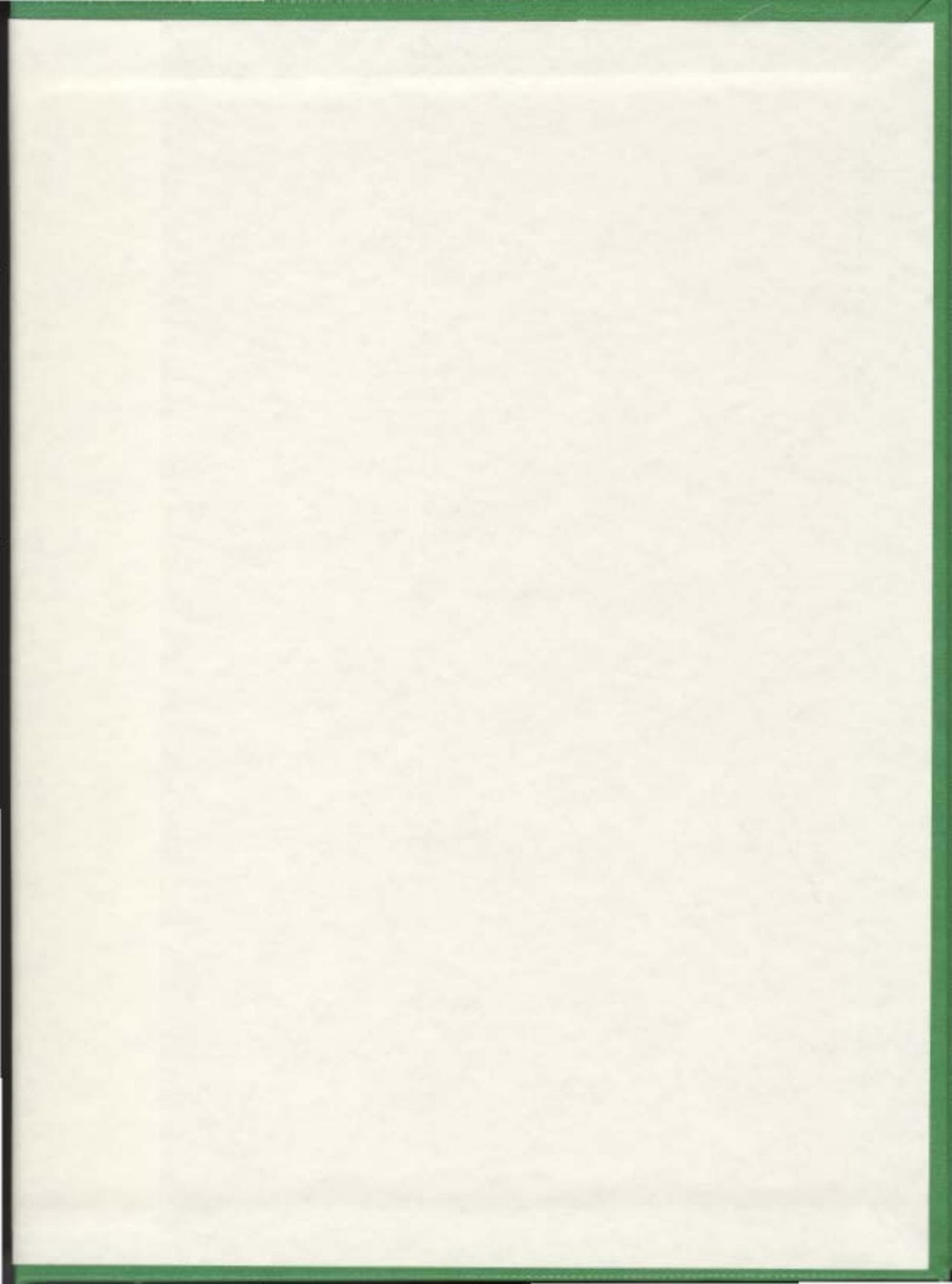


GENDER AND ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PHYSICAL EDUCATION:
ATTITUDES AND PERCEPTIONS OF GIRLS AND BOYS

KATHERINE BAKER



**GENDER AND ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PHYSICAL EDUCATION:
ATTITUDES AND PERCEPTIONS OF GIRLS AND BOYS**

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is an exploration of student perceptions and attitudes towards physical education at one elementary school in St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador. The experiences of female students are explored in particular. Increased attention has been placed on school physical education programs as a result of concern in society over health and fitness issues. Fewer females than males enroll in high school physical education, and females are less physically active than males. Providing girls with the opportunity to express their attitudes and opinions towards physical education at the elementary school level will contribute to on-going efforts to make physical activity more appealing to females and ultimately increase participation levels. This research was a case study of one school. Male and female students in grades three through six were asked to draw a picture of themselves in physical education, and subsequently a number of female students participated in a focus group interview, where they were asked questions related to their physical education experiences. The physical education teacher was also interviewed. Overall, students displayed very positive attitudes towards physical education. The physical education teacher based her program on Don Hellison's model of Humanistic Physical Education, and students demonstrated an internalization of many of the values that are emphasized through this model. The girls in this study indicated a strong liking for physical education. Despite their enthusiasm, however, girls in this study also expressed feelings of frustration towards the behavior of the boys in their classes. They talked of boys cheating, hogging equipment, acting out of control, and acting superior towards the girls. Finally, the girls in this study expressed a significant amount of knowledge about gender role stereotypes, both within and outside of a sporting context, although they rarely indicated being personally influenced by them.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

“Boys behave practically wild—they’re like wild animals...they act that way. And mostly girls actually have less— they’re actually better and they’re actually careful of other people”.

- Grade Five Girl

This comment was made by a participant in this study who was asked to reflect on differences between boys and girls in her physical education (PE) classes. Increased attention has been placed on school physical education programs as a result of concern in society over health and fitness issues (Gard & Wright, 2005). In February, 2007, Andrea Grantham, executive director of the Canadian Association for Health, Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance (CAHPERD) delivered the following message to the House of Commons:

Schools are the only public institution that has the ability to reach every child in Canada, regardless of culture, socioeconomic status, ability or gender. Schools are clearly the most important institution to offer equal access to health and physical activity programs. (Grantham, 2007, p.6)

The potential for physical education to facilitate change on our nation’s ‘health crisis’ has been recognized, and as stated in a January 2007 article in the Globe and Mail, “governments have begun to act” (Picard, 2007, n.p.). Making physical education a graduation requirement at the high school level and increasing instruction time at the elementary school level are two major initiatives that have been undertaken by certain provinces in Canada (CAHPERD, 2007; Davies, 2006). Other provinces have implemented daily physical activity programs or initiatives, and Quebec went so far as to extend the school week by 50 minutes, claiming that the additional time would be allocated towards physical activity (Picard, 2007). These

initiatives demonstrate the desire to strengthen the use of physical education to develop healthier individuals, and an overall healthier society.

This study focuses on elementary school children's experiences of physical education, with an emphasis on the experiences of girls in particular. One could speculate that health experts who advocate for more PE in schools envision programs that reach and benefit male and female students equally. By revealing one student's perception of physical education, however, the introductory comment serves as a reminder that not all children experience physical education in the same way. The female student making this comment felt the boys in her class acted out-of-control. She went on to talk about instances where she had been hit in the head by balls that were thrown by boys, who in her opinion, were acting rowdy and overexcited. Knowing that she did not sustain any injury in those instances, of greater concern is the degree to which the memories of those situations were prominent in her mind as she reflected on physical education. Fox (1988) contended that physical activity alone is neutral in its effect on children—it is their perceptions of the experience that give it meaning, and make it “potentially uplifting on one hand, or psychologically stressful on the other” (p.34).

Female Participation in Physical Activity

Sport and physical activity is an historically male domain (Cahn, 1994; Hall, 1999; Williams, 1996). While women have made great strides to legitimize their presence in sport, there still exist many issues with involvement and participation. These issues, many of which will be explored in this study, have serious implications with regard to physical activity participation levels. While the majority of boys and

girls do not engage in sufficient physical activity for health benefits (Active Healthy Kids Canada, 2006), girls are less physically active than boys. The 2006 Active Healthy Kids Canada Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth states: “A significant gender gap exists: compared with boys, girls consistently report less daily physical activity. The differential ranges from 10%-15%, depending on the source” (Active Healthy Kids Canada, 2006, p.4). According to a recent nation-wide survey, the first of its kind to objectively measure physical activity levels in youth aged 5-19 years old, boys are more than twice as likely than girls to reach the recommended levels of physical activity outlined in Canada’s Physical Activity Guides for Children and Youth (Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute [CFLRI], 2007). Amongst 15-19 year old youth, 63% of females are inactive versus 44% of males who are inactive (CFLRI, 2005a). This trend continues into adulthood—according to a 2004 monitor of physical activity in Canadian adults, 27 % of men were active versus 21% of females, and 48% of men were inactive, versus 54% of females who were inactive (CFLRI, 2005b).

The Problem of Girls’ Participation in Physical Education

Given the well-established physical and mental health benefits that can be gained from regular participation in physical activity (see Active Healthy Kids Canada, 2006), these statistics are concerning. Unfortunately, the trends that are visible in physical activity participation are also visible in physical education participation. Fewer females than males elect to take physical education in high school (Gibbons, Van Gyn, Wharf-Higgins, & Gaul, 2000; Van Wersh, Trew & Turner, 1992) and researchers have found that girls at the elementary school level are already

significantly less physically active than boys (Sarkin, McKenzie & Sallis, 1997; Shropshire & Carroll, 1998; Vincent & Pangrazi, 2002). Furthermore, participation statistics are not the only way that gender issues in physical education prevail. After several years of teaching physical education at the elementary school level, where it is mandatory for all students to enroll in physical education, Snow (1995) described what she termed a “behavioral phenomena” in her female students:

girls in their younger years are eager achievers. They show exuberance towards athletics on par with their boy classmates. They like to have the ball first, to demonstrate, to answer questions, and to show off their knowledge and skill in front of both the class and the teacher...In grade four, the very talented girls start to curb their enthusiasm....Frequently they defer to a boy, allowing him to be the first to take the opportunity to score. By the time top performing girls reach grade five, they are very competent and knowledgeable. However, when a girl is questioned by a boy as to why she did something in a game situation, she often chooses to say that she does not know rather than answer the question. If the boy indicates that she has done something wrong, most girls will back down and agree with the boy. She is reticent to take a stand for herself....By grade six, the top performing girls are very accomplished in their skill level in all of the activities. Yet these girls hold back when playing on teams with boys. When they are in a full game situation they almost always defer to a boy.
(p.43)

Snow’s comments focus primarily on the behavior of higher skilled females, however many of her observations are applicable to female students in general. Anecdotal reports from physical education teachers describe struggles with getting girls to actively participate in classes more so than boys. Likewise, complaints about not getting passed the ball generally come more often from girls than boys. Overall, it seems that girls may not necessarily experience the same opportunities to develop skills, competence, and confidence in their physical education classes as boys do. As

pointed out by Williams (1996), “equal provision does not mean equal learning or equal opportunity” (p.127).

In their discussion of girls’ participation in elementary school physical education, Beveridge and Scruggs (2000) highlight that physical education is the favorite subject of the majority of elementary school students. They go on to state:

One would assume that this enjoyment of physical education would lead to a love of physical activity in general. Why is it, then, that by the time girls reach adolescence, a high percentage of them dislike physical activity and physical education? (p.4)

The answers to this question are multiple and complex. Studies on girls’ attitudes towards physical education are frequently conducted at the high school level as this age corresponds to a well-documented decline in the physical activity levels (Williams, 1996). Research that has been conducted at the elementary school level, however, demonstrates that gender differences have a strong presence at this age. Childhood is an important time for children to develop positive attitudes and behaviors regarding physical activity (Fox & Biddle, 1988). In an effort to respond to the question proposed by Beveridge and Scruggs (2000), there is a need to learn more about girls’ attitudes and perceptions towards physical education at the elementary school level.

Purpose of the Study

This research sought to gain knowledge that can ultimately be used in efforts to increase girls’ participation, and quality of experience, in physical education and physical activity. The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of how elementary school boys and girls perceived themselves in physical education, with the

objective of exploring in particular the attitudes and experiences of girls. The following research questions were addressed:

1. What influence does the particular physical education program offered at the school have on student attitudes towards physical education?
2. How do students in grades 3, 4, 5, and 6 depict themselves in physical education?
3. What comparisons can be made between how females and males depict themselves in physical education?
4. What attitudes towards physical education do females in grades 3, 4, 5 and 6 express with regard to gender and physical education?

This research project was designed as a case study to allow for an examination of the physical education program at the school, and how it influenced student attitudes and perceptions towards the subject. Students in grades three through six were asked to draw a picture of themselves in physical education. The methodology used to collect student drawings was an adaptation of the Draw and Write technique. The Draw and Write technique was developed by Wetton & McWhirter (1998), and was initially devised as a research strategy to investigate children's perceptions of health related behaviours (Wetton & McWhirter, 1998). As drawings comprised a major part of this research project, and remain a relatively new approach in educational research, the work of Wetton & McWhirter was heavily relied on for the development of the drawing portion of this project.

Subsequent to completion of the drawings, female students were invited to participate in a focus group interview where they were asked a variety of questions

related to their physical education experiences. According to Graham (1995a), there is a need for more research that allows students to express their perspectives on physical education. Graham (1995a) stated: “as a profession, physical educators do not know enough about how students feel about physical education” (p.479). This study addressed the need to understand more about how elementary school students view PE in the hope of being able to foster an environment where males and females participate, benefit, and thrive equally in physical education throughout all their years of schooling.

Definition of Key Terms

Many of the terms used in this study have broad, multiple or debated meanings. To clarify the meaning of these terms as they are employed throughout this paper, the following definitions are provided.

Physical Education

Physical Education refers to school based instruction in physical activities. There are many debates as to what the aims and objectives of a physical education program should be, and programs vary substantially from school to school. All programs, however, have at their core a focus on development through the physical self. According to Freeman (2001): “physical education uses physical activity to produce holistic improvements in a person’s physical, mental and emotional qualities” (p.3). Throughout this report *PE* and *physical education* are used interchangeably as suited to the writing.

Physical Activity

Definitions of physical activity can vary to include or exclude certain levels of exercise intensity. Throughout this paper, the term physical activity is used in its broadest sense to describe all “athletic, recreational or occupational activities that require physical skills and utilize strength, power, endurance, speed, flexibility, range of motion or agility” (National Athletic Trainers Association). The term is all encompassing in that physical activity takes place in physical education, organized sport, recreational sport, and play, in addition to other settings. Issues inherent to physical activity in general are therefore inherent to all settings in which physical activity takes place.

Context

Context refers to all factors influencing or related to the environment that a particular phenomenon is located within. In this study, the context of the physical education program includes (but is not limited to) the following: the physical education curriculum, the philosophical beliefs of the physical education teacher, teacher behavior, characteristics and personal values, student demographic, student behavior, family support and attitudes towards health, the number of minutes students receive physical education, the facilities available for use at the school, the school culture regarding health and well-being, school administration, and available resources.

Gender

Gender refers to the designation of feminine or masculine, as identified from a sociocultural standpoint (Nelson & Robinson, 1999). Gender should not be

confounded with sex, which refers to the designation of being male or female as identified from a biological standpoint (Nelson & Robinson, 1999). Gender can be thought of as the way in which individuals conform or reject characteristics associated to their sex. It refers to all expected and actual thoughts, feelings, and behaviors associated with masculinity and femininity (Nelson & Robinson, 1999).

Gender Stereotypes

Gender Stereotypes are widely held beliefs about the characteristics and qualities associated with masculinity and femininity. These are prescribed to men and women as they belong to the specified social category of being either male or female (Nelson & Robinson, 1999). Gender stereotypes are often translated into expectations for gender-appropriate behavior, and exert a powerful influence in society (Nelson & Robinson, 1999).

Attitude

Attitude refers to a set of beliefs that an individual holds towards a certain object, activity, or person (Silverman & Subramaniam, 1999). Attitudes are complex in that they may be transient or fixed, and are influenced by a wide variety of factors.

Perception

Perception refers to the way in which an individual views a certain phenomenon. Perception refers to the subjective experience of the individual, and focuses on the way they make meaning and understand a particular event.

Whereas the terms *elementary school*, *junior high*, and *high school* are well understood, the grades that comprise each level vary according to educational jurisdictions. For the purposes of this study, elementary school refers to Kindergarten

through grade six. Specific use of the term *junior high* refers to the grades between elementary and high school, which typically consist of grades seven, eight, and nine. *High School* refers to grades ten through twelve. In many areas however, high school encompasses grade nine, and possibly grade eight and seven. This may be the case with some of the studies cited in the literature review.

Overview of the Chapters

Chapter Two of this thesis explores a broad scope of literature related to this study. The first section reviews topics related to women's participation in sport and physical activity, including the historical context of women in sport, the influence of socialization on female experience in sport, and current physical activity levels of Canadian youth. Section II reviews studies on student attitudes towards physical education. Many different variables have been studied in relation to gender, attitude, and physical education. These studies provided a lens for the current research project, as well as demonstrated areas that require further attention. This study employed a relatively new research methodology and section III discusses literature related to the use of drawings in scientific research. Finally, section IV describes the theoretical lens through which this project took shape. Chapter Three provides an in-depth description of the methodology employed in this study, including procedures of data collection and analysis. Chapter Four is organized into three sections to discuss the findings of this study as they related to 1) the physical education program at the school 2) gender differences in student drawings, and 3) girls' experiences of physical education. Chapter Five discusses these findings in relation to existing literature, and attempts to understand and interpret findings with regard to their implications of the

physical activity experiences of students. Finally, Chapter Six provides recommendations to physical education teachers and researchers based on the findings from this study. It further offers reflections on the methodology used in this project, as well as the overall research process.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction

This chapter reviews issues related to girls' involvement and experiences in physical education. The chapter has been divided into three sections in order to address related issues as they pertain to this research project. Section I begins with a brief historical overview of women's participation in sport and physical activity. It includes a comparison of the physical activity levels of boys and girls, as well as participation rates in high school physical education.

Section II reviews studies on student attitudes towards physical education at the elementary school level. It examines the literature on the importance of attitude with regard to physical activity participation, and the role that childhood years play in the development of attitudes towards physical activity. Section III discusses the methodological approach to this research project. The use of drawings in physical activity research is a relatively new approach, and this section reviews previous studies that have used drawings. Section IV provides an overview of the theoretical approach to this research project. In summary, this literature review will show that:

1. females come from a historically disadvantaged position with regard to physical activity participation, and are considerably less active than males.
2. the development of positive attitudes towards PE is important in encouraging current and future activity, and females tend to display less positive attitudes than do males.
3. the methodology employed in this study, although relatively new, is sound and will make a valuable contribution to knowledge of girls' experiences

in elementary school physical education, as well as to expanding methodological possibilities for educational researchers.

Section I: Gender Issues in Sport and Physical Activity

Women and Sport

The history of women's participation in sport and physical activity is one of overcoming barriers. Sport has been, and in many ways still is, a male domain. According to Hall (1999): "sport in our (Canadian) culture is still viewed by many as a 'masculinizing project', a cultural practice in which boys learn to be men and male solidarity is forged" (p.7). Women have taken monumental steps to include themselves in the realm of sport and physical activity since the late 1800's, when they first defied social norms by riding bicycles (Cahn, 1994). Today, opportunities for girls and women abound, at all levels of sport, and participation is supported and encouraged. However, as demonstrated by the above statement by Hall, women still face many barriers in sport. Inequities at the elite level of sport are striking; lower salaries, less media coverage, minimal numbers of female coaches and administrators, fewer professional opportunities, and less favorable training conditions are but a few of the problems faced by some of the most elite female athletes in the world (Heywood & Dworkin, 1999; McKay, 1999). Though many of these issues are unique to elite and professional sport, the ideologies behind them are influential in constructing how sport is offered at all levels.

Physical Activity Levels of Pre-Pubescent Girls and Boys

The 2006 Active Healthy Kids Canada Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth (2006) states: "we are still in a situation where less than half of

Canadian children and youth are physically active daily to a degree of energy expenditure that meets the guidelines (*Canada's Physical Activity Guidelines for Children and Youth*) for healthy growth and development” (p.4).

Research on the physical activity levels of children consistently show significant differences in physical activity time, as well as intensity level, between boys and girls. Several studies have found that at the elementary school level, girls are less physically active than boys (Sarkin, McKenzie & Sallis, 1997 ; Shropshire & Carroll, 1998; Vincent & Pangrazi, 2002). Using pedometers for measurement, Vincent and Pangrazi (2002) examined the physical activity levels of children aged 6 to 12 over a four day period. They found no significant variance in the physical activity levels between age groups, but they did find that boys were significantly more active than girls. Similarly, Shropshire and Carroll (1998) examined physical activity levels of grade six students and found significant gender differences in various measures of physical activity. More girls than boys engaged in no physical activity at all. More boys than girls participated in physical activity upwards of three times a week and more boys than girls met the recommended levels of physical activity for health (as advised in the 1996 Surgeon General's Report -Britain).

Sarkin et al. (1997) looked at physical activity levels in children using a physical activity monitor. They compared the activity levels of 91 fifth-grade children during physical education classes and recess periods. Although there were not considerable differences between the activity levels of boys and girls during physical education classes (girls were 94.6 % as active as the boys as measured by the accelerometer), they did find significant differences in physical activity levels during

recess, with girls being 74.2% as active as boys (Sarkin et al., 1997). Carroll and Loumidis (2001) surveyed 922 grade six students and found that on average, girls spent 156 minutes on physical activity a week and boys spent 254 minutes a week on physical activity. Similarly, Guerra et al. (2003) used accelerometers to track physical activity levels of 157 children and adolescents and found that boys engaged in significantly more moderate-to-vigorous physical activities (MVPA) than girls. These findings are consistent with Canadian national surveys. The 2006 Active Healthy Kids Canada Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth (2006) states that although girls participate in organized sport only slightly less than boys (41.2% versus 47.7% respectively), there is a significant gender gap when it comes to unstructured sport. Unstructured sport includes sport activities that take place without a coach or instructor present, likely around the home or neighborhood, and girls are nearly 20% less likely to participate in unstructured sport than boys (72.3% of males versus 52.5% of females).

According to Sallis (2002), although studies have consistently shown that male youth are more physically active than female, and that physical activity declines with age for both genders, there is a fair amount of disagreement concerning the timing and magnitude of decreases in physical activity. Trost et al. (2002) undertook a comprehensive study to address the discrepancies in research by objectively measuring physical activity in a sample of 1110 students, ranging from grade one through twelve, over two 7 day periods. The study strongly supported findings that physical activity decreases rapidly during childhood and adolescence, and agreed that across all age levels, boys were more active than girls (Trost et al., 2002). Contrary to

many previous studies however, the greatest age-related differences in activity levels were detected during the elementary school years. For example, the gender difference in MVPA was 8.4% in grades 10-12 and 18.9% in grades 1-3 (Troost et al., 2002). Trost et al. (2002) found that the difference in overall physical activity levels between males and females was mainly due to significant differences in high intensity exercise – classified as vigorous physical activity (VPA). The average gender difference in MVPA was 11%, while the average gender difference for VPA was 44.7%.

In summary, results from these studies show that boys are in a better position than girls to gain from the potential physical, psychological and emotional benefits that physical activity has to offer. The discrepancy in physical activity levels between pre-pubescent boys and girls evidences the need to research gender issues within physical education at the elementary school level. This need is highlighted by findings such as those from Trost et al. (2002), which demonstrated significantly higher gender differences in physical activity levels at the elementary school level, as opposed to high school.

Female Participation in High School Physical Education

It is widely acknowledged that girls' participation in physical education at the high school level is significantly lower than that of boys, however there is minimal Canadian documentation on this trend. British Columbia is one of the few provinces with statistics on physical education enrollment in schools. Once physical education becomes an elective in grade 11, approximately 10% of female students choose to enroll in it, as compared to 20-25% of male students (BC Ministry of Education,

2000; as cited by Gibbons, Gaul, & Blackstock, 2004). In most provinces in Canada, physical education becomes an elective at some point in secondary school, often after the tenth-grade (Picard, 2007). Students may be required to take at least one physical education course in order to graduate, after which it is available to them as an elective subject. A recent study on physical education in Ontario showed that overall enrollment in physical education decreased from 97.9% in grade nine (when it was mandatory), to 49.6%, 43.3% and 35.9% in grades 10, 11, and 12, respectively (Dwyer et al., 2006). The study did not identify the female/male ratio of enrolled students.

Data evidencing a decline in physical activity levels of adolescent females in general is more readily available. The Health Behavior in School-Aged Children Study (HBSC), a Canadian study conducted every four years, found that 38% of girls versus 48% of boys were physically active enough for optimal health benefits, in both childhood and adolescence (Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute, 2006). Cale (1996) questioned a group of 103 adolescent females and found that the physical activity levels of the girls in the study were generally low, and that the majority did not do enough physical activity to meet established physical activity guidelines for adolescents (Cale, 1996). Trost et al. (2002) found that girls in grades 10-12 averaged less than a single 20-minute bout of MVPA per week. Across all age levels in their study, girls were less physically active than boys (Trost et al., 2002). These statistics reinforce the need to address the physical activity experiences of girls in particular.

