; courage; isolation and anxiety (Yalom, 1980). Arnold (1979) contends that these dimensions are as much a part of movement contexts and practices since sport, as an example, is a microcosm of our existence. If one plays games one will, at some point, have to make that difficult decision, and make it alone – possibly alienating oneself to societal norms and expectations in the process. There is *always* a choice, that cannot be denied or ignored, but the individual must always choose in anguish and suffer the consequences. These instances are many and varied, and evident in all games. For example: making the last ditch rugby tackle or pulling out avoiding it; to volunteer to take a sudden death penalty in a football match or sink into the background; stealing a base to get home or risk being run out; to throw the Hail Mary when the clock is up and stake everything on that one final pass or be intercepted. You don't get the "armchair ride"; you are there in the moment, unable to put it off, and must take the responsibility of your actions (Arnold, 1979). These are examples of the true authentic decisions of which existential philosophers (e.g. Heidegger, 1927/1962; Kierkegaard, 1844/1944; Sartre 1943/1956) psychologists (e.g. Nesti, 2004; Spinelli, 2005) and therapists (Yalom, 1980) speak, and that human beings must make.

What we have done here is attempt to thematize Heidegger's "being-in-the-world" and provide a coherent sporting application for the purpose of clarity. Nevertheless, we reiterate a point we made earlier, in that these should be seen as a whole – a totality of experience (Heidegger, 1927/1962, van Manen, 1997) – otherwise we merely succeed in creating another dualism. Certainly it is not difficult to see how "being-in-the-world" can be interpreted within *each* of Arnold's categories of movement-meaning. But in order to ensure that it is clear how the GCA resonates with some of our interpretations of Heideggerian existential-

phenomenological thought and Arnoldian movement-meaning, we wish to draw on examples of current research literature within GCAs to explicate these links in more depth. In doing so, we offer suggestions for both a future research agenda within GCAs and also some pedagogical applications of Heideggerian existential-phenomenological thought and Arnoldian movement-meaning within GCAa.

Holding the Arnoldian lens to selected GCA research

In this next section of the paper, we wish to draw on examples of current research literature within GCAs that we feel resonates with some of our interpretations of Heideggerian existential-phenomenological thought and Arnoldian movement-meaning (briefly summarized in Table 1). While none of this literature in this section has specifically drawn upon existential-phenomenological theory to frame the interpretive lens, we have used the following loose criteria to consider which GCA research sources to include in our analyses

- Literature that views learner and environment as co-constructed;
- Literature that explores the autonomy-supportive nature of GCAs;
- Literature that explores the attitudes, values and beliefs of participants;

In using these three criteria we were able to draw on a number of sources that on detailed examination had close ties with existential-phenomenology as we will see below.

Contextual and Primordial movement-meaning in GCAs

The Teaching Experiment

Recent Anglophone research (Brooker, Kirk, Braiuka and Bransgrove, 2000; Kirk, Brooker and Braiuka, 2000; MacPhail, Kirk and Griffin, 2008; Rovegno, Nevelt, Brock and Babiarz, 2001) has comprehensively embraced the idea of situated cognition through the use of naturalistic investigations that seek to describe what happens when a GCA is implemented as

part of a regular and everyday PE programme. As Greeno (1998) has observed, the focus of analysis shifts from individual behaviour and thought to active thinking agents as they interact with others and environmental subsystems. For example, other learners, the rules of the game, equipment available and playing area. All of these subsystems act as constraints that will consequently shape the learners' perceptions of a course of action (see Rovegno, Nevett and Babiarz, 2001 for a comprehensive discussion). These actions come to define who the learner is within a particular setting

It is important to note, that these Anglophone programmes of research have no pretensions to be existential-phenomenological from an epistemological or methodological perspective; however they *do share*, what we contend are, similar ontological characteristics, notably, co-construction with respect to situated cognition or being-in-the world within an existential-phenomenological frame of reference.

Kirk *et al.* (2000), using a social constructionist theoretical perspective, took advantage of an array of methods, to take account of the learner in the world. These included observations, interviews and diary entries in their study within an Australian junior high school. They proposed that three situated dimensions impacted upon learning and illustrated these through a series of vignettes. It is particularly the *social-interactive* and *institutional-cultural* dimensions that we consider worthy of discussion. The *social-interactive* dimension referred to the relational aspects of game-play insofar as the performance of learners is interdependent. From an existential-phenomenological perspective we can ask the question: What is the lived meaning of this relational act for the sender and receiver? For example, reception of the ball in basketball is dependent on an initial accurate pass; The pass, however, might be provisional upon effective perception of distance. This dimension is also reliant

upon the social dynamic of learners and the group as a whole; this includes an affective or emotional component conjured by the sensitivity of the needs or competences of the sender and receiver as part of this elementary relational venture.

