

Cultural Diversity Practicum Paper

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Introduction

During the summer of 2019 I was asked by a friend and former teammate Lance Knudson to help coach at the Dakota Roots Hockey School at Andrist Arena/Community Center in Crosby North Dakota. Over the course of two separate five-day camps between July 13-17 and the 20-24 we were able to work with players from a variety of backgrounds, age groups, and skill levels, both on and off the ice focusing on “providing players, no matter where they are from, the opportunity to build their skills, love, and knowledge for the game of hockey” (dakotarootshockey.com, 2020). I was extremely grateful to be given the opportunity to work within this camp during its second year, and I learned a great deal from the experience. The camp itself contained approximately 55 players each week which were split into three groups based on age, maturity, and skill level. A total of six coaches each week would work with these players from 7:30 am to 5 pm Monday through Thursday on one specific concept each day. Monday skating, Tuesday shooting/stickhandling, Wednesday passing/flow, Thursday battle/compete. We practiced these concepts in a variety of ways through two separate on ice sessions in the beginning and end of training, dry land practice, off ice skills training, and further activities which culminated with a scrimmage on Friday. My role within the camp both weeks was to work in the morning on ice sessions from 8 am till noon. Then work with groups one and two (Appendix A and B) off ice in the afternoon. Within the Dakota Roots Hockey School, I was able to see a culture I was remarkably familiar with, hockey culture in an educational format. However, in a rural setting which I had never experienced before growing up around the Twin Cities. Through this I was able to compare what it was like working with hockey players in popular areas in Minnesota to working with hockey players from more rural areas of the country. Within this essay I will analyze my Dakota Roots Hockey School experience in terms of demographics, environmental adaptations, instructional adaptations, interventions, connections

beyond the ice, and conclude with how this experience will translate into my future work in the classroom.

Demographics

In terms of hockey camps, this was easily the most diverse groups of players I have worked with. We had diversity in terms of age, background, socioeconomic status, cognitive ability, ethnicity, gender, and especially hockey skill. The players aged anywhere from 5-18 years old which formed three groups based roughly off traditional school age groupings. These groupings consisted of the Elementary, Middle, and High School level, with groups one being the youngest players and group three being the oldest (Appendix C). The diversity in backgrounds of the students in terms of location and hockey ability were also vast. While most of the players were from Crosby North Dakota, we also had plenty of skaters from other areas in North Dakota like Minot, Williston, and even Mandan. Additionally, we also had players travel from states nearby such as Montana and Idaho. Within the camp we had players who had relatively weaker hockey abilities and players who had extraordinarily strong hockey abilities. These two aspects were some of my favorite parts of the camp as it allowed kids in rural areas opportunities to skate and interact with kids like them, and seeing them become friends throughout the two camps, and overall improvements made in their hockey abilities. As for gender we had both girls and boys in every group both weeks, with each group having anywhere from 3 to 6 girls and anywhere from 10-22 boys. An average group would be about 4 girls and 12 boys with some being larger or smaller depending on the week. The ethnicity of the camp was predominately white, but we also had black and Native American skaters as well. The ethnicity of the skaters had zero impact in terms of how the kids interacted with each other and everyone got along very well. The socioeconomic status of the kids also did not seem to affect any of the

kids. Although it was not explicit whether kids came from families with high or low socioeconomic status there was aspects in which you could tell kids came from different economic situations. Most families were well off enough to pay for the camp, stay in homes, with extended families, or commute to and from the rink including from Williston. The only real separating aspect was the gear, as some skaters needed to borrow things like skates, sticks, and especially goalie gear from the local hockey association. Again, this had no real effect on the camp, presumably because quite a few players needed to borrow gear. Finally, cognitive ability which varied throughout the camp. As with any group of kids there was a spectrum of cognitive levels in each group based on my experience. As the camps went along most kids were able to pick up on the activities and instructions going on throughout the day. But some struggled with things like taking directions, some with behavior, and others with attention. The struggles resulted in those kids receiving more direct attention from the coaches than others. Overall, this wide range of diversity didn't have any negative effects on the camp, it only enhanced the experience for both coaches and players.

Environmental Adaptations

Within the camp there was a few distinct environments in and near Andrist Arena/Community Center. The main two being the on and off ice venues, supplemented by the locker rooms, classroom, lunch area, and local park. Each environment allowed us to focus on distinct parts of being a hockey player and an athlete. The focus of each day was placed on the concept of each day in the morning and afternoon on-ice sessions with additional practice and activities off ice. The purposes of having the different environments were two-fold. One it gave us the possibilities of always having each group in separate locations. Which kept the camp well organized. Second was to keep the kids active throughout the long day, which helped keep things

from getting to stale throughout the days and weeks. In all these environments coaches were directly working with groups besides in the locker rooms. However, coaches, especially in the younger groups were in and out of the locker rooms making sure everyone could get their skates tied and make it out on the ice one time. With the oldest boys group we left them mostly alone which was fine, but their locker room was extremely dirty by the end of the two weeks so there could have been more guidance in that area.