Section II: Attitudes and Perceptions of Students Towards Physical Education Introduction

“Attitude permeates everything we do. It is an important component in all aspects of human endeavor. Attitude influences whether we begin or continue with certain activities- and whether we achieve in certain areas”

- Silverman & Subramaniam, 1999

Attitude is undeniably an important factor in the way we approach our daily living, however we are reminded by Birtwistle & Brodie (1991) that, “it is unrealistic to assume attitude change will automatically lead to changes in behavior” (p.466).

This contention is grounded in the lack of research supporting the notion that attitude has a positive direct influence on behavior (Humphrey, 2003). Nonetheless, a frequently used rationale for the attention that researchers have given to student attitudes is that students with positive attitudes are more likely to achieve in that content area (Figley, 1985). According to Fox and Biddle (1988), there are many times when attitude will influence behavior, and therefore curricular goals of fostering positive attitudes towards physical activity are valid objectives of physical education programs. Humphrey, an expert in the area of child development through sports, supports this contention, and suggests the likelihood that strong positive feelings about fitness may lead someone to exercise regularly (Humphrey, 2003).

Attitude has indeed maintained a focus in physical education and physical activity research. While there has been a great deal of research on student attitudes towards physical education, the majority of studies have focused on the attitudes of high school students towards physical education. A major reason for this is likely the well-documented decline in physical activity of girls and boys that is evidenced around the onset of puberty—approximately 12 or 13 years old (Sport Canada, 2000)

as well as the significantly lower number of females who elect to take physical education at the high school level compared to males (Gibbons et al., 2000). These statistics evidently demonstrate a need to make physical education more appealing to high school students.

Although most research on attitudes towards physical education and physical activity that has utilized gender as a variable has been conducted at the high school level, there has also been a substantial amount conducted at the elementary school level (see Carroll & Loumidis, 2001; Luke, 1992; Portman, 1995; Prochaska et al., 2003; Shropshire & Carroll, 1998; Shropshire, Carroll & Yim, 1997). There have also been a number of studies conducted at the elementary school level that have focused on measuring physical activity levels of children (Faucette et al., 1995; Guerra et al., 2003; Sarkin et al., 1997; Vincent & Pangrazi, 2002; Warburton & Woods, 1996). At both the high school and elementary school levels, studies on student attitudes towards physical education have included a number of different variables. Some have been designed to seek out gender differences in activity preferences and overall attitude (see Luke & Sinclair, 1991; Shropshire et al., 1997; Van Wersh, Trew, & Turner, 1992). Some studies have examined attitudes in relation to other variables, such as fitness level (see Sherrill, Hoguin, & Caywood, 1989; Shropshire & Carroll, 1998). Still others have specifically examined opinions and preferences towards particular activity units (see McKenzie, Alcaraz, & Sallis, 1994; Milosevic, 1996; Rice, 1988). Studies that have focused on attitudes in conjunction with perceived self-competence of students have also been numerous (see Carroll & Loumidis, 2001; Lee, Carter, & Xiang, 1995; Mullan, Albinson, & Markland, 1997). A small number

of studies have sought student opinions on specific pedagogical methods, such as sport education (see MacPhail et al., 2003) or other instructional models (see Dyson, 1995). In one of the few studies of its kind, Portman (1995) looked specifically at the experiences of lower-skilled students in physical education.

The Importance of Childhood

According to the Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute (2001), regular physical activity in childhood contributes to positive mental and physical well-being, helps to maintain a healthy body weight, and may also reduce the risk of a range of adult chronic diseases. In fact, the Public Health Agency of Canada (2006) identifies *healthy childhood development* as one of 11 determinants that shape the health of individuals and communities. A quality physical education program, as defined by CAHPERD, positively influences children's development with regard to mental and physical health.

Physical activity is particularly encouraged in children with the assumption that an active lifestyle in childhood will lead to an active lifestyle in adulthood (Kohl & Hobbs, 2003). There is, however, minimal data to support this claim, which Kohl & Hobbs (2003) suggest may be due to difficulties in accurately assessing physical activity, in addition to the logistical difficulties of tracking physical activity levels. Although very few studies have tracked the long-term impact of physical education programs on adult lifestyle behavior, there is some evidence to suggest that childhood physical activity experiences may be more important for women than men. The only Canadian study that has investigated the long term influence of childhood physical activity was conducted in Quebec, and involved tracking an experimental and a

control group of students. The experimental group received one hour per day of physical education throughout their elementary school years, grades one through six. A specialist taught their classes. The control group received the standard one-hour of physical education per week, taught by their homeroom teacher. Subjects were recalled between the ages of 30–35. Women who had been involved in the enhanced physical education program were undertaking significantly more physical activity than their peers, however there was no significant program-related difference detected in men (Shephard & Trudeau, 2000).

Despite the minimal research documenting the long-term impact of childhood physical activity on adult lifestyle, the importance of physical activity in childhood is widely recognized, for the childhood health of children as well as their future health. In fact, CAHPERD has campaigned for students to receive daily physical education for several years. CAHPERD promotes quality daily physical education programs (QDPE) with the following rationale: “QDPE ensures that all children who receive it have the opportunity to develop the knowledge, skills, and habits that they need to lead physically active lives now, and just as importantly, into the future” (CAHPERD, n.d.). To parallel the recognized importance of physical activity in childhood, research initiatives and intervention strategies at the elementary school level are necessary in order to work towards the goal of providing the best possible physical education experiences for all students, at all ages.

Elementary School Children’s Attitudes towards PE

The majority of studies measuring attitude at the elementary school level have used a questionnaire methodology, occasionally in conjunction with interviews.

Overall, studies have found that girls at the elementary school level hold less favorable attitudes towards PE than boys (Carroll & Loumidis, 2001; Prochaska et al., 2003; Shropshire & Carroll, 1998; Shropshire et al., 1997).

Shropshire et al. (1997) used the Pre-Adolescent Attitude to Physical Education Questionnaire (PAAPEQ) with 847 grade six students. Boys scored significantly higher (indicating more positive attitudes) in the sub-domains of the questionnaire measuring “General Interest”, as well as “Environmental Adjustment”. These findings indicated that boys held a higher overall interest in PE, and were less deterred or bothered by being sweaty, cold, wet, having to change into uniform, or being involved in physically demanding activities. Carroll & Loumidis (2001) questioned grade six students on their enjoyment of physical education, as well as their perceived competence in physical education. Results showed a significant correlation between perceived competence and enjoyment; boys reported a significantly higher level of enjoyment in physical education and a significantly higher perception of their ability than the girls (Carroll & Loumidis, 2001). In one of the few longitudinal studies conducted on children’s attitudes, Prochaska et al. (2003) tracked a group of students as they moved from grade four through grade six. They found that enjoyment of physical education declined consistently over time from fourth grade to sixth grade, particularly for girls and children who were not on sports teams. The average ratings of PE enjoyment were still relatively high in the sixth grade (78%), however the decrease is an important finding as it is evidence of an on-going negative trend as children age (Prochaska et al., 2003).

In addition to measures of overall enjoyment levels, the literature shows a number of specific trends with regard to girls' participation in physical education. Birtwistle and Brodie (1991) found that girls valued the moral, social and aesthetic aspects of physical education more than boys did. Similarly, Burrows, Eves, and Cooper (1999) found that over one-third ($n=21$) of the girls in their study (participants were in grades two, four, and six) commented on the cosmetic aspects of physical activity as a primary motivator for being physically active. The most frequent comment made by the girls was that exercise was a way to stay in "good shape" (Burrows et al., 1999, p.5). Shea (2006) studied how immigrant youth in St. John's, NL, understand discourses of health and fitness in society. She noted that females used terms like "exercising" and "being fit" in discussions of physical activity, while males in her study spoke of physical activity by discussing sports, teams, and competition. In questioning grade six students on their activity levels and preferences, Shropshire and Carroll (1998) found that boys were more inclined towards team sports, while girls spent more time participating in sports not traditionally taught in physical education. Similarly, Prochaska et al. (2003) suggested that curriculums that are dominated by team games could be one reason why girls' enjoyment ratings of PE were lower boys' ratings in their study. The authors argued that team games were more suited to the interests of boys rather than girls. Biddle and Armstrong (1992) found that boys were more intrinsically motivated to be physically active than girls, whereas girls were more dependant than boys on extrinsic autonomous judgment (such as feedback from the teacher).

A recurring theme in physical activity research that has been linked to individual attitudes towards physical education is that girls tend to have lower perceived competence than boys (Carroll & Loumidis, 2001; Lee et al., 1995; Mullan et al., 1997). Chase (2001) found that 8 to 9 year old boys had a higher self-appraisal of ability than 8 to 9 year old girls. Similarly, Shropshire et al. (1997) found that grade six boys had significantly higher perceived competence of their sporting ability than grade six girls. Carroll & Loumidis (2001) suggested the possibility that girls derive less enjoyment from physical education because they perceive themselves to be less skilled than the boys.

Lee et al. (1995) examined elementary school children's conceptions of ability in physical education. They found that fourth and fifth grade males tended to stereotype the girls as being less competent than the boys. This was detected through the provision of gender specific answers such as "well, most of the girls" (p.391) when participants were asked to identify "poor" students in the class. Conversely, when fourth and fifth grade females were identified males as "poor" students, their justifications were based on behavioral criteria, not athletic ability. Mullan et al. (1997) questioned whether the gender differences in perceived self-competence would be as distinct when physical activity was broken down into sub-categories, such as play activities (tag, skipping, climbing trees), recreational competence (pick-up games, aerobics, skating), and competitive competence (basketball, volleyball, soccer, played with a coach, referee, or both). Even within these sub-domains, across all ages of children 7–15 years old, the perceived competence scores of males were higher than females in every category of physical activity (Mullan et al., 1997).

Despite the consistency in the findings on perceived self-confidence, researchers warn against automatically making the assumption that girls actually have lower perceived self-competence than boys. They have suggested that girls may have a tendency to respond more modestly on questionnaires than boys, and thus the findings may not be an accurate reflection of reality (Mullan et al., 1997).

Birtwistle & Brodie (1991) used the Children's Attitudes Towards Physical Activity (CATPA) questionnaire with 316 grade six girls and boys. Contrary to much previous research, the authors found that overall girls showed more positive attitudes towards physical education than boys. Follow-up tests revealed that a significant factor in the higher overall scores for girls was because they ranked the aesthetic value of physical education significantly higher than boys did.

Finally, several researchers have examined the correlation between children's physical fitness levels and their attitudes towards physical education. A number of these studies have found no significant relationship between fitness level and enjoyment of physical activity (see Carroll & Loumidis, 2001; Prochaska et al., 2004; Sherrill et al., 1989). Carroll and Loumidis (2001) questioned grade six students on their enjoyment in physical education and found no significant relationship between enjoyment of physical education and the amount of physical activity that students engaged in both inside and outside of school. Sherrill et al. (1989) examined attitudes towards physical education in relation to fitness levels and self concept of grade four and five males and females who were in the upper and lower quintile of their class in terms of physical fitness level and found that overall, attitude towards physical education did not appear to be associated with levels of fitness. In their longitudinal

study, Prochaska et al. (2003) noted that there was no correlation between an increase in students' BMI and their enjoyment of physical education over the three years they were tracked. McKenzie et al. (1994) asked students to rate their enjoyment of physical education lessons over the course of a unit, believing that enjoyment would increase throughout the unit as skill level improved. They detected no increase in enjoyment throughout the unit, which demonstrated that skill level was not strongly associated with enjoyment in physical education.

Section III: Methodology

Student Voices in Research

Educational researchers have been criticized in the past for neglecting to consider student perspectives in their research (Smith, 1991). The methodology used in this research project responds to the call put forth by researchers such as Graham (1995b) and Smith (1991) to “give children a voice” in physical education research. Although research focusing on physical education experiences from the perspective of students is relatively minimal, there are nonetheless a number of studies that have placed student experiences at the center of the research design (see Dyson, 1995; Groves & Laws, 2003; MacPhail, Kinchen, & Kirk, 2003; Portman 1995). The prospect of learning about student perceptions and attitudes is not recent—in 1988, Fox and Biddle coauthored a six part series exploring some of the psychological factors involved in a child's orientation to physical activity. The authors developed a model outlining the psychological dimension in physical education, based on the hypothesis that if physical education teachers knew more about the psychological domain, they would be able to improve the quality of physical education for more

children, and at a faster rate (Fox, 1988). A central component to their model was hearing students' opinions on physical education (Fox, 1988).

Several researchers support and encourage research designs that allow students to voice their opinions. Fox (1988) argued that teachers who are aware of student perceptions of their programs may be able to better modify and improve the quality and relevance of their physical education programs. In further support of child-centered research, Fox also argued that asking children their opinions emphasizes mutual respect, as it conveys to children the pursuit of a common goal (Fox, 1989). Ultimately, Fox (1989) suggests that superior teachers are ones who are able to grasp the psychology of the teaching situation as it unfolds. Similarly, Graham (1995a) argued that the best teachers are the ones who truly understand the students they are teaching. Seeking out students' opinions on physical education is a way to allow all students—from those who do not enjoy physical education to those who thrive in it—to express themselves (Graham, 1995b). Kientzler (1999) suggested that in order for curriculum and policy changes to be effective and receive student support, all stakeholders involved in making change must first understand what girls think about physical activity and what they believe would motivate them to participate regularly. Luke (1992) conducted individual interviews with children in grades one, two and three about their physical education classes and concluded that “young children in the primary grades do have opinions and perceptions about their school physical education program which serve to influence their attitude” (p. 43). Similarly, Graham (1995b) noted that “students, even as early as 5 years old, are able to express their feelings, needs, and thoughts about what is taught in physical

education and how it is taught” (p.481). Studies such as the one conducted by Luke (1992) demonstrate that there is a lot of knowledge to be gained when students are centered in research with the freedom to express themselves.

Children’s Drawings in Scientific Research

Academic interest in children’s drawings dates back over a century. From the late 1800’s onwards, varying aspects of children’s drawings have been studied, including what children like to draw, how children draw the human figure, cultural influences on children’s drawings, the developmental stages of drawings, and children’s representation of the family unit (Krampen, 1991). Academic interest in drawings has also taken place in the form of debate about the degree to which drawings express some internal representation of the child. While some researchers have argued against evaluating children’s drawings as a form of internal representation (Kossly et al. 1977; Frances, 1953 as cited by Krampen, 1991) others, such as Piaget, have quite strongly advocated that children “draw what they know,” and put certain “internal models” on paper (Krampen, 1991).

Gamradt and Staples (1994) examined the use of drawings in educational research and evaluation. More specifically, they looked at drawings in the context of postmodern research. According to Gamradt and Staples (1994), a postmodernist approach to visual arts research is characterized by its appeal to multiple audiences. In other words, studies are designed that are theoretically interesting as well as useful, and that appeal to researchers as well as members of the school and outside community (Gamradt & Staples, 1994). With regard to the use visual arts methods in educational research, Gamradt and Staples stated the following:

We believe this kind of work represents a new and much needed area of inquiry for social scientists interested in alternative strategies for “capturing the student’s voice” in educational research and evaluation. It is our contention that, if done properly, this kind of research could have theoretical value for visual arts researchers and pragmatic utility for educational decision makers. (p.37)

One advantage to the use of drawings in research is that drawings provide children with the freedom to express themselves from their own point of view (Haney, Russell, Gulek, and Fierros, 1998). With the use of research methods like questionnaires, children are typically asked to respond to questions that adult researchers have decided are the most appropriate to ask based on their interpretation of a situation. Drawings, on the other hand, allow children a higher degree of freedom in expressing themselves, as they make the decisions on what to include in their drawing. Haney et al. (1998) conducted research in the form of student assessment surveys regarding schools reforms. The intention was to gain an understanding of student views on school progress and changes. Haney et al. (1998) concluded that student drawings were a powerful vehicle for teachers to learn from student perspectives. Accessing student perspectives is something Yuen (2004) identified as a significant challenge faced by researchers. Yuen (2004) described the risk of researchers writing texts that impose their own authority on children’s expressions. Yuen (2004) contended that the use of drawings is one way in which researchers can overcome this limitation, as children are able to demonstrate what is most relevant to them through their drawings.

Nelson (1990) noted that what is salient about an event for a child may not be what adults find relevant or interesting (as cited by Bulter, Gross, & Hayne, 1995). A number of researchers have supported the use of drawings as a means of gaining

valuable information. In their study of student experiences throughout a unit of sport education, MacPhail & Kinchen (2004) supported the use of drawings as a method of data collection, concluding that “drawings have the potential to identify a range of experiences related to different teaching and learning environments” (p.106). Groves & Laws (2003) used diaries as their primary data source, but discovered the value in drawings. Several students supplemented their diary entries with drawings or “doodles”, which directed the researchers’ attention to particular issues that a student considered significant, and may have had a hard time expressing in words (Groves & Laws, 2003).

The majority of studies that have used drawings have utilized multiple methods of data collection, and have often used drawings in conjunction with interviews. Yuen (2004) discovered multiple benefits to the use of drawings as part of her focus group interviews with children on their interpretations of summer camp. She found that the drawings facilitated a relaxed atmosphere, allowed the researcher to gain insight into the child’s perspective, provided structure and focus to the group discussion, and reduced the possibility of “groupthink” (Yuen, 2004). Similarly, in their study of inclusive physical education from the perspective of students with disabilities, Goodwin & Watkinson (2000) used drawings in conjunction with interviews. The authors found that drawings eased the participants into the interview, provided a stimulus for discussion and generated important information (Goodwin & Watkinson, 2000). MacPhail & Kinchen (2004) also noted that drawings generated important information in their study. Through an analysis of student drawings, the researchers were able to notice a particular difference between two separate grade

five classes in their experiences of a sport education unit; drawings from one class included a much higher number of trophies versus the other class, where more drawings emphasized teamwork. After further investigation, the researchers attributed this to the different emphases the two classroom teachers had put on the sport education unit (MacPhail & Kinchen, 2004).

A particularly thorough use of drawings was made by Wetton & McWhirter (1998), who grounded their reform of the health education curriculum for young children (in the United Kingdom) in student drawings. The researchers emphasized the importance of “starting where the children are” in terms of the complex understandings of health in society. Ten thousand and five hundred students ranging from ages four to eight completed drawings, in response to being asked to draw what made themselves healthy and kept themselves healthy (Wetton & McWhirter, 1998). The drawings provided a substantial amount of information—from the drawings, the researchers saw that children’s understanding of health was not limited to just physical, but mental and emotional as well. This was seen as the majority of the pictures showed people smiling with love, happiness and friendship being prominent themes across the drawings (Wetton & McWhirter, 1998). From the research, a scope and spiral chart was created depicting children’s changing perceptions of health from aged 4 upwards, which resulted in the school planning program Health for Life I (Wetton & McWhirter, 1998). The “Draw and Write” technique employed by these researchers inspired the methodology used for the present study and will be discussed further in the chapter three.

Butler, Gross, and Hayne (1995) conducted a study to determine the extent to which drawings aided in the memory–recall ability of children. Memory–recall is often of particular concern to researchers who use questionnaires with children to get information on their physical activity levels, frequency or durations (Shropshire & Carroll, 1998). Butler et al. (1995) had children visit a fire station as a school outing, and divided them into two groups afterwards for research purposes. One group recalled the experience to an interviewer verbally, while the other group drew their experience while recalling it verbally to an interviewer. The children who were asked to draw what happened during their trip reported more detailed information than their counterparts (Butler et al., 1995). The children who drew while recalling their experience elaborated on what may be considered routine aspects of the outing. For example, as opposed to just stating that they went by bus, as the non-drawing group did, children who drew elaborated by stating the bus was big, green, a school bus, where they sat on it, and so forth. The authors concluded that the drawing may have been an additional source of retrieval cues for the children (Butler et al., 1995). Importantly, the additional retrieval cues potentially sought by the children throughout their drawing experience would be their own, and not those of an adult, again attesting to the child being able to express what is most relevant to them when drawing (Butler et al., 1995). In summary, Butler et al. (1995) concluded that drawing, in conjunction with direct questions, yielded the most accurate and comprehensive accounts of the experience by young children, a finding consistent with those of Todd & Perlmutter (1980, as cited by Butler et al., 1995), who concluded that children may provide a greater amount of information about events

when they themselves initiate the retrieval. Yuen (2004) also found that drawings can be used as a technique for eliciting further information in focus groups with children.

Children's Drawing Ability and Research

A primary concern in using children's drawings for research purposes is that the child be able to draw in a way that researchers can interpret meaningfully. A brief review of the developmental stages of children's drawings reflects positively on the ages included in this study. This study sought drawings from children in grades three through six, or ages 8/9 – 11/12. Encouragingly, in their study of developmental stages of children's drawings, Thomas and Silk (1990) found that from ages 8 onwards, "children begin to draw from a particular viewpoint...children attempt to portray depth in their drawings, not only in individual objects but also as relationships between objects" (p.38). Similarly, in their study on children's conceptions of health, Wetton and McWhirter (1998) found that as of age 8 and 9 a significant change occurred in the nature of the children's responses, with children of that age being more able to generalize about aspects of health, with their pictures as well as words surrounding their pictures.

Flannery & Watson (1995) undertook a study to determine the extent in which sex differences and gender-role differences are present in children's drawings. In their study of drawings from grade three, four and five children, they found a difference in theme realism (boys often drew more unrealistic and aggressive depictions), however they did not find a difference in the expressiveness of the drawings between boys and girls (Flannery & Watson, 1995). Flannery & Watson (1995) also found no general

difference in artistic skill between males and females. This is an important finding as the present study analyzed drawings from boys and girls against one another. It is therefore ideal that girls and boys be on the same level artistically, considering of course the normal range of abilities expected within any group.

Finally, children seem to enjoy drawing. Yuen (2004) identified how the children in her focus group study felt that the drawings provided an enjoyable occasion to express themselves and be heard by others. Graham (1995) highlighted how in the field of physical education in particular, it is easy for teachers to get caught up with “teaching numbers” and forget about the individual. Student drawings are a way to let children know that what they feel and think about their physical education program is important.

Health and Physical Education Studies that have used Drawings

Relatively few studies in physical education and physical activity research have used drawings as a method of data collection. The most extensive use of drawings was Wetton & McWhirter’s (1998) study on children’s perceptions of health, which sought drawings from 10,500 children, aged four to eight, and generated information that was used as a basis for a health curriculum reform. MacPhail et al. (2003) used drawings, in addition to informal interviews, in seeking to understand grade five students’ conceptions of sport after a 16-week Sport Education unit. Upon completion of the unit students were asked to draw a picture that they believed conveyed their experiences of sport education. The authors included the use of drawings in stating that drawings would allow the students to use their own frame of reference to convey the elements of sport education that were most important and

relevant to them (MacPhail et al., 2003). Goodwin and Watkinson (2000) stated multiple benefits in the use of drawings. They found that the inclusion of drawings in their study of inclusive physical education, from the perspective of students with disabilities, facilitated a higher comfort level in the interview setting and provided a stimulus for discussion, in addition to being a valuable source of data (Goodwin & Watkinson, 2000). Groves and Laws (2003) found that students would occasionally include meta-narratives in their diary entries, often in the form of drawings, to convey issues that the child thought to be of significant importance, but may have had trouble expressing in words (Groves & Laws, 2003). In summary, the use of drawings has been supported by physical activity researchers as a valuable component to data collection.

Limitations to the Use of Drawings

One of the main limitations to the use of drawings is the issue of symbolic representation—that is, can drawings really be read as a meaningful representation of an internalized perception of the child? The literature shows that there have been a number of researchers who have argued both in favor of symbolic representation (DiLeo, 1983; Finney et al., 1995 as cited by MacPhail et al., 2003; Gamradt & Staples, 1994) and against (Golomb, 1994; Wales, 1990, as cited by MacPhail et al., 2003). Researchers have recognized cautions made by experts warning against reading too much into a particular drawing (DiLeo, 1983) and most recent studies involving children's drawings have sought not to analyze individual drawings but to detect patterns and themes across all drawings (Haney et al., 1998; MacPhail et al., 2003; Wetton & McWhirter, 1998).

Wetton & McWhirter (1998) highlight how children's drawings consist of a mixture of drawing conventions and stereotypes. For instance, even though children know that women are not triangular, many children will draw women as possessing a distinctly triangular body. Likewise, when asked to draw a drug dealer, children consistently draw a distinctly mean looking person, with mean expressions, which according to the researchers represents a trap that both children and adults are susceptible to in thinking that "bad" people will be recognizable by their appearance (Wetton & McWhirter, 1998). Haney et al. (1998) also recognized that student drawings are influenced by their stereotypes, but maintained that it is often useful for teachers and researchers to recognize these stereotypes.

Another limitation to the use of drawings concerns the degree of abstract concept that can be depicted in drawings—depending on the nature of the topic, students may not be able to convey their feelings through a drawing as they may be too complex to draw on paper (MacPhail et al., 2003; Yuen, 2004). Similarly, the artistic ability of a particular child may limit the degree to which they are capable of expressing themselves (MacPhail et al., 2003). Finally, as is the case with all methods in qualitative research, the interpretation of drawings is subjective and at risk of researcher bias (Wetton & McWhirter).