The other dimension of interest, *institutional-cultural*, signified the popular cultural perceptions of games that learners bring to school PE, and the effect that such acculturated views have on their expectations of the learning experience within formal games lessons as a result. To illustrate this point an earlier study, also conducted in an Australian high school (Brooker *et al.*, 2000), reported that eighth grade students were often resistant to small-sided basketball games and clamoured for the real thing – *the* game as opposed to *a* game. They concluded that student perceptions of such games are coloured by their mediated experiences of such phenomenon: the glitz, fun and entertainment of the elite game; moreover, the authors' question whether game-centered approaches really have the influence to counter this pervasive, all-encompassing cultural dimension. Kirk *et al* (2000), while accepting that the adult/mediated version of the game may not be the best point of reference for playing games in school, accept, nevertheless, that the "...cultural resources young people bring with them to classrooms may warrant serious consideration by researchers and teachers in terms of how learners comprehend the tasks set for them by teachers" (p.8). Other studies (MacPhail *et al.*, 2008; Rovegno *et al.*, 2001) have endorsed the relational and social aspects of game play (weight of pass, positioning and ability of the catcher), summarised by Rovegno and colleagues' axiom: to "send a catchable pass" (p.375). MacPhail *et al.* (2008) concluded that the three dimensions of situativity provide an appropriate framework to explore situated learning within GCAs in future studies.

To explore these experiences fully and the meaning they hold, therefore, one must get to the heart of the phenomena *as experienced* by the subject in an attempt to ‘see’ as the subject does: the “intersubjective” (Denzin, 1984).

An intersubjective process requiring that one person enter into the field of experience of another, and experience for herself the same or similar experiences experienced by another. The subjective interpretation of another’s emotional experience from one’s own standpoint is central to emotional understanding. Shared and shareable emotionality lie at the core of what it means to understand and meaningfully enter into the emotional experiences of others. (p.137)

Similarly the notion of intersubjectivity, first popularised in the transcendental phenomenology of Edmund Husserl (1931) as, essentially, empathic experience, or “being-in” may have profound implications for the way Kirk *et al*’s (2000) social-interactive dimension of learning may be viewed and explored. These intersubjective acts, for example, sending the catchable pass (Rovegno *et al.*, 2001b), and our understanding of them can be enriched under the scrutiny of the existential-phenomenological oriented lens: the way in which the broad sweeps of culture across the learning tapestry colours the lived experience. Inquiry such as this may provide valuable insight into the meaning of catching the pass that is thrown with the needs of the receiver in mind for example.

Ultimately, if we do not seriously consider the totality of experience that learners hold in relation to games, then academics, practitioners and policy-makers, are doomed to continue espousing ‘good practice’ and policy, that – while containing the right sentiment – may be seen as alien to many young people. Kirk and MacPhail (2002) bear testament to this:

Young people come to PE lessons armed with valid beliefs, expectations and aspirations as a result of their prior experiences. If we fail to take account of these

experiences, “we may be limiting our understanding of the learner’s perspective” (p. 189).

In essence Kirk and MacPhail (2002) are urging the PE community to take heed of the learners’ fore-structures that help shape their experiences of games, and PE more broadly. The proceeding sub-section explores, briefly, a number of data gathering methods that might enable these fore-structures to be explored in the necessary detail.

Attitudes and beliefs about Game-centered practice

Light and colleagues in a series of studies conducted in Australia (Chen and Light, 2006; Georgakis and Light, 2009; Light, 2006) explored aspects of social and emotional learning and demonstrated a number of, often, innovative and *illustrative* approaches in gathering data on student perceptions of Games Sense, an Australian GCA.

Georgakis and Light’s (2009) primary data source consisted of year 6 students’ drawings collected during a cricket unit taught through the medium of Games Sense. These drawings were subsequently used as stimuli for semi-structured interviews on the student affective experience. In the concluding paragraphs of the study, the author’s argue that the drawings embody to some degree, residual value, feelings and attitudes from the completed unit of work. Other studies (Chen and Light, 2006; Light, 2003) using a interpretative, grounded theoretical design, and also drawings as the primary data source, revealed an improvement in social relations, attitudes and other positive affective responses tied to an improvement in procedural knowledge; Illustrating the close relationship between affect and cognition and the holistic nature of Games Sense.