Instructional Adaptions

Due to the wide variety of hockey ability instructional adaptations were essential to running a good practice or dry land session with every group. Instructional adaptations took place in the on-ice practices in two ways. First was with the youngest group, which had many players who could easily perform any task you would ask of them, but there were also a few players, especially the younger ones, who did not have much experience skating at all. Therefore, the adaptations we made were directly related this aspect. For the kids with limited skating ability, we allowed them to have successes on the ice by making drills easier for them in terms of length and complexity. For kids with higher abilities, we made drills longer and more complex. This was accomplished through splitting the group into three further groups based on ability for station work. For the oldest group we also made instructional adaptations especially during the second week. Because we had many players who skated for both weeks during the camp with the same focuses, we needed to change some aspects of the drills we wanted to do. Again, we added complexities in terms of skating, passing, and shooting, while relying on the groups built up knowledge to not give them as much direct instruction in order to let them express themselves within the practices and challenge them in the most appropriate way. For the off-ice session we also utilized instructional adaptations most with the youngest group. These adaptations were

essential in terms of both organization and instruction. During the first day or two of week one with group one we struggled at some points with listening and executing instructions. This was compounded by having one player who was related to one of the coaches needing direct one on one instruction during the dry land sessions, which essentially made it one on twenty for the coaches. To combat this, we organized, planned, and made things more fun for the kids. This had a few effects, one it made many of the kids more attentive because they wanted to do the drills which were essentially games or competitions. It also kept some of the kids who struggled with listening accountable to the other kids, because if a few kids were not listening other kids would hold them accountable. This organization allowed us to keep this group active and the planning helped us with the group during the next week as well.

Interventions

Not many interventions were needed as most of the kids were great to work with, however there was still some kids who needed that extra boost in terms of motivations in order to keep the camp running well. One of the kids who needed that extra motivation was the same one I mentioned in the previous section, who needed direct one on one instruction during dry land time. The intervention needed to take place in order to help this kid stay focused on what the coaches were asking him to do, as we only wanted him to improve in terms of hockey and not distract others around him. To accomplish this, we utilized his aunt who he was staying with during the camp. This player's behavior improved right away as he listened very well to his aunt which led to him listening to the coaches better. To reward him for listening we also gave him a bit more encouragement or praise when he was doing well and more freedom to do what he felt was necessary regarding the tasks at hand. Of course, there were other smaller interventions we made with some of the younger kids but the other major intervention we had was with the oldest

group. This was because a group of the kids in the oldest group decided they wanted to give a minimal effort both on and off the ice and it translated even further into group two as well. We combated this in two ways, one we utilized our coach who plays professional hockey and who had ample respect among the players to talk individually with some of the players who were being influenced by some of the older players. This strategy worked well and got kids more motivated to work hard and succeed. For the group that was the influencers, which was about 3-4 older boys we utilized our classroom period to directly combat the issue. We discussed why it is important to always give a good effort and how their motivation had affected the rest of the group. From there we challenged this group on the ice to perform more difficult complex drills to bring a better effort out of them. The result was good for the week, but the coaches did not sense that the players would stay motivated in this same way in the future.

Connections to the Standards

As the Dakota Roots Hockey Schools is a hockey camp that took place in multiple capacities teaching kids skills and appreciations for the game of hockey the common standards, we wanted to use for the camp were directed towards growth, improvement, safety, and fun. But there were also multiple indirect standards from our practicum syllabus met through the experience. One of the standards¹ “ICSI.2.S1: Create a safe, equitable, positive, and supportive learning environment in which diversities are valued” aligns very closely with the ethos of the camp as all coaches first job was to ensure all these principles were present in order to give the kids the best possible experience. The second standard used “CANDIDATE PERFORMANCE: Standard 1: Candidates preparing to work in schools as teachers or other professional school personnel know and demonstrate the content, pedagogical, and professional knowledge, skills,

¹ All standards retrieved from EDU 390 syllabus

and dispositions necessary to help all students learn” again mirrors the ethos of the camp in using our hockey experience, knowledge, and expertise, to make sure all players experienced growth both on and off the ice. The last standard reflected was “Standard 4: Diversity: The unit designs, implements, and evaluates curriculum and experiences for candidates to acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to help all students learn.” As the camp was almost exclusively a coming together of knowledge from 5 coaches who either work or plan to work in an educational setting and other coaches with extensive hockey experience to ensure all players were able to have a safe and fun environment to practice the game of hockey.

Conclusion

Reflecting on the experience, I recognize I gained a lot of valuable experience from my two weeks at the Dakota Roots Hockey School. I was able to work with kids from a vastly different background than I normally work with, in a hockey camp setting which I am very familiar with. This contrast led to particularly important reflections in terms of demographics, environments, instructional adaptations, interventions, and even connections to our practicum syllabus. These reflections occurred from coaching a diverse population of players and allowed me to implement teaching and instructional strategies that will undoubtedly improve my teaching abilities in the future. The main way I will carry these experiences over to the classroom is the understanding that all kids, regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, or any other distinguishing factor want to succeed, learn, and grow. Some kids may not want to grow in our traditional aspects, and they may not show significant interests in your subject, but they still want to improve in something someday. Our jobs as teachers are then transformed to showing each child how can we help them succeed in the educational settings and beyond.

References

Dakota Roots Hockey School, 2020, <https://www.dakotarootshockey.com>

Appendix

Appendix Photos Removed for Child Privacy