Section IV: Theoretical Perspective

Human development has been defined as "any age-related change in body or behavior from conception to death (Perlmutter & Hall, 1985; as cited by Nelson & Robinson, 1999). There are many theories about human development. The most influential of the traditional approaches to explaining personality and gender is

Freud's psychoanalytic theory, which postulates that unconscious forces and early childhood experiences form personality (Brannon, 2002). Other prominent approaches, however, place social factors as the primary shaping forces of personality and gender. These theories, known as social theories, contend that the toys children play with and the behaviors they see modeled by others around them serve as primary influences in personality development (Brannon, 2002).

The Gender Perspective

This research is grounded in the ideas proposed by the gender perspective. The gender perspective is a response to both biologically-based theories of human development and social psychological theories (Nelson & Robinson, 1999). It has yet to attain the status of a full theory, however according to Nelson & Robinson (1999), the gender perspective has the potential to be one of the most comprehensive and multi-level theories developed in gender studies thus far.

The gender perspective is conceptualized to address problems inherent in other models of gender development. According to Thompson (1993), a main criticism of prevailing approaches is that gender is treated as individual property. The gender perspective problematizes the notion promoted by biological theories that gender differences are stable properties resulting from biologically based sex-differences, and further problematizes the extent to which social theories place socialization, assumed to be dichotomous and deeply internalized during childhood, as an essentially continuous influence throughout an individuals' life (Nelson & Robinson, 1999). According to Thompson (1993), in moving beyond conceptualizing gender as an individual property, the gender perspective highlights the influences of

institutional and interactional factors in the construction of gender. The gender perspective recognizes that there are great similarities between the sexes, as well as great variability within each sex (Nelson & Robinson, 1999).

The gender perspective argues that sex and gender differences are not the product of individual properties, but rather the product of “ongoing multilevel social construction and reconstruction processes” (Nelson & Robinson, 1999, p. 77). This analysis of the construction of gender as occurring on multiple levels is a central feature of the gender perspective (Thompson, 1993). The perspective outlines four levels of gender construction: sociocultural, institutional, interactional, and individual (Nelson & Robinson, 1999). The sociocultural level is comprised of the “symbolic conditions within which men and women live” (p.78), and includes beliefs, values, and ideologies that support social arrangements of gender (Nelson & Robinson, 1999). Analysis at this level recognizes that gender constructs vary across cultures and historical times, but that gender is embedded in ideology and related to disadvantage, stratification and hierarchy in every culture (Thompson, 1993). The institutional level focuses upon the structural basis of Canadian society. According to the gender perspective, each institution in Canadian society (family, economy, religion) holds different implications for each gender (Nelson & Robinson, 1999). The interactional level describes “the impact of immediate situations of everyday interaction as they shape the gendered actions, thoughts, and feelings of men and women” (Thompson, 1993). On a daily basis, individuals negotiate boundaries between what is viewed as gender-appropriate and gender-inappropriate behavior (Gerson & Peiss, 1985, as cited by Nelson & Robinson, 1999). Finally, the individual

level relates to personal characteristics – the level of gender consciousness of an individual, their gender behavior, and the overall form of their gender identity (Thompson, 1993).

Of particular relevance to this research project is how the gender perspective views gender differences. According to the gender perspective, gender differences are an outcome (Thompson, 1993). Each of the four levels contributes to the production of gender and subsequent differences in behavior between women and men. The purpose of the gender perspective is to account for differences by analyzing the social conditions that create difference (Thompson, 1993).

In summary, the gender perspective argues that individual gender behavior is not a consequence of biology nor a simple conformity to role expectations learned during childhood socialization (Nelson & Robinson, 1999). Nelson and Robinson (1999) summarize the construction of gender as proposed by the gender perspective with the following statement: “Individual men and women construct their gender through interacting with other gendered beings in the situational contexts of basic institutions within a particular society possessing a particular culture at a particular point in historical time” (p.79).

Conclusion

Although research has been conducted at the elementary school level, it is relatively small compared to the quantity of research at the high school level. Findings from studies that have been conducted at the elementary level indicate that elementary school children’s attitudes toward physical activity and physical education warrant serious concern at this level. Elementary school is a crucial time for the

formation of attitudes towards physical education. Gender differences with regard to physical activity clearly exist even at this young age. More research is needed at this level, particularly in examining attitudes of grade three and four children, a point at where some researchers (see Prochaska et al., 2003; Snow, 1995) contend that attitudes begin to change. Similarly, more studies on attitudes towards physical education that include gender as a specific variable are needed at the elementary school level, as research has indicated that gender has a significant influence on interest and participation levels in physical education and physical activity. Additionally, there is a need for more Canadian research on the topic of student's attitudes towards physical education, as sport and exercise experiences have strong ties to cultural context (Cahn, 1994; Hall, 1999).

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Physical education has the potential to make important contributions to a child's development. Unfortunately, many students, and in particular female students, do not elect to take physical education in high school. This research evaluated students' perceptions and attitudes towards physical education at one elementary school, in order to better understand what students enjoy about physical education and what struggles they encounter with the subject. Due to the discrepancy in physical activity participation rates, this study sought to gain insight on the experiences of elementary school girls in particular. This research recognized the importance of context by examining the physical education program that was offered at the school. This allowed for the attitudes expressed by students to be continually related back to the physical education program offered at the school. This research was exploratory in nature and sought to give students a voice. The use of qualitative research provided a framework for students to express what was most relevant to them about their physical education experiences.

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research involves exploring and developing an understanding of the experiences of others, and encompasses many diverse methodologies. As stated by Merriam (1998), "qualitative research is a journey of discovery rather than confirmation" (p. 18). Qualitative research is flexible by nature, as methods can be shaped or modified throughout the research process itself. This ensures that there is always room for participants to have their opinions and experiences heard. Flexibility

of research methodologies is necessary to meet the main goal of social research, which is, according to Henderson (1991b), “to discover, understand, and communicate truth about people in society” (p.11). Qualitative research methods offer ways of gaining insight into what Henderson (1991) refers to as “POBA’s”- perceptions, opinions, beliefs, and attitudes. There is a considerable amount of debate surrounding the definitions and meaning of these terms. Henderson (1991) uses this acronym to account for their varying definitions and overlap, and maintains that each of these terms comprise part of what qualitative researcher’s ultimately wish to know- what do individuals think and feel about a certain phenomenon?

In qualitative research, the researcher is a tool in the research process, and the primary instrument for data collection and analysis (Thomas & Nelson, 2001). As the researcher ultimately reports on what she or he has observed and learned, the final outcome of the study is highly dependant on the researcher’s ability to see, understand, and interpret data in the most accurate way possible. Qualitative researchers do not seek to maintain a status of absolute objectivity – it is often their involvement in a situation that allows them to access the most meaningful information and interpret it in its most truthful manner. As stated by Locke (1989), “the ultimate concern is that the data be neutral, not the investigator” (p. 12). Researchers do not rely on personal intuition or insight, however—they are constantly seeking scientifically valid and reliable results. Part of this process of ensuring scientific reliability and validity requires that researchers explain the means by which came to know what they assert (Locke, 1989). By disclosing past related experiences that researchers bring to their projects, readers are able to make the most

knowledgeable assessment of the research possible. The following paragraphs therefore outline the researcher's history in relation to the current project.

The Position of the Researcher

This study was shaped primarily by my own experiences as a novice physical education teacher. I completed an undergraduate degree in Physical Education at McGill University. I made the decision to enroll at McGill having had many positive experiences participating in sport and physical activity as a child and teenager. Additionally, I enjoyed working with people in a social environment.

My past experiences with physical education lead me to develop a critical interest in the field. Having grown up in the province of Quebec, physical education classes were mandatory and separated by gender. I therefore took physical education each year of high school (from grades seven-eleven), and was always in female-only classes. Being an athlete, I generally enjoyed physical education, however I often felt frustrated by the program that was offered at my school. I felt that classes were often not productive or challenging, and that a lot of time was wasted on a regular basis waiting for every girl to be finished changing before classes started (which often seemed to deliberately take a long time). I, along with my classmates, often complained about the fact that the boys' classes were always conducted in larger gymnasium of the two at the school. Additionally, I was occasionally frustrated by the different curriculums that the boys and girls programs followed. I did not like the fact that boys would do typically male activity units, such as wrestling, while the girls would do typically female units, such as dance. These experiences influenced in

particular a more critical awareness and interest in gender issues within the field of physical education.

Physical Education at McGill University was a four year program conjointly offered through the faculty of education, therefore students graduated with their full teaching certification at both the elementary and high school levels. Throughout my undergraduate degree, I had an interest in the different ways that boys and girls participated in physical education, as observed during teaching internships. However, it was after a one year contract teaching physical education full time at an elementary school (Kindergarten-Grade Six) in St. Lazare, Quebec, that I truly came to question students' experiences with physical education over the course of their elementary school education. I was hired to teach on a last-minute basis (the position unexpectedly became available when the permanent teacher had to take immediate leave one month into the school year) with the understanding that it was only for one year. I began the job one day after completing my final required student internship. Throughout the school year, I noticed that beginning in grade four, some female students started complaining about not being passed the ball during team games. Increasingly towards grade six, a higher number of students (majority female) became less motivated to participate in classes and often needed encouragement to participate or maintain quality participation. Conversely, I noticed no differences in the motivation and participation levels between female and male students in grades one, two and three. This prompted a desire to explore attitudes and perceptions of students across several grade levels in elementary school physical education. I had planned to

return to school to pursue a Masters degree, and as such did so following my one year of teaching experience.

Upon arriving in Newfoundland to pursue my studies, I volunteered with a physical education teacher in a local school. I was fortunate enough to be put in contact with an elementary school teacher who ran an extensive and well respected program at her school. I was introduced to the students at the school as a volunteer and spent three hours a week in the gymnasium with the physical education teacher. I became familiar with the teaching style of the PE teacher and many of the methods and activities that she used in her program. After four months, I received the appropriate certification to teach in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador, and began substitute teaching at the elementary school on an occasional basis. I became very familiar with the students and staff at the school after completing a three-week replacement for the physical education teacher towards the end of the academic school year. Eventually, as plans for my study developed, the physical education teacher at this school expressed interest in the study, and agreed for her school to participate in the study.

Case Study

This research project was a case study of one school. According to Yin (1993), a case study approach is used by researchers who want three main conditions in their research: a) broadly designed research topics b) an exploration of contextual topics, not just the phenomenon of study and c) a study that relies on multiple and not singular sources of data. These three conditions were established in the design of this research. Research topics were broadly defined in that students were asked about their

experiences and were free to identify what was most relevant to them through the use of drawings. Focus group interviews provided further latitude for students to express their opinions. The interview with the physical education teacher provided the necessary background on the PE program to establish a context for students' experiences. Finally, multiple sources of data were collected.

The vision of this research project was guided by the belief that the most useful knowledge will be gained through exploring student attitudes and perceptions of physical education within the context in which the physical education classes are offered. A researcher cannot expect to thoroughly comprehend participants' experiences or their sense of understanding of situations, if there is not some form of access to the context in which this understanding is constructed (Locke, 1989). Research has shown that the physical education teacher influences student attitudes towards the subject (Figly, 1985; Luke & Sinclair, 1991). The general support shown for physical education on the part of all teachers and staff in the school may also impact student perceptions of physical education. A teacher who punishes a poorly behaved class by not allowing them to go to their physical education period is sending a very different message about the worth of physical education than a teacher who always brings his or her class to the gymnasium on time. A case study of attitudes towards physical education allows for a consideration of these multiple factors that may be shaping or influencing student attitudes.

Merriam (1998) summarized the objectives of case study research in the field of education:

A case study design is employed to gain an in-depth understanding of the situation and meaning for those involved. The interest is in process rather than

outcomes, in context rather than a specific variable, in discovery rather than confirmation. Insights gleaned from case studies can directly influence policy, practice, and future research. (p.19)

This research project suited this above-described vision of discovery, with an importance placed on the context of the discovery. This naturally led to the use of a qualitative case study research design. The three sources of data collected as part of the case study are discussed in further detail in the following sections

Data Collection

Silverman & Subramaniam (1999) conducted a review of measurement issues and outcomes in research on student attitudes towards physical education and physical activity. A key issue identified by the authors was the need for researchers to disclose, in greater detail, the specific methods and steps that are taken to ensure “good data”. Complete information about how data was gathered, how interpretations were made, and what steps were taken during data analysis to ensure that reasonable conclusions were met is necessary to allow readers to make decisions about the validity of the research (Silverman & Subramaniam, 1999). The following sections outline in detail the processes through which data were obtained and interpreted in this study.

Sample Selection and Identification

This study took place at Parkview Elementary School (pseudonym). The school is located in the central district of St. John's (population 150,000), Newfoundland. It is located in a busy environment. To one side, it borders a residential area. A soccer field and a fence separate it from a high school and a junior

high to the other side. Parkview Elementary is formerly a junior high and has more floors than a typical elementary school.

Parkview Elementary is a relatively small school, with a student population of 220 in the year that the study took place. It houses classes from Kindergarten through to grade six. There are two classes at each grade level, with the exception of grade three where there is only one class. The class sizes are small, ranging between 12 and 18 students, with the exception of the one Grade 3 class which has 22 students and the Kindergarten classes which have under 10 students in each. The student population at the school is a particularly challenging one, in that it has many students with high needs. Several students come from low socio-economic status families. A number of students are deprived emotionally as well as economically, and many students are not in the care of their birth parents. Academically, over 2/3 of the student population are on alternate pathways, meaning that they do not follow the standard objectives and curriculum as defined by the educational board of the province and/or require special assistance to meet those objectives. The degree to which objectives are modified vary according to the needs assessment for students in each subject. The school has a small percentage of students whose families have immigrated to Canada, and for whom English is a second language.

This research project involved students in grades three to six. The intent was to have as many students as possible participate in the drawing portion of the study, and from that sample chose between 6 and 8 females from each grade level to participate in the interview portion of the study. A total of 88 students consented to participate in the drawing portion of the study, and 80 students completed a drawing

that was used in the study. There were several students who completed drawings during the data collection process but whose drawings were not collected by the researcher as they had not returned a signed consent form. Having experienced the challenge of getting consent forms to be signed by parents and returned during the drawing phase of the study, I anticipated further difficulty getting consent forms returned for the focus group portion of the study. I therefore decided to invite all females in each grade level to participate in a focus group interview. Those who did return the consent forms participated in the interview. Though this was not a random sampling technique, the resulting interview groups were not homogenous. Three of the four groups included one student for whom English was not their first language. Each of the groups included students with varying levels of academic success both in the classroom and in physical education. Additionally, the groups varied in the degree of organized extra-curricular involvement in sport and physical activity, with some girls indicating external involvement in activities such as gymnastics, basketball and soccer, and some girls indicating no external involvement in organized sport or physical activity.

Collecting Data from Children

Mauthner (1997) identified a number of methodological concerns that arise when collecting data from children. Mauthner (1997) stressed that care needs to be taken to present the research topic and researcher clearly to children. Furthermore, Mauthner (1997) discussed the issue of unequal power relations between adult researchers and children. One means of equalizing these “power relations” is to use an approach that takes the perspective and position of the child into account is

(Mauthner, 1997). This can be accomplished by having a flexible interview structure that allows children the latitude to make comments, which may or may not be related to the specific topic at hand, throughout the interview. Another strategy is to validate children's experience of the research process itself, by allowing them, for example, to ask questions about the audio equipment and what they would sound like on tape (Mauthner, 1997).

These concerns were heralded in the design and implementation of this research. I explained the study to all students in the class by comparing what I was doing to projects that they often do in school. The students were first asked to provide examples of what types of projects they had done in the past and then questioned as to why individuals undertake projects. Answers from the students indicated a clear understanding of the task. For example, responses from grade four students included "to learn more about something" and "to find an answer to a question". I confirmed to the students that that was purpose of this research project—to learn more about what elementary school students think and feel about their physical education classes. Participants were given freedom to make whatever comments they wanted throughout the interview, however I always brought the discussion back to the structured interview questions. As noted by Mauthner (1997), participants in this study did express curiosity about the research process and discussed the humour in hearing themselves on tape.

The Draw and Write Technique

The Draw and Write technique was conceived from the need for a research approach that did not rule out any children based on reading or writing skills, that

was non-threatening for teachers, administrators, and parents, that had a protocol that seemed like an everyday classroom activity, but was sophisticated enough to answer meaningful research questions (Wetton & McWhirter, 1998). Since the conception of the draw and write technique, it has established itself as a valid and reliable research method (though not without criticism, which is further discussed below) and has been used to answer a variety of health related research questions in a number of countries (Wetton & McWhirter, 1998). The original project that employed the draw and write technique asked children to 1) think about and then draw themselves doing all the things they did to make themselves healthy and keep themselves healthy and 2) write beside each picture what that they were doing (Wetton & McWhirter, 1998).

According to Wetton and McWhirter (1998), the draw and write technique has the following strengths:

- It allows for an understanding of children's perceptions
- It can generate a large amount of data, which can be analyzed both qualitatively and quantitatively
- It is practical for use with children
- It can be used for educational evaluation and to inform policy development.

Increased interest in the draw and write technique has lead researchers to identify some limitations to its use. In their critical appraisal of the draw and write technique, Backett-Milburn & Mckie (1999) reminded researchers that "how children define and perceive the research task and what it means to them can have a considerable effect on the substantive material they then portray" (p.392). This concern was especially pertinent to draw and write studies where teachers acted as

researchers. Consequently, teachers and/or researchers must be careful to minimize the chance of influencing student responses with their own bias (MacGregor, Currie, & Wetton, 1998). Even so much as an emphasis on a certain word or a shift in body language when explaining the task to students can influence their responses (Backett-Milburn & Mckie, 1999).

Backett-Milburn & Mckie (1999) also questioned the theory behind the draw and write technique, stating that dominant discourses of health in society influence children's perceptions and that the "social and contextual influences on data generated have not been viewed as problematic" (p. 392). In response, Gabhainn and Kelleher (2002) argued that the presence of contextual influences should not be viewed as a disadvantage, as it is the context in which the drawings are produced that is of interest. Gabhainn and Kelleher (2002) used the draw and write technique to compare health education programs across several schools and concluded that technique is sensitive to differences in culture at the school level, thus allowing for evaluation of the various programs in different schools.

Some logistical challenges to data collection with the use of the draw and write technique have also been identified. MacGregor et al. (1998) noted that obtaining non-conferred responses in a classroom setting can be challenging, especially when space or desk arrangement facilitate students viewing each other's drawing. Backett-Milburn & McKie (1999) expressed concern that students may be inclined to draw what they think the researcher is looking for, or what they consider the "right" answer (drawing), as they are typically asked to reproduce correct

information when questioned by a teacher in a classroom setting. These concerns were addressed in this study, as described below.

Modifications to the Draw and Write Technique

Modifications were made to the draw and write technique to suit the nature and objectives of this research project. In this study, the students were asked to draw a picture of themselves in physical education. Upon completion of their drawing, students were asked to turn over the paper and write down their responses to two questions. The questions were:

- 1) Explain what you are doing in your drawing.
- 2) How do you feel in your drawing and why?

Instead of being asked to write words around their drawings, the posing of these questions immediately following the completion of the drawing was inspired from methodology used more commonly in art therapy, as outlined by Lister (1997). This adaptation to previous methodology was more appropriate for the age level of the participants and the nature of the task as compared to Wetton & McWhirter's (1998) draw and write studies. In the initial draw and write studies, many of the participants were as young as 5 years old, which resulted in drawings that were difficult to interpret, as well as a limited ability to write on the part of the participants. Given that the participants in the present study ranged from 8 – 11 years old, the vast majority of participants were able to understand and write answers to the questions themselves. In a few cases however, the classroom teacher or researcher acted as a scribe for students.

Protocol for Drawing Collection

All students in grades three, four, five and six were asked to draw a picture. After communicating and arranging a time with each classroom teacher, I did a short pre-visit to each class. The purpose of this visit was to explain the study and distribute consent forms (see Appendix A). As previously mentioned, several researchers (Bckett-Milburn & Mckie, 1999; Mauthner, 1997; MacGregor et al.,1998) have commented on the significance in the way the researcher presents the research, as well as themselves, to study participants. The importance of every interaction that took place between myself and the participants was not overlooked in this research design. I ensured that the participants were entirely clear on the purpose and nature of the research task. I made it clear to the students that they did not have to participate in this project if they did not want to, that the project was in no way affiliated with their marks in either art or gym, and that they must have the consent form signed by a legal guardian if they wished to participate in the study.

I returned to the classroom approximately one week to 10 days later to proceed with data collection of the drawings. Students were given a legal size sheet of white paper on which to complete the drawings. MacGregor et al. (1998) noted that there is a need for consistency when using the draw and write technique. A written protocol detailing everything I said and did in presenting the task to students was followed for each class (see Appendix B). I repeatedly emphasized to the students that whatever they chose to draw was acceptable, as long as it somehow showed them in physical education. Students were instructed not to ask any questions, to avoid the possibility of a student mentioning a specific sport or activity just prior to

commencing the task, subsequently influencing other students in their decision of what to draw. Students were also informed that they could move their desks around so that they had their own workspace. I made a point of sitting at the front of the classroom reading a book throughout the time that students were drawing their pictures. This was intended to counter the familiar behaviour of the teacher walking around the classroom, monitoring student work over their shoulders to ensure they are completing it correctly. This type of monitoring may easily have sent the message to students that I was looking for a certain type of drawing, therefore sitting at the front of the classroom was a strategy used to further emphasized the point that whatever they chose to draw was acceptable.

The time it took each class to complete the drawings varied, as did the individual time it took students to complete drawings. No class was allotted more than 35 minutes to complete their drawings, with most classes finishing their drawings between 25 and 35 minutes. Timing was difficult to manage due to the fact that students work at different speeds and the questions had to be asked to the class as a whole upon completion of the drawings. Students who finished their drawings first were told that they may colour their drawings. The students who took longer to complete their drawings often did not finish colouring them, however it was ensured that all students had finished the drawing itself prior to the questions being asked. Upon completion of the questions I collected the drawings, thanked the class, and concluded the session.

Focus Group Interviews

Focus groups are conducted with the goal of eliciting participants' feelings, attitudes, and perceptions about a selected topic (Vaughn, 1996). A central component of qualitative research is that it maintains a certain degree of flexibility, and as Greenbaum (2000) accurately points out: "focus groups are the only research technique in which even unintended reactions from participants can be used to delve further into a particular topic of interest" (p. 10). Focus group interviews were ideal for this study as they allowed for the opinions of several students from each grade level to be heard. In doing so, the researcher was also able to benefit from the interaction between the participants: what was agreed upon, what was contested, and what comments sparked opinions from others. This type of interaction is one of the main benefits of conducting focus group interviews and serves to increase the richness of the information generated from the session (Greenbaum, 2000).

Four focus group interviews were conducted, one per grade level, with a sample of females from grades three, four, five, and six. The research questions that ground the study emphasize the importance of understanding the experiences of girls in physical education, which is why only females were asked to participate in focus group interviews. The interviews were conducted over a lunch period during the school day, with each interview lasting approximately 45 minutes. In keeping with the recommendations of several researchers (Siedmen, 1998; Silverman & Subramaniam, 1999) a question guide was followed to ensure quality data and avoid researcher bias due to 'spur of the moment' decision making (Silverman & Subramaniam, 1999). See Appendix C for the complete question guide. Interviews

were conducted in the gymnasium. As the participants were being asked to reflect on their experience of physical education classes, the researcher assumed that being in the gymnasium setting would help stimulate memories and feelings.

Similar to the procedure for drawings, I made one pre-visit to each class to hand out consent forms for participation in the focus group interviews (see appendix D). All females in each class were given the consent form, and therefore the invitation to participate in the focus group. All females who returned their consent forms by the scheduled day for the interview took part in the study. The number of participants in each group varied. There were five participants in the grade three interview, seven participants in the grade four interview, five participants in the grade five interview, and six participants in the grade six interview. The participants sat on benches in the gymnasium and ate their lunches as the interview was conducted. An audio-recording device was positioned as close to the centre of the group as possible. All participants were aware they were being recorded. One participant in the grade five focus group had parental consent to participate in the interview but not be audio-recorded. The tape was therefore paused each time she spoke.

Interview with the Physical Education Teacher

There is typically only one physical education teacher per school at the elementary level, and as a result teachers have a high degree of autonomy in choosing what activities to include in the curriculum and how to deliver them. Interviewing the physical education teacher added depth to the study as it allowed for professional insight into the program offered at the school. In particular, the physical education teacher was questioned about her teaching style and educational philosophy. The

interview with the physical education teacher was conducted shortly after the student drawings had been collected, and prior to the focus group interviews, at the home of the physical education teacher. The physical education teacher had not seen or discussed any of the drawings prior to the interview. The teacher was questioned on some logistical aspects of her position- how long she has been working at the school, how often the students receive physical education per week- as well as some more in-depth questions on her teaching style and philosophies. She was also questioned on her personal opinions with regard to gender differences in her school. See Appendix E for the interview guide.

Delimitations

This study was limited to one school and only students in grades three, four, five, and six were invited to participate. Focus group interviews were restricted to females only. Students were given no more than thirty minutes to complete their drawings, and focus group interviews were conducted over lunch period, which allowed for no more than 45 minutes per interview.