The findings of these studies are significant for two reasons. Firstly they give further credence to the importance of the situational (“in-the-world”) and relational (“being-in”) aspects of game play. Secondly, they provide a glimpse at the type of 'polyvocal' methods that can be employed in exploring meaning, within such settings, when young people, especially, find it difficult to articulate their thoughts, feelings and experiences (e.g. Enright and O'Sullivan, 2012).

Existential movement-meaning in GCAs

Autonomy-supportive studies

Jones, Marshall and Peters (2010) and Mandigo, Holt, Anderson and Sheppard (2008) undertook ecological studies to explore the autonomy-supportive nature of Teaching Games for Understanding (TGfU) structured PE lessons. An autonomy-supportive environment, it is argued, can engender enhanced levels of intrinsic motivation and positive affective responses, which in turn strengthen the motive to participate (Deci and Ryan, 1985). The results of both studies illustrated that autonomy in TGFU lessons was found to act as a significant mediator in fostering intrinsic motivation. Yet, as Ryan and Deci explain autonomous acts are those that are endorsed by the self and not necessarily independent. Allied to this autonomy has continental philosophical underpinnings, that relate to authenticity, borrowing from the existential (Heidegger and Pfander) and hermeneutic traditions (Ricoeur) (Ryan, personal communication, 20th May 2014).

If TGfU, and other GCAs, are conducive to autonomy-supportive climates as limited research indicates, are participants within these environments undergoing some actualizing change as existent beings (Arnold, 1979)? As Ryan asserts autonomy is underpinned by the existential-

phenomenological notion of authenticity. Furthermore, what is the meaning of such autonomous decisions at the moment of making them?

Action Fantasy Games

The ‘Action Fantasy’ (AF) games of Play Practice (Lauder, 2001), a GCA popularized in Australia, are not only the culmination of this form of game-centred practice, but could also be interpreted as the nearest thing we have, formally, to existential movement meaning. Lauder (2001), while not extolling the virtues of existential game-like practice, alludes to the benefits of being something you are not, and how fantastical situations can move young people in games teaching:

In these games youngsters love to emulate their sporting idols and to take on their identities when playing. Indeed, the struggle to “be” a particularly favoured hero is often as hard fought as the game itself! In this way, a sport educator can combine action fantasy cards games with mini games to create cameo situations in which young people commit themselves fully as they become immersed in the fantasy (p.153)

Therefore, AF structured games have at their very heart those existential moments, that like life, we must face and manage. Whether these are counterfactual scenarios designed by the student with assistance from the teacher or coach, or a moment from famous games past, such as a *Wimbledon* final, a *Superbowl* or an *Ashes* test match, lovingly rendered from consciousness. What we actually find most remarkable is there is little or no research that has attempted to explore the value of AF games in the grander scheme of things. If we as teachers and researchers actually took a little time to reflect on the actual meaning of games at a specific, dramatic high risk moment and how young people actually experience them –

not how we *think* they experience them – then we have no doubt AF games would play a considerably larger part in programmes of GCA research.

[insert Table 1 here]

Conclusions: Pedagogical Implications and a future research agenda

Phenomenological analysis may help those of us who wish to see the child as he or she really is, to know the child's reality, and to use this knowledge to facilitate the child's being in the game world in physical education (Wessinger, 1994, p.427).

We wish to conclude this paper by considering the implications of what we have discussed in relation to practice and a future research agenda for GCAs. We will start by echoing the call for a phenomenological oriented research agenda in PE and the sport sciences in general terms (for example, Allen-Collinson, 2009; Bain, 1995; Brown and Payne, 2009; Kerry and Armour, 2000; Smith, 1992; Standal and Engelsrud, 2013; Wessinger, 1994). We urge – nay we implore – readers to indulge these papers not in isolation but as a rich chronicle of the development of phenomenology and phenomenological oriented research practice. It is an exciting, inspirational journey, and they provide a possibility for research that has always been there, but for some reason has escaped the eye of social and human scientific researchers. It is not the purpose of this paper to ponder why we may have failed to grasp the opportunity. In light of what has been discussed in this paper, nevertheless, the primary questions that slowly emerge are: Whither the cornerstone of GCA practices? Whither the Game Form?

Item 1: Contextual Movement.

Games-based modification:

We have already outlined that for some students the conditioned or modified game becomes too divorced from their perceptions of reality (Brooker *et al.*, 2000; Kirk *et al.*, 2000). If these game forms fail to match the students' perceptions of the real, adult, full, mediated form is the illusion of reality lost? Do these become non-serious, 'mess-about's' in turn leading to a loss of engagement or meaning? After all Light *et al.* (2013) maintain that the learner comes with embodied socio-cultural knowledge of the game that must be explored through the construction of appropriate game forms. Whereas Arnold (1979) would contend that contextual meaning is missing in this instant. That is to say that the students' role in the illusion is only given meaning by the dynamics of the game and the 'others' around you – the intersubjective nature of game-play: other players and how non-participants and teaching staff actually *become* spectators and officials to maintain the illusion. Additionally what does this process of becoming mean to the learner? From being a novice to becoming a master and what implications can be garnered from the lived experience in terms of structuring the GCA learning and motivational climate?