Data Analysis

Drawings

The purpose of drawing analysis in this research project was not to formulate conclusions about certain children or individual drawings, but to a) identify and explore how each child chose to represent themselves in physical education and b) detect common themes and patterns across groups of drawings. The steps for data analysis of the drawings were modeled after the work of Kuhn (2003), who conducted research on children's ideas about active school environments. The methodology of

this research project paralleled Kuhn's work, in that Kuhn also asked children to first draw a picture (of what they envisioned an active school would look like), and then later conducted interviews based on the drawings. Kuhn's analysis of drawings was conducted on three levels. For this research project, two of those three levels were employed in drawing analysis, with modifications made to account for the specific research questions of this project.

The first level of analysis was *descriptive analysis*, where all drawings were evaluated strictly with regard to content. For this research project, drawing content was analyzed in five categories; person (who was in the drawing—child, teacher, classmates), setting details (what details were included in the drawings—lines of the gym floor, windows, posters on wall etc.), objects (what equipment, pylons, nets etc. were drawn), text (any text that was written in the drawing), and symbolic elements (arrows, motion lines or other that was included). These descriptive categories were then counted by the frequency that they appeared by grade level and by gender. Morgan (1997) supports the use of counting in qualitative analysis, and noted that descriptive counting is particularly useful for comparing how often various topics are mentioned by different groups within a study. See Appendix F, Drawings 1, 2, 3, and 4 for examples of this analysis.

The second level of analysis was *interpretive analysis*. Two aspects of the drawings were evaluated at this level—the characteristics of the self-depiction, as well as any type of social interaction that was depicted. Self-depiction was classified into two categories: 'static' and 'in-motion'. A self-depiction was classified as 'static' if the person in the drawing was drawn standing straight up, facing forward, arms at

side, legs together, with no general indication of movement. Conversely, if the person in the drawing was engaged in activity, implied by arms and legs engaged in a movement pattern, use of equipment or body and head focused on the activity at hand, then the self-depiction was classified as 'in-motion'. Social interaction was classified into three categories; simultaneous, together and together-against-each-other. A depiction was categorized as 'simultaneous' if two or more students in the drawings were engaged in activity at the same time, alongside each other. They could be doing different activities, or the same activity. If students were doing the same activity however, each person in the drawing would have to be using their own equipment in order to be classified as simultaneous. The category 'Together' was used when two or more students engaged in the same activity (for example jumping rope together, or pushing each other on scooter boards), where they are working cooperatively. 'Together-against-each-other' indicated two or more students playing a game against each other (for example a game of floor hockey or volleyball). See Appendix F, Drawings 5, 6, 7, and 8 for examples of this analysis.

Apart from Kuhn's approach, the physical activities depicted in the drawings were identified and categorized by frequency in terms of grade level and gender. A qualitative research software program, QSR N6, was used to assist with drawings analysis. Descriptions of the drawings for interpretive analysis and descriptive analysis were done in Microsoft Word, and then transferred in a text-only format into the QSR N6 program. This program allowed for text searches of words or phrases as they appeared by grade or gender and facilitated the comparison of answers across all groups.

Drawing Questions

Student responses to the questions about their drawings were analyzed in a descriptive manner. The first question asked: “explain what you are doing in your drawing”. Responses were categorized in terms of the activity that students cited, resulting in a complete list of all activities that were drawn by students across all grade levels and both genders. The second question asked: “how do you feel and why?” Responses to this question were analyzed in two parts. All answers to the first part of the question “how do you feel?” were listed and categorized according to the frequency that they were cited by grade level and gender. For preliminary analysis, a table was developed to evaluate responses to the second part of the question, “why do you feel that way?” As their responses were slightly longer than the in the previous questions and invited more explanation, no two responses were identical. The responses were similar however, and a taxonomy was therefore developed to classify answers into general themes (Finson, Beaver & Cramond, 1995). Eight themes were identified from the answers provided by students. After an initial overview of the answers, eight categories were developed to describe certain themes or attitudes that the responses referenced. The eight categories were 1) liking a specific activity 2) having fun, enjoying oneself 3) being with friends 4) liking gym in general 5)having mastered a task 6) experiencing success and/or failure 7) physiological reactions 8) other. To view each answer in the theme was classified under, see Appendix G.

The category of ‘liking a specific activity’ included any reference to a specific sport or activity as the primary reason for enjoyment. For example, a student responding that they felt happy “because I love playing basketball” was placed in this

category. The category of 'liking gym in general' included responses such as "because PE is the best part of the day" and "because I love gym". The 'having fun/enjoyment' category encompassed more general responses such as "because I am having fun" and "it makes me feel happy". The category 'having mastered a task' included responses that refer to specific accomplishments, such as "because I learned the face pass" or "because I am doing the long jump 5 feet long". The category of 'being with friends' included all references to friends and being around other people, such as "I get to play with others", and "because I am with my friends". The category of "experiencing success or failure" included answers that refer to winning or losing, or scoring a point, "because I am in first place", "because I got a goal"). The category of 'physical/mental reactions' described references to specific physiological or mental states and included responses such as "I feel alert and ready because someone is going to throw a dodgeball at me". Responses in this category required considering the answer to question one in its entirety, as opposed to two parts. For example, the answer "because someone is going to throw a dodgeball at me" only makes sense in the context of the entire phase, which includes the statement "I feel alert and ready". The category 'other' contains answers that did not fit within any other categories, due to being vague "because I am doing something" or unique "I feel cool because a big audience is watching me".

Interviews

The researcher was the primary tool for interview analysis. Each interview was transcribed shortly after its completion. Through a cycle of repeated reflecting, questioning and interpreting, the researcher sought to understand the experiences

being communicated by interview participants and the meaning that those experiences held. The focus group interviews were initially analyzed question by question for each group. A thorough understanding of responses to each question by each group allowed for common themes in the opinions and attitudes to be identified as they appeared across different groups. Additionally, common themes were detected as they were voiced through responses to different questions. Focus group results were compared to the results from drawing analysis and compared to results from the interview with the physical education teacher.

In a similar manner as the focus group interviews, the interview with the physical education teacher was carefully reviewed question by question. The researcher reflected upon the interview with the physical education teacher primarily in terms of the physical education program that she offered at the school. The philosophical foundation of the program was examined in depth, as were specific teaching strategies and behaviours. Having gained an understanding of the context of the program, the researcher was able to identify student's perceptions of physical education as they related to the program.

Ethical Considerations

As participants of this study were school aged children, ethical considerations were of extreme importance. Permission to conduct the study followed the appropriate authoritative hierarchy. Prior to seeking consent from any parties, the research proposal was approved by the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research of Memorial University. The research process adhered to all stipulations outlined in their Policy on Ethics of Research Involving Human

Participants. Permission was sought from the school board followed by the principal of the school. Subsequently, each teacher at the school was informed of the study and asked for permission to have her or his class participate in the study. Following agreement from all these parties, I sought the required consent from the legal guardians of the children, as well as written consent from the children themselves.

My relationship with the school could potentially be regarded as an ethical issue in this study. My familiarity with the school and the physical education teacher facilitated access to the school for research purposes. The administration and teachers were supportive and cooperative. My familiarity with the students allowed the students a certain comfort level that may not have been possible with a researcher who was unfamiliar with the students. It also may have resulted in a higher number of signed consent forms being returned. Additionally, my experience in the school enhanced my ability to interpret the data. Regardless of my familiarity with staff and students however, I followed strict ethical protocol. Teachers and students alike were repeatedly assured that they were not obligated in any way to participate in the study. Every teacher signed a consent form that informed them of their right to withdraw from the study at any time. Likewise, it was repeatedly clarified to students that the study would in no way affect any of their marks and that they were free to withdraw or not participate at any point in the research process. Some students exercised this right and chose to read a book or do another activity instead of a drawing during the time the researcher was collecting drawings from their class.

Conclusion

The methodology employed in this research project allowed for students to express themselves from their own perspectives. A modified version of Wetton and McWhirter's (1998) draw and write technique was used to ask students to draw pictures of themselves in physical education. Students decided what about physical education they wanted to include in their picture. A modified version of Kuhn's (2003) methods was used to analyze drawings. Student drawings provided the opportunity to explore and compare the manner in which all students in grades three through six depicted themselves in physical education. Focus group interviews were conducted with girls in grade three, four, five, and six. Participants were given latitude to discuss what was most relevant to them and the interviews resulted in insightful comments about what they considered the positive and negative aspects of physical education. Finally, an interview with the physical education teacher garnered information on philosophical foundation of the program, and teacher's preferred style of teaching and the types of messages that were emphasized to students through the program. The interview provided a rich context in which to interpret student responses, and allowed for an exploration of contextual influences on student attitudes and perceptions. Few studies on student attitudes towards physical education have employed a case study methodology. This research project demonstrated the value of conducting a case study. It further supported the use of student drawings, a relatively new methodology in physical education research, as a valuable way of gaining knowledge on student experiences.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

Introduction

This study explored the various ways in which elementary school students, particularly girls, perceived, experienced, and were impacted by the physical education program at their school. Specifically, the following research questions were addressed:

1. What influence does the particular physical education program offered at the school have on student attitudes towards physical education?
2. How do students in grades three, four, five, and six depict themselves in physical education?
3. What comparisons can be made between how females and males depict themselves in physical education?
4. What attitudes towards physical education do females in grades three, four, five, and six express with regard to gender and physical education?

The following chapter presents the findings of the study as they relate to these research questions. Section I describes key characteristics of the physical education program at Parkway Elementary School, and subsequently explores the impact that the PE program proved to have on students. Section II describes how students depicted themselves in physical education through an analysis of the drawings that were completed by the boys and girls who participated in the study. Finally, section III sheds light on the physical education experiences of girls in grade three, four, five and six through an exploration of the various themes that emerged from the focus group interviews.

Section I: The Physical Education Program

Introduction

This research project employed a case study methodology. This was done for two reasons: 1) to gain a broader understanding of the physical education program at Parkview Elementary in order to enhance the researcher's ability to understand participants' experiences of this program and 2) to allow the researcher to evaluate how the specific program offered at the school impacted the student attitude and perceptions of the subject. The teaching style and philosophies of a PE teacher are inevitably embedded within the program they deliver, and as a result play a pivotal role in shaping the overall program. This section will provide some background on the PE program at Parkview Elementary School, describe certain aspects of the program, highlight features of the teaching style, and illustrate how these were reflected in the attitudes expressed by students.

The Program

Background. Students receive 90 minutes of physical education over a 7 day cycle. Students in Kindergarten to grade three receive three blocks of 30 minutes each over the 7 days, whereas students in grades four through six receive two 45 minute periods. At the time the data was collected, the physical education teacher had been teaching at the school for two and a half years.

Teaching Style. A teaching style describes the methods an instructor chooses to deliver curriculum content to a class as well as the way they interact with their classes. Linda described using a variety of different approaches throughout the school year. She explained that she adjusts her teaching style depending on the unit she is

teaching and the particular goals she has for that unit. She described using a mixture of sport-based units and concept-based units. In sport-based units she teaches the students a particular sport through a variety of ways. In concept-based units, she teaches a movement concept, such as sending and receiving, using a variety of equipment and activities. She also described using the basic play model, where students can use equipment on a less-structured basis, on occasion. The main theme overall was that her teaching style varied significantly:

I'll use whatever suits the students, whatever suits the time, whatever suits how I can teach it and how I can develop it in my teaching. So there's kind of a lot of things that I use, a lot of different approaches (Linda, March 11, 2006).

Teaching Philosophy. Whereas teaching style focuses on instructional methods, teaching philosophy describes underlying beliefs that a teacher holds about education in general, child development, and the needs of her or his students. The most central feature of the physical education program itself was that Linda grounded her approach to developing and delivering the PE program on Dr. Don Hellison's model of humanistic physical education. Don Hellison is an educator who, in his own words, has pursued a "career long effort to use sport and exercise as a vehicle for helping kids take more responsibility for their well-being and be more sensitive and responsive to the well-being of others" (Hellison, 2003, p.viii). An author of several books on how to teach responsibility through physical activity, his approach is to encourage students to take responsibility for their actions, choices, and the consequences of their behaviours. Linda explained how she attempted to incorporate Hellison's model into her everyday teaching;

I spend a lot of time talking to children...trying to get them to understand how to take control of their lives, responsibility for their lives, responsibility for their actions, and then how to work into-once they've got control of themselves- work into caring for others, and then once they've not only got themselves taken care of but they've gotten others taken care of, now they can actually be role models in the school and on the playground and in society. So yah, I deal with them on a humanistic level more than anything else (Linda, March 11, 2006)

When asked if there were any messages in particular that she emphasized with her students, Linda concisely stated "self-responsibility and caring".

Influence of the Program on Student Perceptions

Throughout this study, it was clear that the unique style in which Linda delivered the PE program at her school strongly influenced the students' overall understanding of the subject. The program itself proved to be a central factor in shaping the way students perceived physical education, as data from the participants frequently reflected several key philosophies of the program.

A number of girls in grade four, five and six girls responded to the question "what do you learn in gym besides how to play games and sports?" by stating some of the values that Linda attempts to communicate to students through the program. Two girls in grade four indicated that they learned manners. Responses from other grade four girls included; to cooperate and be social with each other, to be responsible for gym equipment, and to be healthy and active. One grade four girl went so far as to elaborate on the potential rewards of being a responsible student: "Well Ms. said that, sometimes when you cooperate and help others, and do all those things over there (referring to a poster on wall that described responsible behaviours), then you can be a role model".

Unlike the comments from grade four girls, the comments from grade five girls did not relate directly to what Hellison's model attempts to teach. Some girls, however, did reference learning that occurred as a result of what the teacher chose to emphasize, above and beyond motor skills. One grade five girl spoke of extra bits of knowledge learned within curricular units. She talked of how they learned about specific Canadian Olympic athletes, how they trained, and what they ate surrounding Olympic competition (this was during an Olympic unit that Linda taught while the Torino 2006 Olympics were taking place). Another girl mentioned learning about the benefits of eating healthy.

Grade six girls demonstrated a particularly thorough internalization of the messages the program attempted to communicate. Each participant in the interview concisely stated at least one response to the question of what else is learned besides games and sports, and all but one of the responses directly referenced a value emphasized through Hellison's model. Their responses to the question included the following: to be healthy, listen, respect, responsibility, be fair to others, cooperate, and to care about the people around you.

Evidence of the effectiveness of the program in communicating values to students could also be seen in the way that students included certain details of the physical environment in their drawings. Linda has placed several posters up on the gymnasium walls, some of which have words or phrases emphasizing certain values related to Hellison's program. One girl in grade four drew a poster in her drawing with the words "Always help others" in it. Another grade four student drew a poster containing the words "be nice". As a complement to the humanistic physical

education program that Linda offers at the school, she organized a series of peace month activities one year prior to when the research took place at the school. One activity was to have each class in the school help paint the word "PEACE" in large, colourful, multi-patterned letters on the gymnasium wall. Several students illustrated the word "PEACE" in their drawings, often with it centrally placed in their drawing and coloured in a similar bright and vivacious way. Nine students in total included the word "PEACE" in their drawings. Although using the word *peace* and discussing its meaning is not a specific component of Hellison's model, it evidently represents the same values of respect and caring. See Appendix F, Drawings 6, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, and 26 for examples).

Conclusion

These findings demonstrate that students understand, have internalized and are able to articulate the morals and values emphasized through the program. Though this study did not encompass any means of measuring to what degree these values subsequently guide student behaviour or influence their decision making, it nonetheless showed that the program is reaching a degree of effectiveness in teaching and communicating these values to students. These findings demonstrate that the specific details of the program (messages that the teacher strives to emphasize through a variety of methods) are embedded in students' overall impressions of physical education.

Section II: Self- Perceptions in Physical Education

Introduction

Following Kuhn's (2003) model of analysis, this section will provide a detailed analysis of how students depicted themselves in physical education. To substantiate the research questions regarding how students depict themselves in physical education, as well as potential gender differences in these self-depictions, the drawings have been analyzed by gender as well as grade level. Appendix F can be referred to for examples of drawings as they are described in the following results.

Kuhn's Descriptive Analysis Level I

Level I of Kuhn's analysis consists of describing the content of each drawing according to five categories; person, setting details, objects, text, and symbolism.

Person

Four categories were employed to describe the number of people in each drawing - self, self with one other, self with two others, and self with multiple others. Over half (n=38) of the participants in the study drew a picture of themselves with no other people in the picture - this is not surprising as the given task was to draw a picture of "yourself" in physical education. Of the students who did include others in their drawing however, the most frequent category was 'self with multiple others' (n=15), followed by 'self with one other' (n=12) and self with two others (n=7).

When examined in terms of gender, some differences emerge. In drawings that included others besides just the self, the most frequent depiction for boys was 'self + one other' and for girls it was 'self + multiple others'. Boys depicted, 'self + multiple others' third most frequently followed by 'self + 2 others'. Girls depicted

'self + two others' third most frequently and 'self + one other' least frequently. In summary, girls had a tendency to draw themselves with other people more so than boys. This trend of girls' valuing the sharing of physical activity experiences with friends was also demonstrated in the focus group interviews.

Setting Details

The vast majority of students (n=76) included details of the gymnasium setting in their drawing. The lines on the floor and the basketball nets were two of the most frequently depicted permanent fixtures of the gym. Other frequently drawn setting details were painted on wall targets, the gym windows and a scoreboard, which is mounted in the corner of the gymnasium at the school. The scoreboard is in the gymnasium because the school was formerly a junior high, where competitive interscholastic games took place, which necessitated a scoreboard. The scoreboard is never used however in the elementary physical education program, and is not referred to by the Linda in her daily teaching. On the contrary, she refers to the posters on the gym walls regularly within the delivery of her classes.

Overall, just under one-third (n=25) of participants included something that adorned the walls of the gym in their picture. These included posters, painted wall targets, a bulletin board, or the painted word 'PEACE'. As previously mentioned, some students included text with the posters they drew, and nine students included the word 'peace' in their drawing, often as a large, central component of it.

In terms of both gender and grade level, there were no distinct response patterns with regard to setting detail. Boys and girls from all grade levels had, on average, the same type of detail included in their drawings. Of the nine students who

drew the word 'PEACE', five were male and four were female, all coming from varying grade levels (see Appendix F, Drawings Ten, Eleven, and Twelve for examples).

Objects

Participants included a variety of objects, consisting of mostly gym equipment, in their drawings depending on what activity they were portraying themselves doing. There were very few drawings that included objects not typically found in a gymnasium. The objects depicted in the drawings paralleled the main activity featured in the drawings. Given this strong association, no in-depth analysis was carried out on objects alone, as the activities depicted in the drawings were analyzed separately.

Text

A number of students (n=14) included text in their drawing, though the majority did not. Text was included in the drawing to serve a number of different functions. A small number of students depicted posters on the wall and included text in the posters, such as "Be a good sport", "help others", and "be considerate". Some students labeled the people in their drawings, such as themselves, their friends, or the physical education teacher. Other students included words to help describe their emotion and accomplishments. One student in grade three drew herself doing the long jump and drew a tape measure with the words "5 feet" next to it. She drew a second picture of her jumping, including a dialogue bubble containing the words, "Yes! I did it!" Some students had titles to their drawings, such as "Volleyball Class" or

“Hertalls” (*sic*). As previously mentioned, the word “Peace” appeared in a number of drawings as a reflection of the gym setting.

Symbolism

Drawings contained the occasional use of symbolism. Some students used symbolism to emphasize motion. For example, a girl and boy in grade six each drew an arrow pointing from a basketball drawn in flight to the basketball net, implying that the ball was going in the net. A grade four girl drew motion lines surrounding the soccer ball she drew. Another grade four girl, who depicted multiple activities going on in the gym, included a small diagram with names of students and numbers of points they possessed in the corner of her drawing.

Kuhn’s Level II Analysis

The second level of Kuhn’s analysis is interpretive in nature and deduces the location, social relations and activities in the drawing (Kuhn, 2003). Certain modifications were made to this level of analysis to suit this particular research design. For the purposes of this research, level II analysis examined social interaction present in the drawings, as well as characteristics of the self-depiction.

Social Interaction

Table 1 demonstrates the forms of social interaction present in the drawings according to age level and gender. Approximately half of the sample population depicted themselves only in their drawing therefore no social interaction was included in their drawing. The two primary types of social interaction depicted were students playing simultaneously, and students playing together against each other. Though the overall numbers for each of these categories are within a broad range of each other

(15 and 19, respectively), there is a considerable difference when analyzed according to gender. Females drew themselves engaged in ‘simultaneous’ activity much more frequently than males did, whereas males drew themselves engaged in activities classified as ‘together-against-each-other’ more than females did.

Table 1: Social Interaction Depicted in Drawings

<i>Interaction</i>	3 G	3 B	4 G	4 B	5 G	5 B	6 G	6 B	<i>TOTAL</i>
N/A (self only)	2	5	10	4	5	7	5	3	41
Together- Against		2	1	4	2	3	3	4	19
Simultaneous	4	1	1	2	5	1	1		15
Together			1					1	2
other								1	1
Total	6	8	13	10	12	11	9	9	78

Self-Depiction

Overall, the majority of self-depictions were classified as ‘in-motion’ (a total of 62), while approximately one-fifth of the self-depictions were static. Females had twice as many static self-depictions than males (28% for females versus 13% for males).

Drawing Questions

Question One: Explain what you are doing in your drawing. Overall, 24 different activities were described by students. Table 4.2 shows the frequency of each activity depicted by grade level and gender. The most frequently depicted activity overall was basketball, with 26 out of the 82 drawings including basketball. Slightly more girls than boys drew basketball (14 girls and 12 boys). No students in grade three drew basketball, and the group with the highest frequency of basketball depictions was grade five females.

Following basketball, the frequency with which specific activities were depicted dropped substantially and is more evenly distributed. Volleyball and skipping rope were each depicted six times, soccer was depicted four times, using the gymnastics mats and running were each depicted three times. Twelve separate activities were depicted by just one participant in the sample of 80.

In terms of gender the second most frequent activity depicted by females was skipping rope, with a total of six depictions. At least one female in each grade level drew skipping. Volleyball was depicted by three females. There were also three females who depicted multiple activities in one drawing.

The second most frequently drawn activity for males was 'multiple activities', describing students who drew several different activities in their one drawing. All depictions of multiple activities were drawn by grade three boys. Five grade three boys drew between two and five activities in their drawings, all of which included a depiction of basketball and at least one other team sport. The next most frequently depicted activities by males were soccer and volleyball, with each being depicted three times overall. The use of springboard and mats was depicted twice by males, as was dodgeball and archery. There were seven different activities that were depicted once each by a male.

Overall, three of the top four activities drawn by girls and boys were the same; basketball, volleyball and multiple activities in one drawing. Skipping rope was the only activity depicted that had a strong gender association, being depicted by six girls and no boys. Girls drew skipping rope second most frequently, followed equally by volleyball and multiple activities in one drawing. Boys drew multiple activities in one

drawing second most frequently, followed equally by volleyball and soccer. Of the eight participants in total who drew multiple activities in their drawing, all but one of the drawings included basketball as one of the activities.

Table 2: Frequency of Activities Depicted in Drawings

Activity	3 boys	3 girls	4 boys	4 girls	5 boys	5 girls	6 boys	6 girls	Total
Basketball			4	3	4	6	5	5	27
Multiple	5	1		1		2			9
Skipping Rope		2		2		1		1	6
Volleyball			3	3					6
Soccer	1				1	1	2		5
Running		1	1			1			3
Gymnastics Mats/Springboard					2	1			3
Playing Tag	1							1	2
Using Fitness Balls						1		1	2
Archery					2				2
Dodgeball					1		1		2
Playing with a ball		1							1
No Activity (self in gym)				1					1
Long Jump		1							1
High Jump	1								1
Hockey			1						1
Ribbons				1					1
Hula Hooping				1					1
Miss Wolf				1					1
Hurtles			1						1
Curling								1	1
Handball							1		1
Tennis					1				1
Listening to Instructions								1	1
Total	8	6	10	13	11	13	9	10	80

Question Two, Part I: How do you feel in your drawing? Answers to this question were categorized in terms of frequency of response by gender and grade level, as demonstrated in Table 3. By far, the most frequently cited response was “I feel happy”. “I feel happy” was cited by at least half of the participants across each grade level and gender. The second most cited response was “I feel good”, cited by

approximately a quarter of participants overall. This was followed by “I feel excited” and “I feel like I am going to have fun” which were both cited an equal number of times by students.

Table 3: Responses to the question “How do you feel in your drawing?”

<i>I feel...</i>	3 GIRLS	3 BOYS	4 GIRLS	4 BOYS	5 GIRLS	5 BOYS	6 GIRLS	6 BOYS	<i>TOTAL</i>
Happy	3	5	7	6	6	7	6	5	45
good	1		2	2	3	1	1	1	11
excited		1		2				1	4
fun					2	1		1	4
cool		1	1						2
great	1					1			2
determined							2		2
hot	1								1
nervous			1						1
so-so			1						1
proud			1						1
alert and ready						1			1
exhausted					1				1
ready to have fun							1		1
<i>TOTAL</i>	6	7	13	10	12	11	10	8	77

Two statements had a gender association to them. The statement that had the strongest association to gender was “I feel excited”, as it was cited by four boys and no girls. The statement “I feel determined” was cited by two girls and no boys. Apart from those two statements, any statement that was cited two or more times overall was cited by both genders.

Overall, girls provided a significantly broader range of answers as to how they felt. Of the seven different answers boys provided, the vast majority were general descriptive terms for enjoying oneself (i.e happy, great, good, cool, excited, fun). The majority of girls also cited answers that fit the category of enjoying oneself (happy, good, fun) however there were also a number of responses alluding to different

emotions. Feeling “determined” was cited by two females, while feeling “proud” was cited by one. Two responses alluded to physiological states; feeling “exhausted” and feeling “hot”. One girl indicated feeling “nervous”, while another felt “so-so”.

Question Two, Part II: Why do you feel that way? Subsequent to indicating how they felt in their drawings, students were asked to elaborate on why they felt that way. Given that this question invited more explanation than the previous questions, no two responses were identical. Responses were similar however, and a taxonomy (see Appendix G) was therefore developed to classify answers into general themes (Finson, Beaver & Cramond, 1995). Eight themes were identified from the answers provided by students. Responses were analyzed according to gender and grade level, as demonstrated in Table 4.

Table 4: Responses to the Question “Why do you feel that way?”

THEME	3 Girls	3 Boys	4 Girls	4 Boys	5 Girls	5 Boys	6 Girls	6 Boys	Total
Liking a specific activity	1	1	3	3	4	2	2	1	17
Having fun, enjoyment	1	2	3	2	1	1	4	2	16
Being with friends		1	1	2	4	2	4	2	16
Liking gym in general	1		1	1		1	1		5
Have mastered a task	1		2		1		1		5
Experiencing success/failure			1	1		2		1	5
Physiological Reactions	1					1			2
Other	1		1				1		3
Total	6	5	12	9	11	10	13	7	69

Three categories accounted for the majority of answers overall as to why students felt the way they did in their drawings. These were 1) liking a specific

activity 2) being with friends and 3) general enjoyment/having fun. Each of these categories contained approximately the same number of responses (n=16) and significantly more than any other category. The next three categories- liking gym in general, mastering a task and experiencing success or failure- all contained 5 responses each.

The results for the top three categories remain strikingly similar when analyzed separately according to gender. Though girls had a higher number of overall responses than boys (n= 42 for girls, 31 for boys), girls and boys had approximately the same percentage of responses in each of the top three categories (with each category accounting for 21% to 23% of responses from both genders). Following these three categories gender differences become apparent. The category with the fourth highest number of responses for girls was 'having mastered a task', accounting for 12% of responses (n=5). Boys had no responses in this category. The category with the fourth highest number of responses for boys was 'experiencing success or failure', with 13% of responses (n=4), whereas there was just one response from a girl in this category.

Responses in a minimal number of the categories differed in the frequency with which they were cited by students across difference grade levels. Responses from boys that were classified into the category of 'being with friends' were made relatively evenly from boys across all grade levels. Only one girl from grades three or four however alluded to being with friends, with the majority of answers coming from girls in grades five and six (n=8). The analysis of focus group discussions also

indicates that being with friends is increasingly important to females at the older elementary level.

Section III: Girls' Attitudes

Introduction

Focus group interviews served as the primary method to address the research question "What attitudes towards physical education do females in grades 3, 4, 5 and 6 express with regard to gender and physical education?" While the girls shared many preferences and favourite things about PE, they also cited a number of individual preferences and opinions in response to several of the questions. Above and beyond their likes and dislikes however, their comments showed that there was a level at which a collective experience of physical education as females was evident, specifically in relation to their experiences with the boys in their classes. This section will begin by describing the overall attitude the girls held towards physical education. It will subsequently explore some of the more specific themes that were evidenced in the focus group interviews and proved to be central to the girls' experiences of the physical education.

Overall Attitude Towards Physical Education

The girls in this study held positive attitudes towards physical education, in that they enjoyed their PE classes, identified a variety of favourite memories and activities, and expressed excitement about certain parts of physical education. The answers to the question "how do you feel in your drawing?" served as a primary indicator of the girls' overall attitudes, as the vast majority of the girls indicated that they felt either happy, good, or like they were having fun. Of the girls who didn't cite

either of these three responses, answers still for the most part indicated positive feelings, and no answers indicated negative feelings towards physical education.

Comments from the girls in the focus group interviews supported the positive expressions in their drawings. When asked what they liked most about physical education, the girls listed a variety of specific activities, in addition to citing general aspects of physical education as what they enjoyed the most about the subject.

Grade three girls listed numerous specific activities in response to the question of what they liked most about physical education. These included station work, skipping, using the HOP balls, and gymnastics. Grade four girls spoke more generally with in regard to what they liked most about PE. Their comments included the following:

“fun to run around”, “you can get exercise”, “you can...have fun”, “you can pour out all the energy that you saved up while you were sitting down in class.”, “that you can try something new, like, every time”. Grade Five girls made similar comments: “It’s usually like a free period that you get to run around and play games and be active and all that...”, “well it’s because you get to play a whole bunch of different sports, because there’s so much equipment”, “Well, I like all the fun activities usually, and have tons of fun”. Additionally, one girl stated:

to me it feel like when you’re getting out of class and you don’t have to write or anything so you just come down to the gym, like play some games to warm up and then you do some sports, and then like, it feels really good.

Grade six girls cited a mix of general aspects of PE, as well as some specific activities, in response to the question. These included as getting to be with friends, student choice day, dodgeball, and Fun Day.

The girls were asked what they did not like about physical education and their responses also evidenced, in many ways, their overall positive attitude towards the subject. For the most part, the girls took longer to think about an answer to this question than the other questions. A number of girls stated that there was nothing they did not enjoy about physical education. Several girls cited a specific activity that they personally did not enjoy, such as running laps, dancing, and using the HOP balls. These statements often prompted other girls in the group to express their liking of that particular activity (despite the researcher's reminders that everyone was being asked to share their own personal opinions). Only one thing was collectively agreed upon as something that was not enjoyed in PE, by the grade four girls, who spoke of getting frustrated when students did not listen in class and the whole class then suffered the consequences by having to stop their activities.

The fact that there was only one negative aspect of PE that was communally agreed upon- and the fact that ultimately this aspect was considered negative because it limited the time the students spent being active in PE- demonstrated the positive attitude the girls had towards PE.

Importance of Friends

Results from this research suggest that female students, particularly older female students, may value sharing their physical activity experiences with friends more so than male students. Multiple sources of data from this study evidenced a trend that social interaction and the presence of friends figured prominently in the thought processes and reflections of girls with regard to physical education.

One manifestation of this theme came through student drawings. As described above, girls were more likely to draw themselves with friends than boys were. Furthermore, with regard to the type of social interaction present in the drawings, females drew themselves playing with their friends more than males did, whereas males drew themselves playing against their friends more than females did. This finding supports much research on the differences between boys and girls in childhood play and will be discussed further Chapter 5.

Grade six girls in particular placed importance on sharing experiences with friends. Although friends were also a source of enjoyment to boys, there was not the same increase in importance of friends from older elementary boys as there was from older elementary girls. Responses from grade six females to the second question about their drawings (why they felt the positive emotions they had indicated they were feeling in their drawing) emphasized the importance of friends. In response to this question, boys referenced being with friends approximately evenly across all grade levels, whereas females in grades five and six cited friends as a source of enjoyment more than females in grades three and four.

The responses from grade six girls in the focus group interview further evidenced the importance of friends. When asked what they enjoyed most about physical education, one girl responded: "What I like the most is being with my friends and like, playing basketball and stuff". Similarly, another girl responded that "being with classmates" was what she enjoyed most. When the girls were asked to describe how important it was to them to gain a sense of accomplishment in PE (or in other words, to feel like they had really learned how to do a new skill) many of them

related their responses to friends. One girl spoke of how it feels good to learn how to do something new: “cause you’ll get to do it like, when you go home, you can practice it when you’re playing with friends and stuff”. Another girl spoke of how it might be somewhat of upsetting if “your friends know how to do it and you don’t”. Finally, one girl talked of an important part of learning new skills: “when you know it and you’re friends don’t, you can teach your friends”.

Following a discussion about activities that were stereotyped as either a traditionally female or traditionally male activity, the girls were asked if they thought they would be dissuaded from doing an activity that was considered traditionally male. Some of the girls responded that they would feel more inclined to participate with presence of friends. One girl responded:

if you go- like if you could get more girls to go with you. Like if you start going on a boys team then maybe some girls think “oh now there’s a girls there now maybe I could go” you could get more girls to go with you.

Similarly, another girl stated: “if you had friends to join you then that would really make a difference”.

The variety of ways in which the girls included friends in their responses- practicing with them, teaching them, feeling badly if they are not able to share an experience (practice a new skill) with them- was testimony to the overall central space that friends occupied in the reflections of the girls with regard to physical education.

Feelings Towards Boys

Introduction. The question that invited by far the strongest responses from girls in grade four, five and six in the focus group interviews was “What differences do you notice, if any, between boys and girls in gym?”. The girls’ responses revealed a range of feelings and attitudes, and showed a general feeling of frustration that almost all the girls had towards the boys. The girls identified a number of particular issues that they had with the boys.

Poor Behaviour/Cheating/Hogging. Overall, the girls felt frustrated at many of the behaviours the boys exhibited in physical education classes. One source of frustration for the girls was the tendency the boys had to cheat in class. According to one grade four girl: “when girls and boys are playing volleyball, they’re (boys) always goin’ next to it and cheating like on, they’re all hittin’ the ball at the same time and stuff”. Another girl in grade four spoke of how boys often stopped short of touching the end line in running races before they turned around so that they could be first to finish.

Hogging was also mentioned as a frustrating behaviour, as, according to one grade six girl “boys like to hog everything”. Another grade six girl stated: “they hog it-mostly the big balls- and nobody gets a turn, like all the guys just run to go get ‘em”. A number of comments were made about how girls tended to share things whereas boys did not. One grade six girl spoke of boys hogging within games: “like if you’re playing volleyball boys will just like, try and get the ball, they won’t pass it to their teammates”. One grade four girl talked about how boys “just like take whatever they want”.

Overall, the girls felt that the boys acted out of control. One girl commented that the boys were too strong, that they “used a lot of force” while another explained that more people were likely to get hit, and injured, by balls that had been thrown by boys. One girl in the group was an example of this as all participants were aware that she had been hit in the eye twice by objects thrown by boys. In terms of general behaviour, one grade five girl stated: “they behave practically wild – they’re like wild animals. They act that way. And mostly girls actually have less, they’re actually better and they’re actually careful of other people”. Another girl spoke of how the boys get too “overexcited” which often led to misbehaviour, especially during the time when the class walked down to the gym for a physical education period. Finally, a girl in grade four stated: “I think, like, boys are really mean, and like, I don’t know like, they really like, wants to get you annoyed, and it really hurts.....”.

Attitude of Superiority. The girls talked about how the boys in their grades maintained an air of superiority over the girls. According to one grade five girl:

I think, like, the boys think that they’re like good at everything when they’re not. Like they get really ‘I’m better than you, I’m better cause you know I’m a boy’ and like, they get like, right feisty and stuff. One grade four girl stated that “sometimes boys act like you’re a big loser and they rub it in your face”. Another girl in grade four spoke of a classroom incident: “well...boys are like...every time when sometimes girls have tests and they (boys) pass, they’re always asking like “ Ha ha ha- you failed I didn’t, ha ha in your face- you’re gonna fail grade four (said tauntingly)”.

Grade six girls were also quick to identify this attitude in the boys. According to one girl: “boys like acting right tough, and think like, they’re the only ones, and they’re all this and girls aren’t...”. Another girl confirmed: “they think they’re so

popular”. One grade six girl stated: “the boys don’t respect us very much”. Finally, one girl in grade four shared her insight on the attitude of boys: “Well...boys actually really think they’re tougher than girls, but, girls are actually more smarter and better than boys, so they- they’re better at sports because they know strategies and boys don’t make any strategies before they do anything”.

Feelings of Animosity. Many of the girls made comments throughout the interviews that displayed animosity, or a certain degree of hostility, towards the boys. One girl concisely stated that “the boys are crazy and the girls are smart”. Another girl in grade five girl listed “winning against boys” as something that would make her feel especially good or happy in PE.

Grade four girls in particular expressed strong feelings of resentment towards the boys. On the subject of differences between boys and girls, after one girl in grade four decided to share her knowledge that males can be colour blind whereas females can’t, another girl in the group chided “in your face, guys!”. Another girl called boys weird, to which others expressed agreement. One grade four girl expressed her view that gym classes should be separated by gender:

I think they should like, put boys in another room and put girls in another room. That would be fair because like, boys are really bad, like – and they should like, put them in a different room, so it’s gonna be like, no problems.

Later in the interview, when asked what they would change if they could change anything about PE, the same girl said: “Okay, the boys, I would change like, the boys would be out of the class and the girls would have all the fun not the boys. Like, because they ruin people’s games and that stuff”. Another girl in grade four also said she would have boys in a

separate class if she could make any change she wanted, and a third girl made the following comment: “well, I do not like having boys in a game because sometimes there’s cheating, sometimes if they’re just right they’ll just go on back when you’re not looking”.

There was one girl in the group of grade four interview participants who strongly defended the boys against what the other girls were saying. She was in fact the only girl in any of the focus group interviews to do so. In response to the suggestion from one girl that boys and girls should have separate gym, she stated that, “I think as long as like, the boys and the girls are passionate about the sport then, there’s nothing that should be done, just let them play”. She later said that she thought the girls were being over critical of the boys and that maybe the boys were justified in boasting sometimes: “Personally I think that you guys are going too hard on them. Like if they say “whoo hoo I’m the fastest!” – who knows, maybe they are?!” She also countered that if they boys were acting excited, it was maybe “because they like the sport and they’re happy”. One thing she did agree with amongst the comments that were made by the other girls however was that the boys cheated.

The strong attitudes displayed by the girls were an unexpected finding. More so than directly contributing to a clearer understanding of the girls experiences, these comments prompted further questions that will be explored in the following chapter.

Awareness of Gender Role Stereotypes

The girls in this study possessed a great deal of knowledge about gender role stereotypes, however concurrently indicated that they did not feel personally constricted by them. All of the girls, from grades three to six were able to identify and

talk about a number of stereotypes. They were very eager to share their knowledge of differences between boys and girls both within and outside the context of sports. They frequently offered information when it did not relate to the question or the discussion that was taking place. For example, during a discussion on differences between boys and girls in physical education, one girl interjected with: “some guys they can get colour blind. And girls can’t”. Similarly, another girl offered the following information:

okay well, boys could wear skirts and stuff, and shorts, and if they wear one of them to school everybody will laugh at them. And sometimes the girls will too, cause – the boy wanted to wear them. Girls are used to wearing skirts and shorts and dresses and stuff, and high heels.

The girls displayed significant interest in talking about gender differences. They were quick to agree and elaborate on each other’s comments. Grade three girls discussed how boys don’t really like dance or gymnastics and girls don’t really like doing push-ups. One girl stated that girls don’t really like playing hockey because “it’s more of a boyish thing”. When asked why hockey was a “boyish thing” she explained that it was rough, and that boys liked playing the rougher games such as basketball, football, and baseball. The girls were then asked if they played or liked any of the above-mentioned sports, to which they responded with the following comments: “well I like basketball but I don’t really like football or baseball”, “I like baseball and basketball”, “I like soccer baseball but not just regular baseball”, and lastly “I like basketball”.

In essence, the girls clearly identified the stereotypes, however when questioned about how their own activity preferences, they personally countered many

of the stereotypes. As a follow-up to the discussion on stereotypes, grade three girls were asked if they had ever wanted to do an activity, but decided not to do it because it was seen as too 'boyish' in nature. All of the girls agreed that they wouldn't stop themselves from doing something they wanted to do because it may be considered 'boyish', however they also said that they are not usually faced with that conflict because they are not interested in things that are considered 'boyish'. According to one girl:

like if we had, got to choose what kind of games we got to play, like football, I wouldn't pick that stuff but if Ms. told us we had to, I would do it, I wouldn't care to do it, but I wouldn't pick it.

Similarly, another girl stated: "like, I would do it, but I don't find it fun and I think that like, some of the games the boys do are like rough games and... I like doing cartwheels... I like gymnastics". Similarly, several girls spoke about how boys did not like to do dance because they considered dance "too girly".

Two grade five girls responded fervently to the question of differences between boys and girls. One girl stated: "we can- whatever boys can do we can do too". Another grade five girl was the first of the group to respond by initially stating that there were no differences, however she went on to say: "Basically, what the boys can do girls can do and what girls can do boys can do, but girls can do cartwheels and boys can't. And splits". These immediate and slightly defiant responses suggest that the girls were aware of, and wished to counter, the belief that females are typically viewed as less capable than males in the area of sport and physical activity. The girls also expressed an understanding of the fact that although stereotypes exist and may apply to the behaviours of many people, individuals are always free to choose non-

stereotypical behaviour. This was evidenced by the grade three girl who commented on the fact that boys can choose to wear skirts, even though classmates may make fun of them. Additionally, in response to a question about activities that were considered traditionally male or female, one grade six girl stated: “that’s like saying blue is a boy colour and pink is a girl colour”. Her tone and expression indicated that she clearly knew this was not a rule that boys and girls had to follow.

The girls in all focus group interviews displayed a substantial amount of knowledge about gender role stereotypes, both in general, and as they related to physical activity. Stereotypes are generally considered to be negative as they lend themselves to discrimination and set limitations on individual experiences (Williams, 1994). While the girls in this study did not indicate feeling directly constricted by stereotypes, the degree to which they were aware of them and spoke ardently about them invites further discussion about how their understanding of stereotypes may impact the way they experience and view physical education. This will be further discussed in the following chapter.

Chapter Summary

The physical education program at Parkview Elementary School is a high quality program. Overall, students displayed very positive attitudes towards physical education. The physical education teacher based her teaching philosophy on Don Hellison’s model of Humanistic Physical Education, and throughout the study students showed that they had internalized many of the values that are emphasized through this model of teaching. These values included respect, responsibility, and caring for others. Students included items that adorned the gymnasium walls in their

drawings, such as posters, and the word "PEACE", which is painted on the gymnasium walls.

The girls in this study indicated a strong liking for physical education. They had positive feelings about physical education, enjoyed a variety of activities, and expressed a desire to see more time for physical education in the curriculum. The girls emphasized the importance of friends, and grade six girls in particular demonstrated that being able to share physical education and physical activity experiences with friends was important to them. Despite their enthusiasm for physical education, the girls in this study also expressed widely felt feelings of frustration towards the behaviour of the boys in their classes. The girls talked of boys cheating, hogging equipment, acting out of control, and acting superior towards the girls. In turn, many comments made by the girls demonstrated feelings of animosity towards the boys. Finally, the girls in this study expressed a significant amount of knowledge about gender role stereotypes, both within and outside of a sporting context, although they rarely indicated being affected by them personally.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

Introduction

The purpose of this discussion is to understand and evaluate the results of this study with regard to the physical education experiences of girls and boys. The literature review provides a framework for the current discussion. Through an exploration of related findings, this discussion provides some insight into the factors that contribute to the gender differences and issues identified in the results section. It further explores the implications of these findings on the physical education experiences of girls and boys. While many of the findings from this study may be of interest to those who are concerned with girls' participation in physical education and physical activity, the purpose of this study was to explore students' experiences at one school, and findings cannot therefore be generalized beyond the environment in which this research took place. Based on this study, recommendations are provided to teachers on gender-equitable teaching methods and strategies. Recommendations are also provided to researchers regarding the logistics of conducting studies similar to this one, as well as areas for future research.

Section I: The Program

The Importance of Context

In their review of research on attitudes towards physical activity and physical education, Silverman and Subrahmanian (1999) concluded that contextual factors within the gymnasium were responsible for the wide variance in student perceptions of PE. In other words, the various and often contrasting results were due to

differences in PE curriculums, PE teachers, school resources, and other details about the local school culture.

Silverman and Subrahmanian's (1999) position on the importance of context is supported by this study, as results demonstrated that the PE program and school culture substantially influenced student perceptions of physical education. The implication of Silverman and Subrahmanian's (1999) position is that attitudes depend in large part on the program that students are offered, and it is therefore important to take these factors into consideration when designing and reporting research. Results from this study support this position. Throughout their conversations, the focus group participants in this study identified a number of values they learned in physical education. This information could not have been interpreted in its most meaningful sense without the researcher understanding Hellison's model and the role it played within the program at Parkview Elementary. Although data can be meaningful without an understanding of the contextual factors surrounding the student's PE experience, interpretation will be enhanced with knowledge of these factors. In reviewing research on children's attitudes toward physical education, Graham (1995) contended that more information about the physical education programs in the schools where the research took place was necessary in order to understand why the children felt as they did. Given that research on attitudes towards physical education is used to tailor programs to provide students with the best possible PE experience, it is important to accurately interpret attitudes.

Hellison's Model

A unique feature of the physical education program at Parkview Elementary is the use of Hellison's model of humanistic physical education. Although the model is well-established, it is not a prevailing approach to teaching physical education. While the researcher was aware that Hellison's model was used at Parkview Elementary, the degree to which the model was reflected in data from the participants was surprising. In order to help interpret the meaning of these findings, a brief discussion on Hellison's approach is included below.

Hellison's model comprises an affective and social orientation towards teaching physical education (Ennis, 1996). According to Ennis (1996), teachers who advocate social responsibility are concerned with the ways the students interact with each other. They focus on teaching students how to accept personal responsibility for their actions, and develop skills to be both a leader and a team member in group situations (Ennis, 1996).

Hellison's model consists of six levels of responsibility. The levels represent a teaching-learning progression, as well as a hierarchy of values (Hellison, 1996). For example, putting effort into a task is a level two action as it shows basic responsibility, whereas self-direction is a level three action as it is more complex (Hellison, 1996). Hellison's (1996) definition of responsibility reflects components of the six levels, and describes a successful progression through the levels:

You are personally responsible if you are willing to try and experience new things, and if you can work on your own and develop and carry out a plan for yourself that will enhance your well being. You are socially responsible if you respect the rights and feelings of others and are sensitive and responsive to the well being of others. To fully carry

out these responsibilities you need to attempt to put them into practice outside PE (p.274).

The physical education program at Parkview Elementary is an exemplary model of a Hellison based program. In fact, the physical education teacher received a national award for teaching excellence the year in which the research took place. Graham (1995) proposed that if researchers can identify positive programs “it would be helpful to understand why the impact is positive, what these positive programs look like, and perhaps most importantly how the teachers were able to create and sustain their positive programs in a time of budgetary constraint” (p.481).

The impact that the program at Parkview Elementary had on students was a result of the consistent manner in which Linda incorporated Hellison’s model into her program. She employed a variety of methods in dealing with the students that were guided by the philosophies on which the program is based. In other words, she did not attempt to simply “add-on” concepts from Hellison’s model at the end of classes or whenever time permitted. Rather, these concepts were explicitly woven into curriculum as a whole. She made every effort to provide a learning environment where students felt supported, encouraged, and respected. When students engaged in conflict with each other, she used Hellison’s strategies to encourage them to solve their problems independent of teacher intervention. When students worked independently, she asked them to reflect on which level of self-responsibility they worked at. She designed learning environments where students were able to work individually and take responsibility for their own learning through goal setting. Likewise, she shaped many team games and activities as settings where students could demonstrate responsibility and caring towards others. The six levels of

responsibility are posted on the gymnasium wall at Parkview Elementary, next to the entrance to the gym and directly opposite to where students line up at the end of class. After each class, students touch the poster for the level they thought they worked as they leave the gym.

According to Hutchison (1995), there is a pressing need for social development skills to be taught in schools. Many youth do not have the opportunity to learn skills such as honesty, fair play, and respect, and teachers therefore can not assume that they are known by all students (Hutchison, 1995). Many researchers refer to a constantly changing society that exposes students to increased levels of violence, rudeness, and disrespectful behaviour as a reason why teaching social responsibility is increasingly important (DonMorris, 2003; Tyson 1996).

The nature of physical education classes makes for an ideal setting to teach social and personal development skills. Every class, students engage in countless interactions with other students, often with conflict present. As any physical education teacher can attest to, accusations of cheating or not following rules frequently surface in games. Students must negotiate using and sharing equipment. They play games where physical contact, or use of too much force, can become a problem. They are put on teams with classmates of all different abilities. Some students must deal with being on the lower-skilled end of the spectrum in a highly visible arena, whereas higher skilled students must deal with the frustration that can occur from working with a much lower skilled partner or teammate. How does a student who was pushed over during a game of tag react? What does a student do when a classmate won't share a piece of equipment? What sort of attitude does a

student who can only make contact with the badminton shuttle one out of every 10 tries maintain? How can we guide higher skilled students to help and encourage lower skilled students instead of showing frustration? These questions have little to do with the directly developing the physical competencies of students, but are relative to virtually every physical education class, and demonstrate the potential that physical education holds for addressing affective goals.

With her effective use of Hellison's model, Linda is able to address many of these types of situations, while at the same time maintaining focus on the development of the physical self. Providing students with opportunities to be physically active, developing physical competencies and encouraging a healthy lifestyle are key objectives of the program. Implementing Hellison's model in such a comprehensive manner allows objectives in both domains to be pursued simultaneously. The data from participants in this study is testimony to the positive lessons that students can take from the effective implementation of Hellison's model, and demonstrates the potential benefits that can be gained from using a program that emphasizes personal development.