From a pedagogical perspective it follows that facilitators of GCA practice must give as much thought to, what we often think of as, the peripherals of game-play as we do the nature, structure and function of the game form itself. For example, giving teams or individuals the opportunity to choose names, wear 'real' kit and use 'real' equipment should they possess it, allowing a student the opportunity to provide a live commentary during game-play. These 'peripherals', as we refer to them (spectators, officials and props and equipment) do as much to provide a contextual meaningful games teaching experience.

Item 2: The transformation of Primordial into Contextual Movement.

Relational game-play dynamics as intersubjective acts

It is also necessary to explore the same phenomenon from multiple perspectives; the relational dynamics inherent in games, for example ‘throwing the catching pass’ (Rovegno *et al.*, 2001). How the receiver intends the pass might be very different from how the sender intends it. If an intersubjective act is an act of empathic understanding then why might the sender insist on a pass that is nigh on impossible to catch? This question brings us to Primordial Movement Meaning (Arnold, 1979). The student must always be allowed to express themselves in the moment or ‘to be’ what they are without shattering this illusion. In other words the game form should rein in these exuberant, expressive acts and not the teacher or coach. The game *itself*, structured appropriately, must help students realize that primordial acts are often not the best course of action in solving problems that the game form provides. This way primordial movement becomes transformed into contextual movement.

When structuring the game-form this means, for example, allowing the students’ the opportunity to throw the ‘glory pass’ that sails over the intended receiver. The modification to the game of tag football, in this respect, might allow a drop-off or lateral to the running back instead, a less risky, but possibly less rewarding, alternative provides the necessary contextual meaning to the game form. In this sense the student *becomes* a quarterback and not an individual participating in a PE and seeing how far they can throw an American football.

Item 3: Existential Movement.

A case for the Action Fantasy

The outcome of any game must never be in sight. A visible outcome diminishes the unpredictability, the excitement, the to and fro. Hence it shatters the illusion of reality or the existential meaning that the game holds. There is no anxiety, no fear, no joy, and no delight if the result or outcome is always in plain sight. This means that when Game Forms are

structured there must always be blind alleys to tempt students to run down, conditions that may provide incredible risk but an equally high reward (the risky but celebrated ‘glory pass’ or the safe and comfortable drop off to the running back, for example). The use of AF games, Launder (2001) contends, can provide this intoxicating, uncertain existential thrill. As a community it is necessary to explore their ability to provide existential movement meaning by exploring the autonomous nature of AF games: How are they intended (description) and accordingly what meaning (interpretation) do they have for learners? Might feelings of existential dread, anxiety, isolation or fear be present prior to such decisions being made? Is it so bad if they are experienced; since to experience them is to occupy an authentic mode of being?

GCAAs, *can* and *should* give learners the opportunity to make a myriad of difficult decisions if the game form is structured appropriately. The “armchair ride” must never be an option. The key is to explore how such decisions are experienced in the moment. The educator, as interested observer, might argue quite reasonably that nothing *really* is at stake when playing conditioned or small-sided games in a PE lesson, yet the educator *does not* inhabit the lifeworld of the base runner, tackler, quarterback or penalty taker. The decisions that the learner-as-player has to take appear very real to them as the tackle, fake pass and penalty become the only things that matters *in that moment*. Hans-Georg Gadamer (1975) makes the point in his major work *Truth and Method* that:

The appeal of the game, the fascination it exerts, consists in the fact that it becomes **master of the player** [emphasis provided]. Even when games are concerned in which one tries to fulfill tasks one has set oneself, it is the risk, the question of whether it “works,” “succeeds,” or “succeeds again” that exercises the game’s attraction. (p.95)

Hence, the game – or more specifically the game form (as the GCA proffers) – must provide the illusion of reality to the learner. The game form must become “master of the player”. Fantasy and reality need to merge in an intoxicating mix of uncertainty, challenge, fear, anxiety and *necessarily* reward; We contend that this is where AF games come into their own allowing the fantastical and the actual to coalesce needfully. The wonderful paradox and ultimate lesson of playing games will then begin to emerge. The axiom that educators and academics who have an interest in GCAs must take heed of: *Everything is at stake; yet nothing is at stake*. These existential moments must never be denied the learner since human beings are *existent* beings.

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