Section II: Gender and Physical Education

Gender Differences in Student Drawings

Numerous studies have compared differences in the physical activity preferences of males and females (Birtwistle & Brodie, 1991; Faucette et al., 1995; Luke & Sijnclair, 1991; Prochaska et al., 1993; Sherrill et al., 1989; Shropshire & Carroll, 1998). Results have demonstrated that typically, males preferred competitive, team oriented activities, and females preferred cooperative, individual, or fitness

oriented activities (Birtwistle & Brodie, 1991, Luke & Sinclair, 1991). These findings are in large part attributed to gender role socialization, and the strong cultural norms regarding different sports considered appropriate for females and males (Cahn, 1994). Overall, these types of stereotypes are considered damaging, as they limit an individual's freedom to choose certain activities, or put them at risk for ridicule and belittling if they do choose to pursue what is considered a non-traditional activity (Cahn, 1994; Williams, 1996).

Results from this study indicate that some progress is being made in this area. Although students were not specifically instructed to draw their favourite activity, it is assumed that the activity each student chose to draw was one that they enjoyed, and possibly one of their favourite activities (this assumption is supported by the responses that students provided to the question "how do you feel in your drawing?", to which no negative feelings about the activity students had drawn themselves engaged in were described). The majority of the activities depicted in the drawings had no gender association to them- meaning they were not depicted significantly more by one gender versus the other. In this study, basketball was the most popular activity drawn by both girls and boys. In fact, slightly more girls than boys drew themselves playing basketball. Volleyball, another team sport, was drawn by an equal number of boys and girls. Although females have been participating in competitive sport for several decades, and now have their own professional basketball and soccer leagues, stereotypes and societal norms can be very difficult to surmount (as demonstrated by other data from this study). The fact that relatively equal numbers of boys and girls in this study chose to depict themselves playing competitive team

sports in a positive and enjoyable manner is an encouraging finding. This finding is likely attributable to numerous factors, one being that women's basketball has become more visible over the last few decades. More likely however, this finding is due to the PE program at Parkview Elementary and the way that basketball is taught by the PE teacher. Lenskyj (1994) argues that the reason that females are dissuaded from team sports more than males is because models of competitive sport emphasize traditionally male values, such as winning, over traditionally female ones, such as friendship, connection, and cooperation. Although a variety of team sports are offered as part of the curriculum at Parkview Elementary, Linda teaches her classes and organizes her activities in a way that places no emphasis on winning – when students play games, the score is not kept. Students are given opportunities to participate in competitive activity where the score is kept in other settings, such as intramurals and after-school activities. The way that basketball is taught by Linda, as consistent with the philosophies of the program and Hellison's model as outlined above, may have resulted in a higher number of students, particularly females, enjoying the activity and therefore choosing to depict it in their drawings.

The one activity that had a strong gender association to it was skipping, which was not drawn by any boys. Skipping is highly stereotyped as a female activity, and as one that is particularly enjoyed and participated in by young girls. Many researchers have shown that the 'stakes are higher' for males crossing into traditionally female activities than vice-versa (Thorne, 1993; Williams, 1994). Whereas it is now common for women to play hockey, basketball, and soccer, males have not experienced the same acceptance or encouragement to engage in

traditionally-female activities as females have to engage in traditionally-male activities (Messner, 1994). The findings from this study support this research, and speak to the need to critically address the reproduction of masculinity within the male sport culture.

A consistent finding in the study of children's play is that boys have a tendency to play competitive games in larger groups, whereas girls tend to play more cooperatively in smaller groups (Lever, 1976; Zarabatany, McDougall, & Hymel, 2000). The analysis of social interaction in the drawings reflected these findings. Girls drew themselves engaged in non-competitive play with others much more often than boys, who depicted themselves engaged in competitive play more than girls. As previously mentioned, the females in this study also indicated an enjoyment of competitive team sports. Several girls drew themselves playing a team sport, such as basketball, but simultaneously with friends (each individual had a ball to themselves, or individuals were lined up taking turns with the same ball). These findings suggest that many of the girls who participated in this study enjoy team sports, however do not necessarily place an emphasis on the competitive aspect of the game.

A number of scholars have discussed this finding. According to Lenskyj (1994), females place unique value on friendship and interpersonal relationships within their physical activity experiences, and these values are often neglected in competitive sport models. Tannehill (1994) found that girls were less competitive and more sensitive to the holistic goals of physical education. Lenskyj (1994) suggests that approaches to physical activity programs need to take into account the unique values and interests of females. Similarly, LeDrew (1997) questioned sport models

that guided elementary school curriculums and contended that our society has “allowed patriarchal values to design and control the gymnasium space that elementary teachers work in” (p.19). Both of these researchers describe a need to support “girl-friendly” models of sport that include a focus on cooperation, friendship and connection. In addition to cooperative games, these models may include offering team sports such as basketball and soccer, but in a way that values interpersonal relations and enjoyment as opposed to winning. Clearly this approach would not appeal to all girls, many of whom enjoy and thrive in competitive sports. While it is important to recognize the diversity within any group of students, the result from this study indicate many girls may derive more enjoyment from the type of approaches to sport that Lenskyj (1994) and LeDrew (1997) describe.

Another finding from this study that relates to long-standing issues with women’s involvement in sport was found within the drawings; twice as many females than males drew themselves static (not actually engaged in movement patterns in their drawings). Historically, when female athletes were portrayed in the media, the pictures tended to show women outside of their sport, often posing with either a husband or children (Cahn, 1994). Conversely, pictures of males tended to be “action shots”, showing the athlete engaged in his sport, often with the intensity of competition clearly showing on his face (Cahn, 1994). Significant progress has been made in this area and action photos of female athletes, often with intense and competitive facial expressions, are much more common than in the past. It is interesting to note this discrepancy in the number of static depictions by males and females in relation to the traditional media representation of female athletes. Children

are exposed to higher levels of media than ever before (Tyson, 1996). Future research could explore the topic of how children perceive and are influenced by media representations of male and female athletes.

The Importance of Friends

A popular cultural belief is that women place more importance on social relationships than men. However, research has more strongly alluded to differences in the characteristics of social interactions of males and females, rather than in the number or importance of relationships (Eder & Hallinan, 1978). A fairly consistent finding is that females' relationships with their closest same-sex friends are more intimate than the relationships males have with their closest same-sex friend (Barth & Kinder, 1988; Bell, 1981; Caldwell & Peplau, 1982; Wright & Scanlon, 1991). Bell (1981) found that friendships of women are more personal and emotionally based than those of men. Results from this study support these findings. Girls in this study placed more importance on sharing experiences with friends than boys did. The girls repeatedly spoke of getting enjoyment from being able to do activities with friends. These findings are supported by the identification of skipping as the activity of choice of a number of girls. Skipping is an activity that lends itself to socializing – girls often skip in groups or in pairs, and work on double-dutch, partner or group tricks with friends. As previously discussed, this emphasis on cooperative play with friends as opposed to competitive was also seen in the drawings.

Buhrmester and Furman (1986) looked at the development of companionship and intimacy in children's relationships, and found that children in second grade reported that their relationships with mothers and fathers provided the most intimate

disclosure. By fifth grade however, though relationships with mothers and fathers continued to be intimate, girls' ratings of relationships with same-sex friends had risen to be equivalent to relationships with parents. This was not the case with boys, whose intimacy ratings of same-sex friends remained significantly lower than ratings of mothers and fathers (Burhmester & Furman, 1986). Similarly, Zarbatany, McDougall and Hymel (2000) looked at intimacy levels in children's friendships found that sixth grade girls' best friendships were more intimate than those of sixth grade boys, and that the girls subsequently reported a higher level of intimacy needs fulfillment. Results from this study are consistent with these findings. Of all participants in this study, grade six girls placed the most importance on friends, and when the girls reflected on their friends, they often focused on feelings. For example, one grade six spoke of not wanting a friend to feel bad for not being able to do a skill that other friends could do. Conversely, another girl spoke of it potentially being upsetting to not be able to do something her friends could do. These comments display characteristics of intimate relationships. Similar to the findings from the analysis of drawings, these findings also suggest that many girls may be more motivated to participate in sporting opportunities that allow them to value interpersonal relationships and connection within activity.

Gender Separation and Girls' Attitudes Towards Boys

Children naturally separate by gender. According to Thorne (1993) "in nearly every study of school situations where kids from age three through junior high are given the opportunity to choose companions of the same age, girls have shown a strong preference to be with girls, and boys with boys" (p.46). Beyond simple

separation however, the girls in this study expressed strong feelings of frustration and contempt towards the boys in their classes. Although it may be tempting to dismiss their comments as a standard part of childhood experience which they will eventually outgrow, Thorne (1993) reminds us that “children’s interactions are not preparation for life; they are life itself” (p.3). In other words, understanding and valuing the experiences of children is just as important as understanding those of adults.

The significance that gender holds in children’s lives changes as they age. According to Thorne (1993), during the middle childhood years (corresponding roughly with the second through fifth grades), boys and girls begin to feel less positive towards the other gender. Adler and Adler (1998) noted that the most problematic interactions they observed between boys and girls in their study were during the middle childhood years. They contend that the best-case scenario during this time is that boys and girls regard each other neutrally; the worst-case scenario that they, in the words of Thorne (1993), regard each other as contaminated (Adler & Adler, 1998). Results from this study fully support the observations of Thorne (1993) and Adler and Alder (1988); the girls in this study fall into the category of middle childhood, and displayed attitudes towards boys that place them somewhere close to the “boys are contaminated” end of Thorne’s spectrum.

Previous studies have documented similar attitudes from elementary school girls. Adler and Adler (1998) found that most of the grade three girls they observed regarded boys as “violent, uncouth, dirty, and mean-spirited...boys were disgusting and had nothing that would interest girls in them” (p.162). When Greene (1987) questioned elementary schools girls about their thoughts on boys, their responses bore

a striking similarity to comments made by girls in this study; they accused the boys of acting like monkeys, thinking they were 'tough' and taunting the girls with comments such as "I can beat you" (as cited by Lenskyj, 1994).

Researchers have made certain observations about the nature of children's lives in seeking to understand and interpret children's experiences both at school and in their neighbourhoods. With regard to the extensive gender separation present in schools, researchers have explained that schools lend themselves towards gender separation more than any other environment (Adler & Adler, 1998; Thorne, 1993). Thorne (1993) identified a number of environmental conditions present in schools that increase the likelihood of gender separation. She noted that the crowded setting of schools increases the likelihood of gender separation, as there is high potential for companions of the same gender and age (Thorne, 1993). Teasing, a standard ritual in elementary school, also functions to discourage mixed gender interactions, as it is often targeted at individuals who choose to associate with members of the opposite sex. Furthermore, the public nature of schools means that decisions to interact with members of the opposite sex are inevitably witnessed by classmates, which increases the likelihood of being teased (Thorne, 1993). When the girls in this study spoke about boys, they demonstrated a very strong 'boys-against-girls' mentality. These observations help to explain how school settings, in particular, contribute to establishing this mindset.

As described in the results section, there was one girl in this study who spoke in defense of the boys, justified much of their behaviour, and expressed that she felt the girls in the focus group were being overly critical of the boys. This girl's position

serves as an important reminder of the problems that occur when gender is conceived in a different-cultures framework (Thorne, 1993). According to Thorne (1993), much of the research on gender relations among children and youth is skewed to represent to experiences of the most visible and dominant children in a group of boys or girls, and silences or marginalizes the experiences of those who do not “fit the mold”. The gender perspective (described in Chapter Two) posits that gendered behaviour is constructed on multiple levels; socio-cultural, institutional, interactional, individual. While this girl may experience similar socio-cultural and institutional environments as her peers, her daily interactions and her individual characteristics have clearly contributed to her having a remarkably different attitude towards boys than the majority of her peers. Perhaps an interesting avenue for future research would be to explore the experiences of girls or boys who differ markedly from their peers in their attitudes towards physical activity and gender, in an effort to identify factors that allow children to successfully go “against the grain”.

Thorne (1993) emphasized a key concept to consider when interpreting gender relations within a school setting. She noted that gender boundaries are “episodic and ambiguous” (p.84), and the salience of gender varies from one situation to another (Thorne, 1993). Throughout a given school day, gender boundaries are erected and dismantled dozens of times. Boys and girls may throw insults back and forth on the playground at recess, only to be working cooperatively in reading groups ten minutes later (Thorne, 1993). Thorne (1993) uses the analogy of a picket fence to describe the fluid meaning of gender, comparing gender boundaries to “many short fences that are built and as quickly dismantled” (p.84). Recognizing this volatility and flux of gender

dynamics allows for a partial understanding of how the girls in this study can express such frustrated opinions towards the behaviour of the boys in their physical education classes, yet at the same time express a strong enthusiasm and liking for the subject. The gender 'picket fence', may be constructed and destructed numerous times throughout an activity, a class, or a day. Likewise, the frustration caused by these 'fences' may not be continually felt throughout an entire lesson, but may come and go as particular situations unfold and evolve. Although the girls expressed intense feelings of frustration towards the boys, it seems that these feelings did not define the girls' physical education experience overall. In fact, they only spoke so fervently when they were specifically asked the question of whether or not they saw differences between boys and girls in gym. By the sheer posing of a question about gender differences, the researcher brought the "opposing sides" view of boys and girls to the forefront in the discussion and essentially erected one of the 'picket fences' for the girls to negotiate around. However, this recognition serves only to help understand the fluid nature of gender relations and is not intended to undervalue the comments made by the girls.

..... In terms of the physical education experiences of the girls there are some clear insights to be gained from their comments. Regardless of the causes, prevalence, or other related factors, the girls described a very real sense of frustration from many of their class experiences of physical education with boys. Physical educators deal with conflict on a daily basis, and in many cases, likely tire of hearing the same complaints several times a day. The attitudes expressed by the girls serve as a reminder of just how salient these conflicts can be in the lives of children. Consequently, physical

educators should attempt to address situations that occur in day-to-day PE classes where gender-based frustration could manifest. Monitoring for these situations, however, is just one step in addressing this complex problem. More importantly, the girls' comments indicate a need for educators to create environments that teach honesty, respect, and cooperation. Particularly relevant to the physical education environment is the concept of working with students of varying skill levels. Although students excel to varying degrees in every subject, physical education is one of the few subjects where a student's ability is visible and constantly on display for all their classmates to see. For this reason, a particularly important objective for physical education teachers should be to encourage students—and provide them with strategies—to work with students of all abilities. Ultimately, these are goals that should be generic to all educational settings. As previously mentioned, however, their necessity is highlighted in physical education classes, due to the countless interactions that occur between students throughout a PE period. Deliberately emphasizing behavioural principles can at best minimize the incidences of conflict, and at least provide a foundation for dealing with conflict between students.

It should be noted, at this point, that Parkview Elementary is a school renowned for offering a quality Hellison-based program that emphasizes the aforementioned values, and regardless, the girls are still expressing frustrated attitudes towards the boys. Several questions are thus warranted; what other factors are influencing the gender-interactions taking place at Parkview Elementary? Would attitudes be worse in a school that doesn't address behavioural principles in such a systematic way? Would attitudes at this school be worse if Hellison's model was not

implemented? Answers to these questions are beyond the scope of this study, and speak to a need for more research on the implications of the “gender wars” that children experience throughout elementary school.

Perceptions of Gender Appropriate Activity

Boys and girls begin to learn gender-appropriate behaviour at a very young age (Greendorfer, 1993; Thorne, 1993; Williamson, 1996). Gender is the most ardent type of socialization children experience; from birth onwards, gender role socialization teaches appropriate behaviour, mannerisms, dress, and activities based on the biological sex of a person (Greendorfer, 1993). Gender stereotypes are a powerful phenomenon in our society, and hold the potential to place severe constraints and limitations on individual behaviour (Nelson & Robinson, 1999). Sport, in particular, is an area where gender dualisms are vigorously constructed (Bryson, 1994; Cahn, 1994; Walk, 2000). Competitive and aggressive sports are traditionally considered appropriate for males, while expressive and aesthetic sports are considered appropriate for females (Cahn, 1994). Regardless of the obvious progress that has been made with regard to women’s participation in competitive sport, the comments from the girls in this study show that the cultural socialization process of gender-appropriate sport remains firmly intact.

Results from this study were proof of the young age at which gender-appropriate behaviour is learned and engrained in children. The girls in this study talked about a number of physical activities that they considered as either “for boys” or “for girls”. In fact, grade three girls spoke more about gender appropriate activities than girls in other grades. Gender-role stereotypes have several implications with regard to sport

and physical activity participation. Activities that are perceived to be either masculine or feminine may discourage members of the opposite sex from participation (Williamson, 1996). Homophobia functions to strengthen these perceptions of gender appropriate activity as individuals who engage in activities deemed “inappropriate” for their sex put themselves at risk of homophobic name calling (Griffin, 1992; Williamson, 1996). The public nature of schools makes this threat even more pertinent to students, whose actions are witnessed by their classmates on a continual basis (Thorne, 1993). Researchers have noted another consequence of stereotypes, in that females have lower self-competence beliefs towards sports that are traditionally perceived as male (Solmon, Lee, Belcher, Harrison, & Wells, 2003). However, the complex nature of stereotypes should not be underestimated, as we are reminded by Scraton (1992):

it should not be assumed that the existence of gender stereotypes is all-determining, resulting in the conformity of all girls and boys to expected roles, behaviour and attitudes. Clearly, many individuals challenge the process of gender stereotyping- not always consciously - and as a consequence the transmission of stereotypes is by no means simplistic, absolute or uncontested. (p.9)

Comments made by the girls in this study attest to the complex nature of stereotypes described by Scraton.

For the most part, the girls in this study spoke of differences in the form of preference—boys and girls “like” different things. (One exception is a grade three girl who definitively stated that girls could do cartwheels and splits whereas boys could not). Physical activity research has shown that girls and boys show higher personal interest in activities that are traditionally considered “appropriate” for their sex (Shen et al., 2003). Results from this study support these findings, as the girls expressed low

personal interest in activities they considered “boy” in nature. Similarly, the girls spoke of how the boys did not want to participate in dance units because they considered dance to be a “girl” activity. Interestingly, however, Shen et al. (2003) found important differences between personal interest (an individual’s preference of one action over another) and situational interest (a momentary appealing effect of an activity in a particular context at a particular time). Despite the fact that the boys in their study reported a much lower personal interest in dance, they experienced similar levels of situational interest as girls, as measured by their high activity level throughout the dance classes (Shen et al., 2003). In other words, situational interest overcame the influence of gender-based personal interest (Shen et al., 2003). This is a pertinent finding for physical education teachers, as it further emphasizes the importance in the way teachers establish learning environments and deliver classes.

Despite their conceptions of “boy” activities and “girl” activities, the girls in this study concurrently expressed the knowledge that boys and girls *could* do any sport or activity if they wanted to, even if it was an activity considered to be more appropriate for the other gender. This recognition of individual freedom to choose suggests an awareness of gender-role stereotypes as socially constructed, and a rejection of the rigid dichotomy that stereotypes perpetuate. Essentially, the girls knew that any boy or girl is free to like whatever they want to like, however society has taught them otherwise. The fact that the girls made a point to discuss the possibility of choosing non-traditional activities is encouraging. The influence of stereotypes is not easy to negotiate around. Understanding that, regardless of societal norms, individuals should have the freedom to be whoever or whatever they want is a

necessary step towards lessening the negatives implications that stereotypes may impart.

Section III: Limitations to the Study

There were several limitations to this project. Participation in the drawing portion of the study was on a voluntary basis and required that the students return a consent form signed by a legal guardian. I encountered difficulty in getting the consent forms returned. In some classes the majority of students returned the consent forms returned, yet in other classes less than half of the students returned the forms. In many cases, students wanted to participate in the study however had not returned a consent form. As a result, sample size was smaller than initially hoped for and the number of students participating across grade levels was unequal. This limited my ability to compare findings between females and males and across grade levels.

Issues with consent forms subsequently affected the focus group interviews. Initially, I was going to invite selected participants to participate in the focus group interviews. After experiencing the difficulty with consent forms in the drawing portion of the study, I decided to invite all female students to participate in the interviews. This was done in an effort to ensure that enough interested females returned the consent form. Although an adequate number of females returned the forms at each grade level, the self-selection process may have resulted in a more homogenous group than initially desired. The racial and ethnic diversity of the participants in the study was dependant on the school population. While there was some ethnic diversity within the study population, including participants who had

recently immigrated from Russia, Cote d'Ivoire, and Taiwan, the vast majority of the sample was Caucasian.

Efforts were made to ensure that students had their own workspace to do their drawings, the nature of classrooms necessitates that students are in relatively close proximity. It is possible that what some students chose to draw was influenced by seeing a classmate's drawing. Similarly, although emphasis was placed on participants expressing personal opinions in the focus group interviews, focus groups naturally lend themselves to the possibility of "group-think", where individuals are influenced by what is being said around them.

Section IV: Conclusion

Understanding and interpreting the gendered worlds of girls and boys is complex (as is the gendered world of adult men and women)—there are many factors to consider, many shifting variables, and many contrasting messages. Furthermore, every person negotiates around and understands all these variables in different ways. Nonetheless, as the results from this study demonstrated, there are indeed common lived experiences. This discussion has attempted to understand the experiences of the participants in this study. The findings from the drawings and the opinions expressed by the girls in the focus group interviews hold several implications for physical education teachers, researchers, and those interested in the promotion of physical activity towards girls in particular. The final chapter reflects on this research project as a whole and explores the implications for teachers and researchers that were generated from this study.

CHAPTER SIX: RECOMMENDATIONS AND REFLECTIONS

Introduction

This study was an exploratory inquiry, with the objective of learning about students' experiences of physical education in elementary school, and learning in particular about the experiences of female students in physical education. There was no hypothesis and no concrete expectations for certain results. While one of the guiding research questions was based on evaluating differences in the way girls and boys depicted themselves in PE, no assumptions were made about what sort of potential differences may surface. The data collection methods used in this study were chosen to suit this approach. The first phase of data collection consisted of student drawings, which put students in charge of the starting point of the study; through their pictures, they demonstrated what aspects of physical education were most relevant to them. Similarly, the focus group interviews were conducted in a way that allowed students the freedom to discuss issues that were important to them, and to share knowledge that they considered relevant. These methods truly spoke to the exploratory nature of the study. The use of a case study design reflected a central belief in the design of the study—that the physical education program would have some influence on students' attitudes, although to what degree was not known.

The goal of learning about student experiences was indeed accomplished, and although no particular findings were specifically anticipated, many of the findings were nonetheless surprising. One of the most notable findings from this study was the degree to which the philosophies of the physical education program were reflected in the students' drawings and comments. In fact, the overall caliber of the physical

education program at Parkview Elementary (essentially due to the high quality physical education teacher) made this school a unique site for this research project. This was the strongest reflection of the program's influence on students, and as discussed in the previous chapter, this finding is attributable to the effective and successful implementation of Hellison's model by the physical education teacher. The fact that the program at this school was a particularly high quality one (as evidenced by the physical education teacher winning a national award for teaching excellence in the year in which the study took place) not surprisingly shaped the case study in a variety of ways. Certain results may have been more likely due to the high quality program rather than other possible factors (for example, the program may have been a primary reason for girls drawing certain team sports as much as boys). Likewise, whereas one of the most notable findings from this study centered on the program itself, this evidently may not be the case were similar case studies to be conducted at other schools. Although much of the data was tied uniquely into the program at Parkview Elementary, much of it was also linked to larger societal and cultural issues. The following sections provide recommendations based on findings from this study.

Recommendations for Practice

This study demonstrated the prominent role that gender plays in shaping the physical education experiences of girls and boys. While the purpose of this study was not to generalize the findings to the population at large, it is important to note that results do in fact support much of the related literature on issues of gender and socialization. Much of what was learned from the student interviews and drawings at Parkview Elementary related to cultural beliefs, cultural values, and the process of

socialization. In this regard, suggestions resulting from the study at Parkview Elementary may be applicable to other physical education programs in Canadian schools, as students inhabit a similar national culture.

A central theme across the data was the influence that gender role stereotypes had on the perceptions of certain physical activities as more or less appropriate for either sex. These results hold important implications for physical education teachers. As we have seen from a number of researchers, gender role stereotypes are powerful ideals that place limitations and constraints on individual behaviour. This is particularly problematic for physical education teachers, who teach a variety of activities to large groups of students. Physical education teachers must actively work to de-emphasize the perceptions of sex-appropriate activities as much as possible. Physical education classes are almost always co-educational in elementary school, and are often co-educational in high school. The more students view activities as sex-appropriate, the more difficult it is for a physical education teacher create an ideal learning environment where students feel comfortable and not at risk for teasing or humiliation. De-emphasizing perceptions of sex-appropriate activity is one means of establishing a learning environment where girls and boys feel equally challenged and motivated to learn. Establishing a gender equitable environment is challenging and complex (Hutchison, 1995), and requires consistent and reflective actions on the part of the physical education teacher. Hutchison (1995) offered the following strategies for gender-equitable teaching:

- Use gender inclusive language
- Avoid the use of stereotypical phrases

- Interrupt sexist and other derogatory comments and behaviours by students.
- Be critical of classroom interaction patterns in the first few weeks of classes, and make an effort to ensure girls are included in all aspects of activity.

Instructional strategies should also be used to create a gender equitable environment.

Hutchison (1995) outlines the following:

- Recognize the contributions of females athletes in delivering PE content
- Consistently use material that promotes positive images of boys and girls
- Use cooperative strategies for learning that promote interaction among students from diverse groups.

Physical education teachers can also use specific strategies when introducing students to new activities. Rose (2005) discussed the challenge of getting boys to feel comfortable and gain a sense of belonging within dance units. Many of the strategies she suggests are applicable to any activity that is highly stereotyped to one gender or the other, and include the following:

- Be positive and proactive. Always show students that you have full confidence that they will enjoy the activity.
- Make every effort to provide students with opportunities to be successful in the activity. Success breeds confidence and leads to enjoyment. This is especially important in encouraging students to feel comfortable in sex-typed activities.
- Know the potential trouble spots (such as holding hands during a unit of dance, or boys not passing to girls during a game of floor hockey), and work

to minimize their traumatic effect. Address the issue, talk about it, and “defuse (it’s) power with skill, persistence, and humour” (Rose, 2005, p.27).

- Give students role models. Whenever possible, provide images of the non-stereotyped gender performing the activity (put posters of women wrestling on the gymnasium walls, or show videos of boys and/or men dancing during a dance unit).
- Keep it light. When attempting to make students feel comfortable, fun is a more worthy goal than precision.

Implications for Physical Education Teachers

Girls in this study showed a significant amount of frustration towards the boys for many of their behaviours during physical education classes. Although related to larger issues of gender relations among children, this finding speaks to a need for physical education teachers to address these sorts of conflicts as much as possible in their classes. PE teachers habitually address conflict amongst students. Given the dynamic environment in the gymnasium it is impossible to witness and mediate every conflict between students- nor is it desirable. However, the comments from the girls speak to a need for PE teachers to direct special attention to mediating circumstances where gender prevails in a “boys-against-girls” sense. In particular, physical education teachers should use strategies in their classes that minimize instances of cheating and hogging. This is best done in a preventative manner by encouraging fair play and teamwork. These are relatively easy concepts to promote however, and relatively difficult ones for elementary school students to understand and act upon in a consistent manner. Teachers should therefore be vigilant of these behaviours and the

sites in which they manifest. According to the girls' comments, many of the problems they described occurred during competitive events and team sports.

Results from this study showed many positive learning outcomes from the use of Hellison's model, and suggest that this model may be an effective approach for many teachers. Inevitably, a physical education teacher's approach to teaching must suit their personality and personal beliefs regarding teaching and learning. In addition, the needs of classes vary substantially from school to school. For teachers who are interested in a Hellison's model, or a similar approach, this study offers encouraging results, as demonstrated by the positive messages that students voiced. As demonstrated by the discussion on Hellison's model in Chapter Five, a number of researchers believe it is extremely important for physical education programs to include personal and social development objectives, and support the use of Hellison's model (see

Data from this study indicates that using visual material on gymnasium walls is an effective means of communicating messages to students. The drawings by students in this study reflected a wide variety of items that are found on the gymnasium walls at Parkview Elementary, and reinforced a number of ideas and messages that were emphasized in the physical education program. The use of visual stimuli is also a means of accommodating various learning styles. Based on the results of this study, physical educators are encouraged to hang posters and signs on gymnasium walls as a means of communicating certain messages to children.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study holds implications for researchers as well as teachers. When measuring student attitudes towards physical education, researchers need to account for the variance in physical education programs and the influence that the programs subsequently have on student attitudes. The details of the local school culture—specifically, the physical education program offered at Parkview Elementary and the teaching philosophy of the physical education teacher—were reflected in the students' overall perceptions of physical education. The most meaningful understanding of students' attitudes towards PE will be gained with an understanding of the type of program the students experience. This includes not only the type of curriculum that is followed, or the years of teaching experience that the physical educator has, as many research studies suffice to offer. It is necessary to understand the teaching philosophy of the PE teacher to gain an understanding for the type of interaction they have with their students, for it is the details that shape the daily experiences students have in their physical education programs. It is these daily experiences that significantly influence on a students' attitude and perception of physical education.

This research demonstrated the powerful influence that gender stereotypes have in children's lives, the young age at which they learn sex-appropriate behaviour, and the contrasting messages they receive about gender appropriate behaviour. Future research could attempt to further explore children's conceptions of gender and the resulting implications on their attitudes and behaviours, both personally and socially. In order to critically analyze and address the ways in which gender

influences physical education and sport experiences, it is important to understand how children internalize their understandings of gender.

Reflections on Methodological Aspects of the Study

Based on the methods and procedures of this study, several recommendations can be made for future research. As a relatively new methodology in the field of physical education, this study supports the use of drawings. They proved to be a valuable method of collecting data that allowed for insights that otherwise would not have been gained. As several researchers have noted (Backett-Milburn & Mckie, 1999; MacGregor et al., 1998; Mauthner, 1997), children are extremely sensitive to the way in which research is presented to them, and the data can easily be influenced by events that occur during the data collection process. The protocol for presenting this research to participants was extremely sensitive to not biasing the data in any way, and with the exception of one out of the seven classes, it proved successful. Students were instructed to shift their desks to be in their own workspace, to work on their own and not talk while they were drawing, and they in turn worked independently on their drawings. It was emphasized to students that whatever they chose to draw was okay and that no choice of drawing had to be approved by the researcher or teacher. A point was made of comparing how different that was from regular classes, where the students were encouraged to ask questions. This also proved to be effective, as no students asked about certain activities, which in turn did not influence other students in what they drew. The drawing activity itself was enjoyed by students. Likewise, the girls enjoyed participating in the focus group interviews. As recommended by Mauthner (1997), allowing the girls some freedom to

make comments as they felt inclined helped to maintain a comfortable environment for participants, and lead to the sharing of valuable insights.

Mauthner (1997) noted that finding areas that are ideal for interview recording purposes can be a challenge when conducting research in schools. This proved to be an issue in this study. The interviews were conducted in the gymnasium, which has pipes in it that occasionally make persistent noise. This was the case during one interview in particular, making it difficult for the researcher to hear all the comments that were made. Another issue in this study was getting consent forms returned. Many students wanted to participate in the study on the day of data collection, but hadn't returned their consent forms. This challenge is not unique to researchers, as many teachers spoke of the difficulty in getting forms returned. Sending home a short note reminding parents and students to return the form as the date for data collection approaches is a strategy that could possibly increase the number of consent forms returned.

Results from this study suggested areas for future research to address. Research has thoroughly documented the nature of children's gender relations, factors that contribute to gender separation and the different phases that gender dynamics progress through. Little research, however, has attempted to understand the implications that these relations have on children's self-concept, and how children personally make sense of the "gender wars" that they experience on a daily basis. The comments from girls in this study displayed some very strong emotions, and invite further investigation in this area. It would also be of interest to explore the attitudes of boys with regard to the gender issues that they perceive in physical education.

Personal Reflection

The study was a journey for me in many ways – as a researcher, as a physical education teacher, and as a female athlete located within the same socio-cultural context as the participants in this study.

This study reinforced and strengthened my beliefs in the importance of developing personal and social skills within physical education. Prior to meeting Linda and volunteering at Parkview Elementary, I had not heard of Dr. Don Hellison or the model of humanistic physical education. However, in the one year that I had previously spent teaching elementary school physical education, I realized immediately that I was compelled to address situations where my students were disrespectful or uncaring towards each other. Similarly, I recognized one of my biggest challenges with some students was helping them to overcome the feelings of frustration they often displayed if they were unsuccessful at a task, or if they viewed themselves as less competent as other students in the class. Educators often talk about “teachable moments” – situations that unfold in classes that allow teachers to provide students with bits of insight that may not work themselves neatly into a lesson plan or curriculum. I remember clearly the day when a grade five boy approached me while his PE class was organized into playing mini-games of basketball. He was a highly-skilled athlete, visibly frustrated, and complained about a girl on his team who wasn’t actively participating in the game, wasn’t running up and down the court, didn’t want the ball, and was basically dragging his team down. I agreed with his assessment, and told him he was entirely correct in his observations. I then suggested that he had two options – he could continue to play in the same way as he had been and remain

frustrated at this visibly weaker player, or he could recognize that basketball was not a preferred activity of this girl, or one in which she was particularly skilled or confident, and find ways to at least attempt to include her in the game. He returned to the court and started giving her bounce passes instead of the more-difficult-to-catch chest passes, and started praising her on her effort as well as successful plays. If I wasn't sold on my budding philosophy before, I definitely was then.

Physical education classes present any number of opportunities to develop characteristics in students that are crucial to social and emotional health, and relevant to virtually every life situation. PE has the potential to teach students to work with classmates of all abilities, to be respectful, to be caring towards others, to recognize and accept that they may be proficient at certain activities and not as proficient at others, to set goals for themselves, to share, to problem solve, to cooperate—the list goes on. What is so remarkable about the program that Linda runs is that she pursues all these goals in a manner that does not take time or focus away from the development of movement concepts and physical competencies. Mental health is, in my opinion, substantially underemphasized in our society. Social and emotional health is necessary for students be confident with themselves and lead generally happy lives. If physical education programs can simultaneously develop the physical health of students along with their social and emotional health, then it seems almost neglectful to not at least try to pursue these objectives, to some degree, within PE programs.

As a researcher, I often struggled with how to address and write about gender as it presented itself in the findings from this study. Gender is a very complex issue,

and one that contains many contradictions. Moreover, there are many different views regarding how to approach the study of gender. One day, as society continues to inch forward, become more accepting of all types of people with all types of interests and possibly (hopefully?) moves closer to what Lorber (2005) describes as a “degendered” society, we will have to stop writing about “traditionally female” and “traditionally male” activities, as in doing so (in any capacity), we reconstruct the self-perpetuating system of gender dualisms. Furthermore, when discussing gender, it is a constant struggle to discuss findings in a way that gives voice to the experiences of many while not obscuring the experiences of a few. Throughout writing this thesis, I was often left wondering if we had come to a point in the study of gender that demanded a new way of theorizing – an approach that recognized how much progress has been made in the last several decades, allowing us to move forward from some of the language and discussions we’ve employed thus far, but that recognizes the substantial barriers that continue to exist—particularly at the ideological level, both as individuals and as a society.

Finally, the attitudes and opinions of the girls in the focus group interviews spoke to me about the on-going need to address gender issues, particularly in the form of gender-role stereotypes. I was struck by how eager the girls were to share any knowledge they had on the differences between boys and girls. As many researchers have noted, gender role stereotypes can constrain and deter both boys and girls from pursuing certain interests – possibly ones that would make them truly happy. I am left wondering if many of the legislative and policy gains (with regard to non-traditional lifestyles, such as homosexuality or transgenderism) that we have made as a society—

namely that we are an accepting and diverse society on paper—obscures the degree to which our personal attitudes and ideologies—those which we convey to our children—have been much slower to change.

Summary

This study provided an interesting window of insight into the experiences of students within one elementary school physical education program. Results demonstrated the manner in which a quality program is delivered at this school, the impact it has on students, the different ways that boys and girls perceive themselves in physical education, and the struggles of girls in physical education classes. Based on this study, several recommendations for practice were made to physical education teachers. This study demonstrated that many of the issues students face in physical education are a result of long-standing cultural socialization practices. Several researchers have stated the importance of addressing gender issues in physical education at a young age (LeDrew, 1997, Shropshire et al., 1997; Williams, 1996), and results from this study demonstrate the importance of continuing work at this level. There is a lot to be gained from participation in physical activity. The attitudes expressed by girls in this study demonstrate a strong enthusiasm for physical education, and we must continue efforts in this field to ensure an equally strong quality of experience – for all our students.

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STUDY INFORMATION SHEET

October 14, 2005

Dear Parent/Legal Guardian,

Your child has been invited to participate in a study designed to investigate elementary school children's attitudes towards physical education. This study is being conducted by Katherine Baker, a graduate student in physical education at Memorial University of Newfoundland and a certified physical education teacher. Helping students develop positive attitudes towards physical education is a goal for many physical educators. Studies have shown that participation levels in high school physical education decrease progressively, in particular for females. The present study therefore concerns itself with exploring the impact of the physical education program on students in varying grade levels at MacPherson Elementary. Learning more about student attitudes across many ages and grade levels can help teachers to provide programs that will motivate and interest students in physical education and physical activity over the long-term.

If your child, with your permission, agrees to participate in this study they will be asked to draw a picture of themselves in physical education. Many researchers have used drawings in studies involving children as it allows children to express themselves from their own perspective, as opposed to that of an adult. The drawing activity will take place in school during a scheduled art class. There is a possibility that your child be asked to participate in a focus-group discussion about physical education after the drawing portion of the research is completed, however if this is the case you and your child will be further contacted and asked for consent. *Participation in the drawing portion of the study by no means obligates your child to participate in a focus-group discussion.* The intent of this study is not to read meaning into individual drawings but rather explore possible themes across groups of drawings categorized by either grade level or gender.

Should your child choose not to participate in the study they will still participate in a drawing activity during the scheduled time with the freedom to draw whatever they please, thereby not setting them apart from the rest of the group in any visible manner. Participation or non-participation in this study will not affect any aspect of your child's education in either art or physical education through assignment of grades, participation marks or otherwise.

Any information from this study that can be associated with your child will remain confidential. Pseudonyms will be used when referring to individual participants therefore no names will appear in any reporting of the study. Additionally, as this study aims at exploring themes across groups reporting will be done in broad descriptive terms and not focused upon individual participants. Any data collected for the study (drawings and interview transcripts) will be kept in possession by the researcher for a five year period as required by Memorial University then subsequently destroyed.

The proposal for this research has been approved by the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research at Memorial University. If you have ethical concerns about the research (such as the way your child may be treated or your

Appendix B: Protocol for Presenting The Drawing Task To Students

Thank you all for doing this project. Thank you for bringing back your consent forms.

1. We are going to get started right way – I will give you your paper. Don't start drawing yet, wait for my instructions. As I go around giving out the paper, you can take out your art markers and crayons.
2. Before I give you your instructions, I want to say:
 - a. Work on your own – don't worry about what anyone else is drawing, For this project, I am interested in knowing what *you* want to draw – it doesn't have to be like anyone else's.
 - b. Something different – I don't want you to ask any questions. Whatever you want to draw is okay, it can be anything about gym, as long as you are somewhere in the picture.
 - c. You are going to draw your picture - when everyone is finished, I am going to ask you some questions, so if you finish early, keep your drawing at your desk with but you can read or do some work quietly while we wait for everyone to finish. You will have more than 20 minutes to do your drawing, so you can take your time.
 - d. Instructions:

“Close your eyes. Think of yourself in physical education, which you may call gym class. Think of being downstairs in the gymnasium. Think of all the different things that you do in gym – not just what you are doing right now but all the different things you do all year. Think of how you feel when you are in the gymnasium. What do you see when you picture yourself in gym class? On your piece of paper, I want you to draw whatever you see when you think of yourself in gym. There are no rules about what your drawing has to look like, as long as it somehow shows you in gym class. Remember, you have almost more than 20 minutes to do your drawing so take your time. Work quietly, and on your own”.
3. Now that everyone is finished, I want you to turn your paper over and write your name on the back. I'm going to ask you some questions and I want you write your answers on the back of the paper, underneath where you wrote your name. First question is:
 - e. Explain what you are doing in your drawing.
 - f. Explain why you drew what you did? What did you do that drawing, instead of something else?
 - g. How do you feel in your drawing and why?
4. Last thing! Here is the fun part – I want you to pick a “fake name” and write it on the bottom of the page, underneath where you answered your questions. It should sound like a human name but

Appendix C: Interview Guide (Focus Group Interviews)

Focus Group Interview

The following information will be confirmed for each participant at the beginning of the session:

Name
Chosen Pseudonym
Grade Level
Age

Discussion Questions

1. Explain your drawing to me.
2. What do you enjoy most about physical education?
3. What do you enjoy least about physical education?
4. When you are in phys ed, is there anything that can make you feel especially happy or excited?
5. What differences, if any, do you notice between boys and girls in PE?
6. If you could change something about physical education what would you change?

CONSENT FORM
Focus Group Discussion

Elementary School Children's Attitudes Towards Physical Education

Parental Consent

I _____ agree to allow my
child _____

to participate in the focus group discussion portion of the study "Elementary School Children's Attitudes towards Physical Education".

I understand that I may withdraw consent for my child to participate in the study at any time. I have read the study information sheet and give consent for my child to (please place a checkmark)

_____ participate in the focus group discussion

_____ for the discussion to be audio-recorded.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix E: Questions Guide for Interview with the Physical Education Teacher

Question Guide

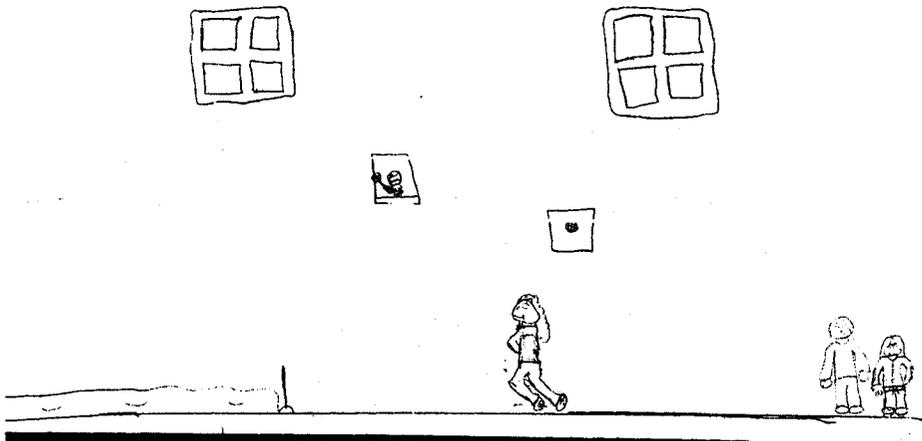
Interviewer: Katherine Baker

Interviewee: Elementary School Physical Education Teacher

1. How long have you been teaching at this school?
2. How many minutes of Physical Education do the students at this school receive a week?
3. How would you describe the students' overall attitude towards phys. ed. at this school?
4. Describe your teaching philosophy – what types of messages are emphasized in your classes?
5. Describe any differences you notice in the participation of girls and boys in your Kindergarten to Grade Two classes.
6. Describe any differences you notice in the participation of girls and boys in your grade three and four classes.
7. Describe any differences you notice in the participation of girls and boys in your grade five and six classes.
8. What strategies to you use to encourage participation on behalf of your students?
9. Based on your observations as a teacher, what do you think are individual factors that affect the participation levels of some of your students?

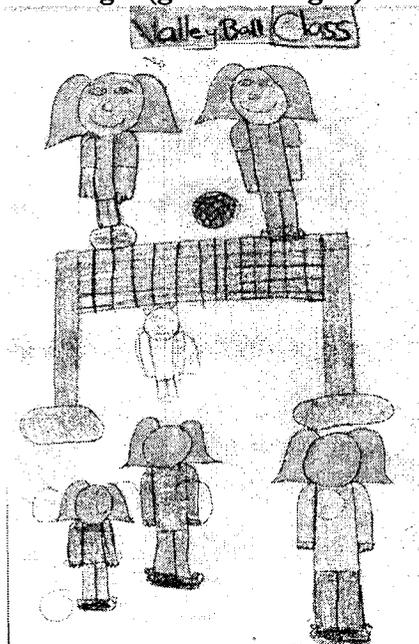
Appendix F: Student Drawings

Drawing 1 (grade three girl)



Person: self, 2 others
Setting details: windows, wall posters
Objects: large gymnastics mat, mini high-jump stand
Text: none
Symbolism: none

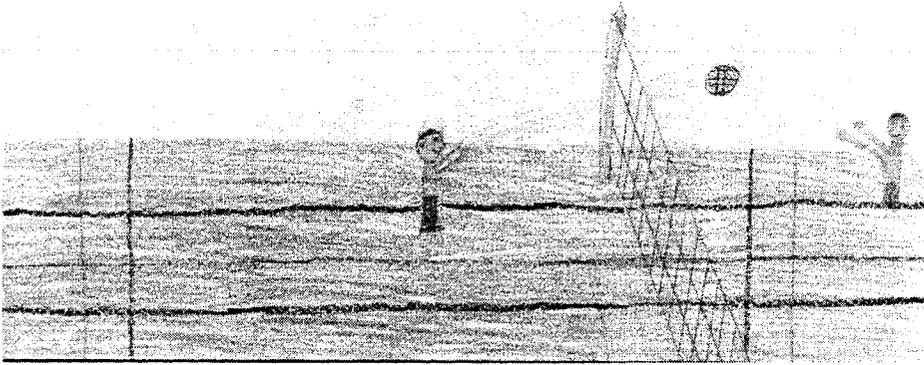
Drawing 2 (grade four girl)



Person: self versus others (team), all female, smiling
Setting details: none
Objects: volleyball, volleyball nets
Text: Volleyball Class
Symbolism:

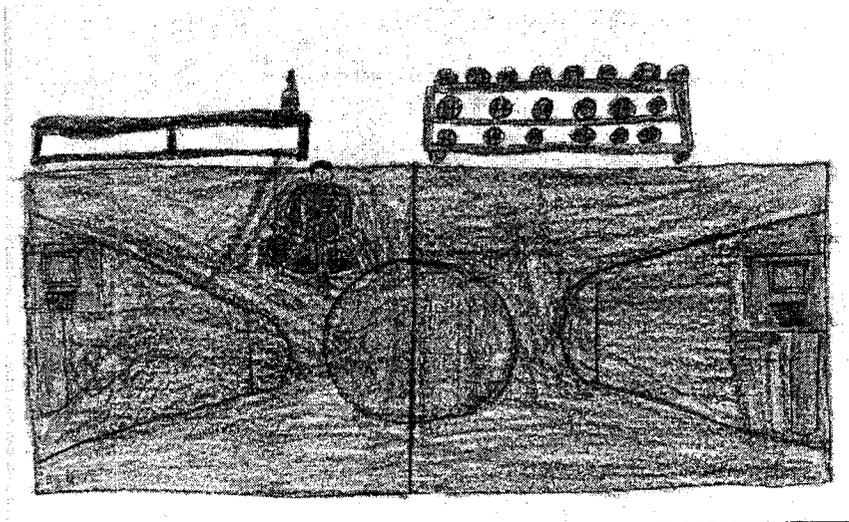
Drawing 3 (grade four boy)

Volley Ball



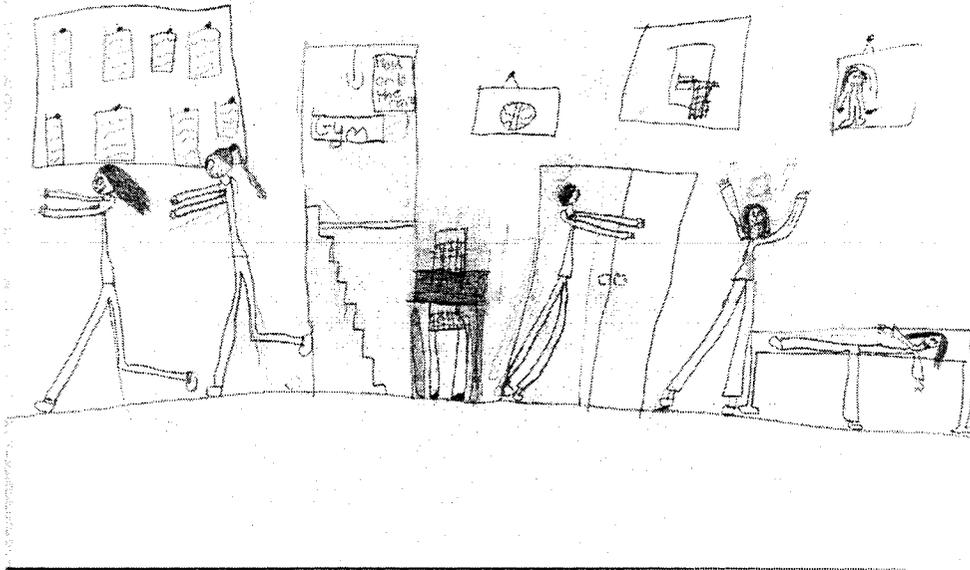
Person: self, smiling, one other
Setting details: gym floor lines
Objects: volleyball, volleyball net
Text: Volleyball
Symbolism: none

Drawing 4 (grade four boy)



Person: self, smiling
Setting details: gym floor lines – basketball court, bench, basketball nets
Objects: basketball ball rack, basketball, water bottle
Text: none
Symbolism: none

Drawing 5 (grade six girl)

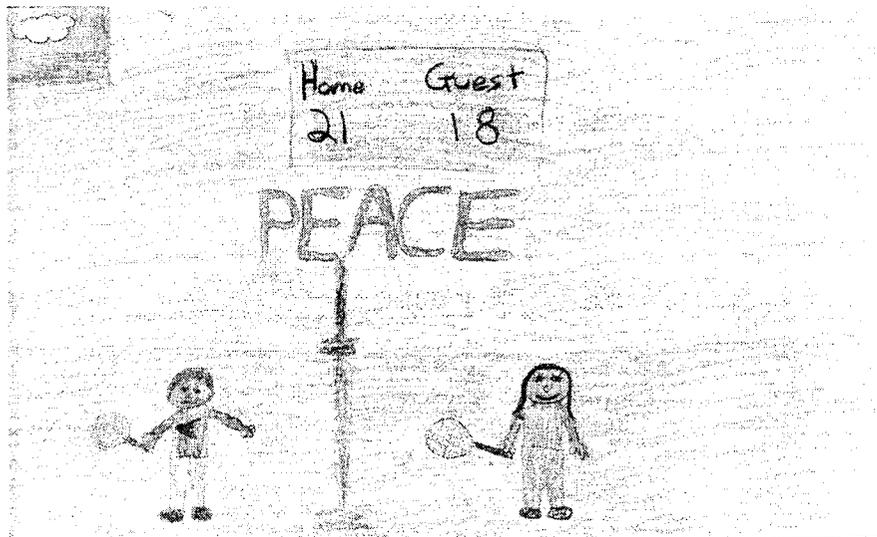


Number of People (NP): 5

Interaction (I): together against each other (playing freeze tag)

Self Depiction (SD): in motion (ALL are in motion)

Drawing 6 (grade five boy)

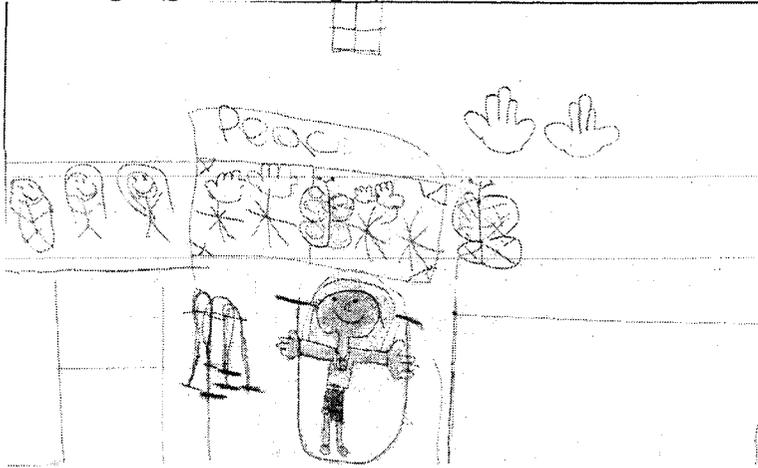


NP: two

I: together against each other (badminton)

SD: static – holding racquets but facing viewer

Drawing 7 (grade three girl)

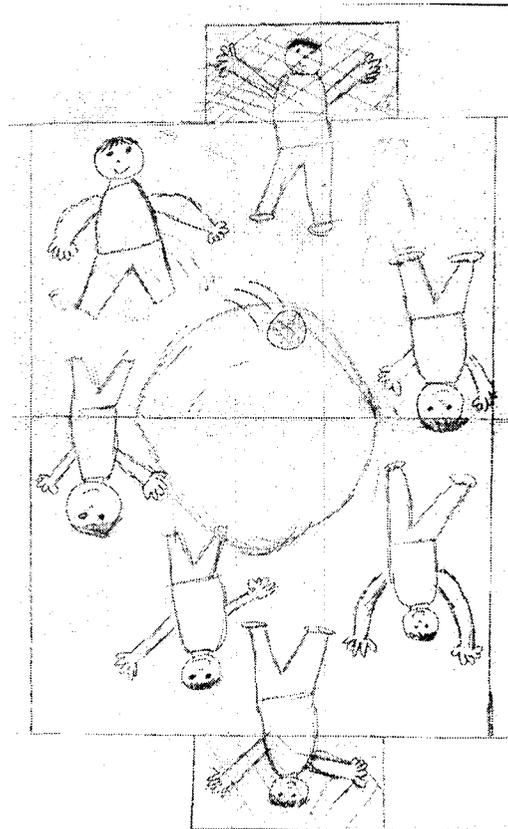


NP: 4 (self at forefront, coloured – others in background)

I: Simultaneous (all skipping)

SD: In motion – skipping

Drawing 8 (grade six boy)

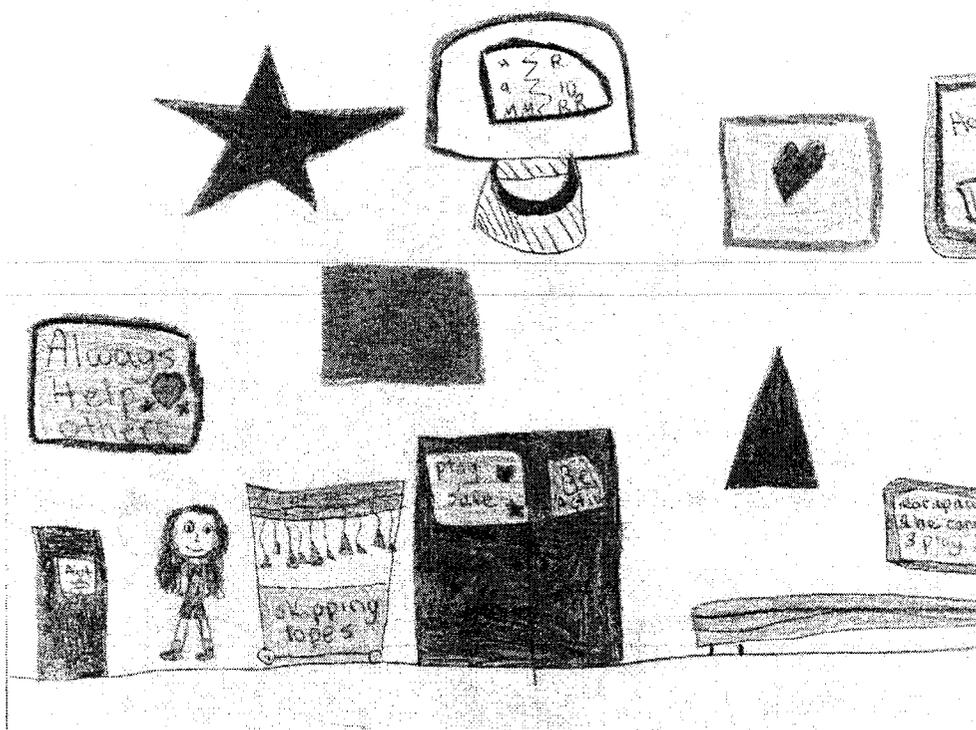


NP: 7

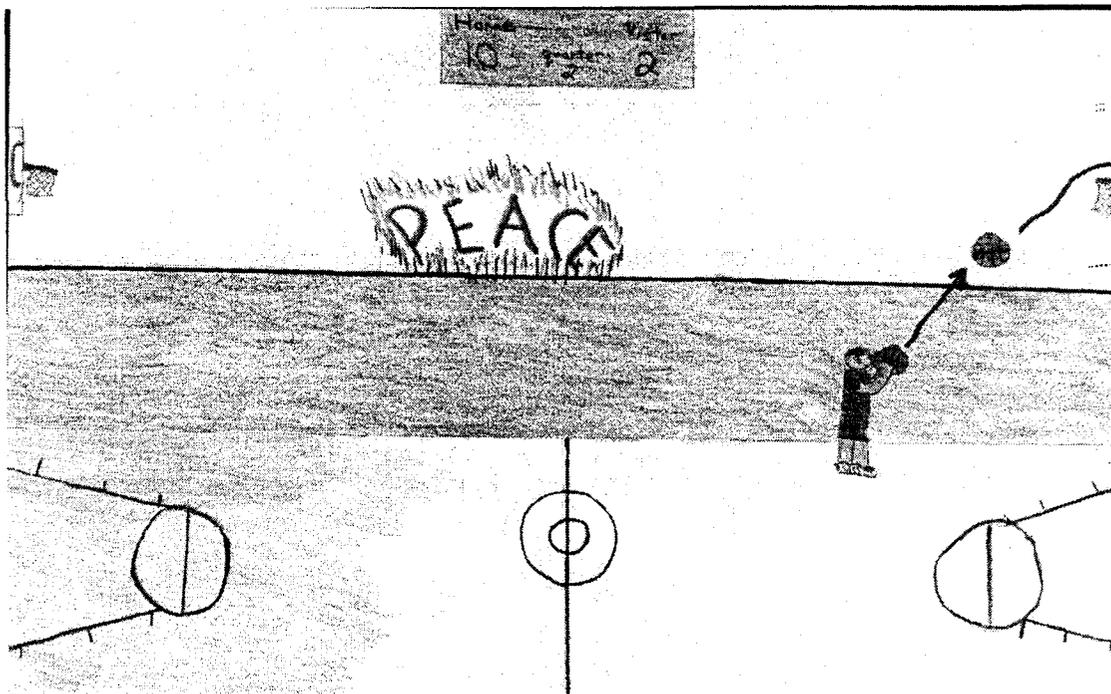
I: together against each other

SD: in motion – all arms up in air

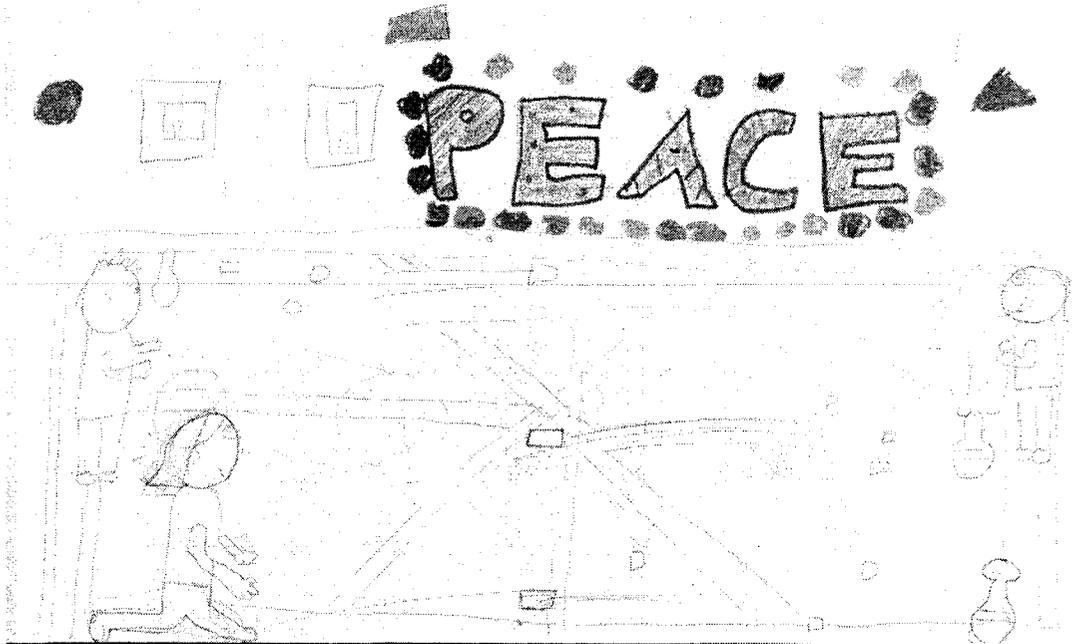
Drawing 9 (grade four girl)



Drawing 10 (grade five boy)



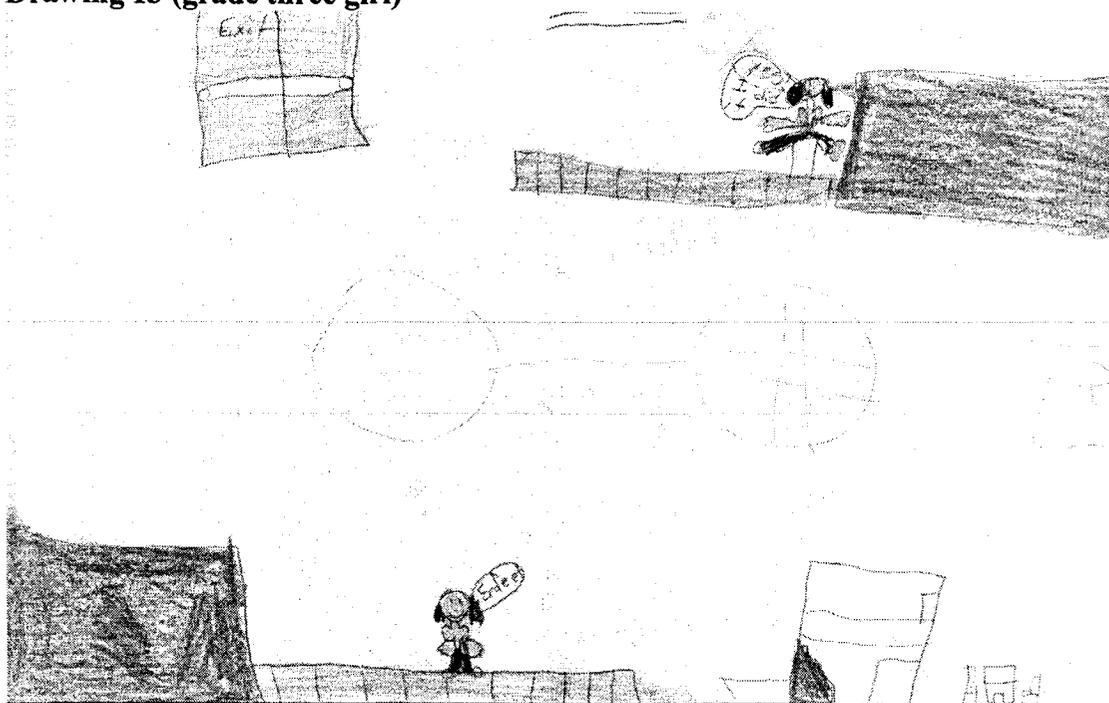
Drawing 11 (grade six girl)



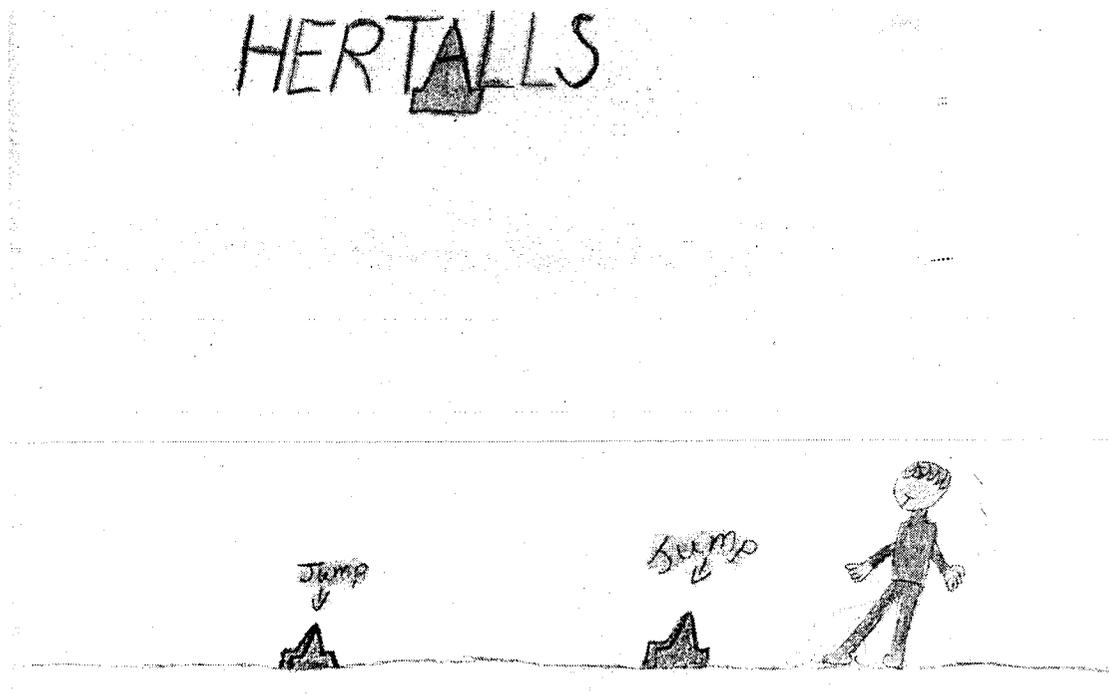
Drawing 12 (grade three boy)



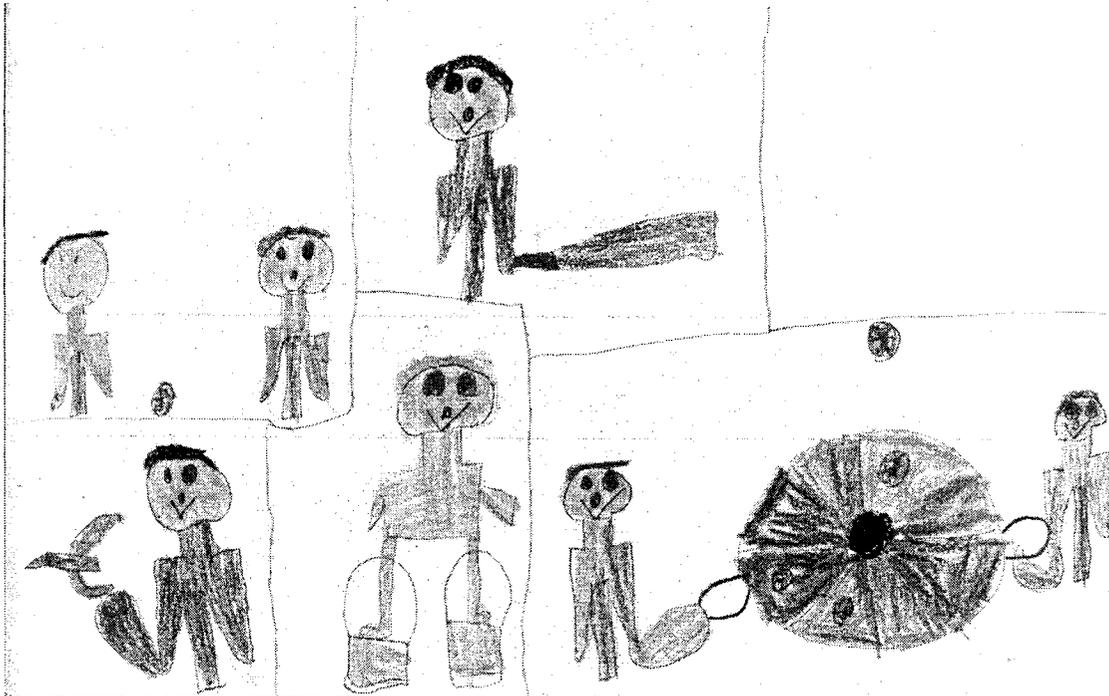
Drawing 13 (grade three girl)



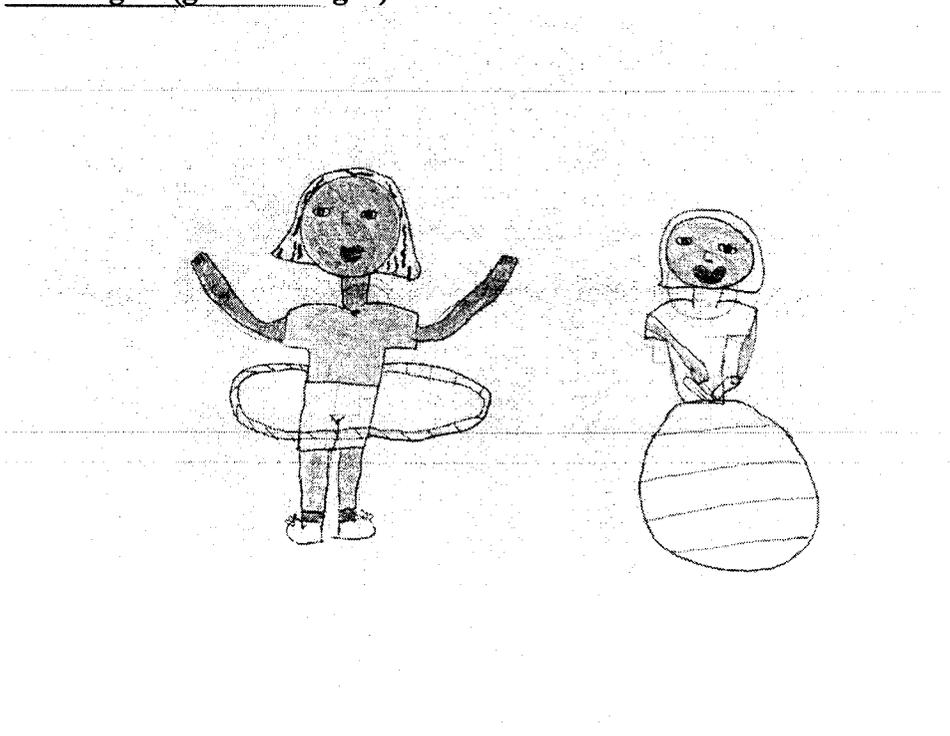
Drawing 14 (grade four boy)



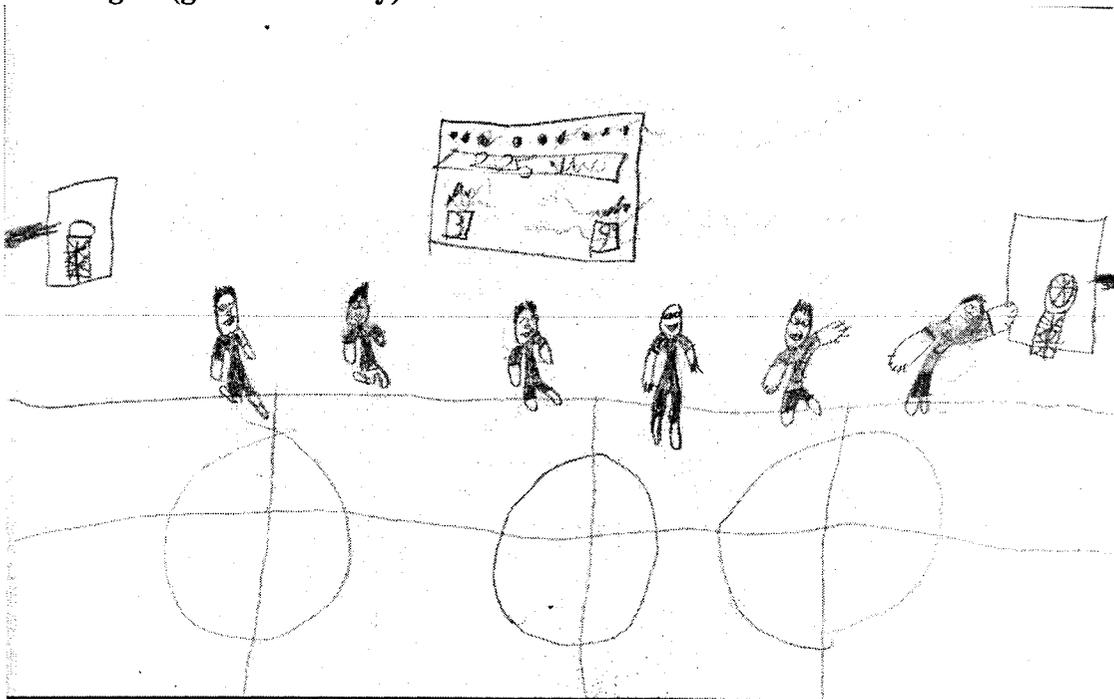
Drawing 15 (grade 3 boy)



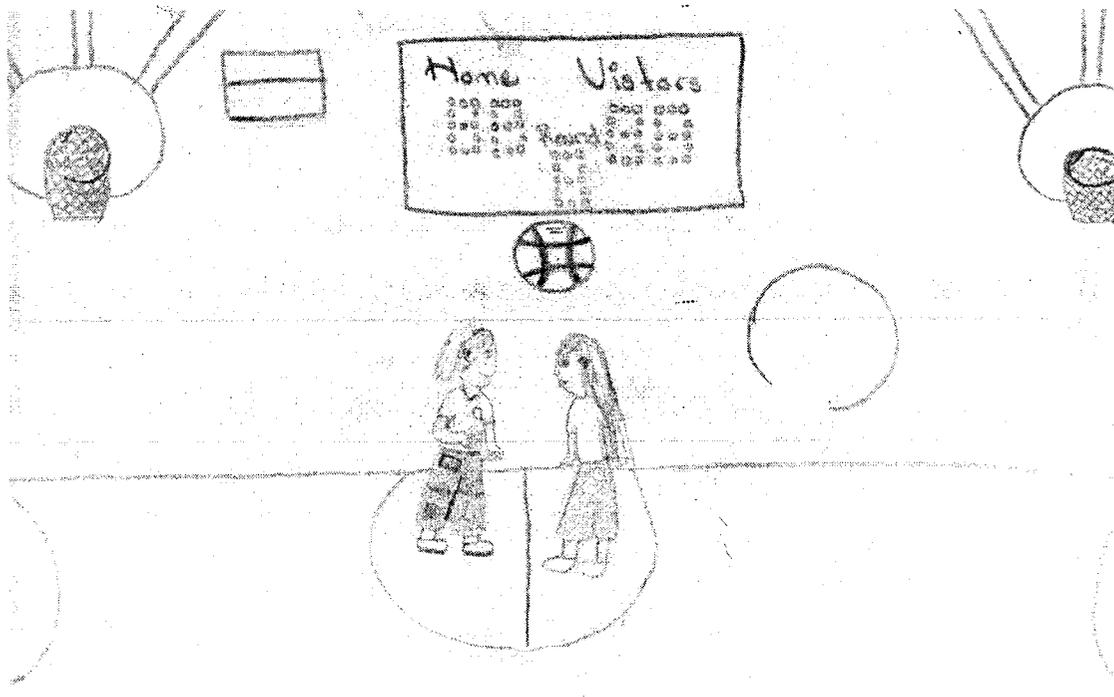
Drawing 16 (grade four girl)



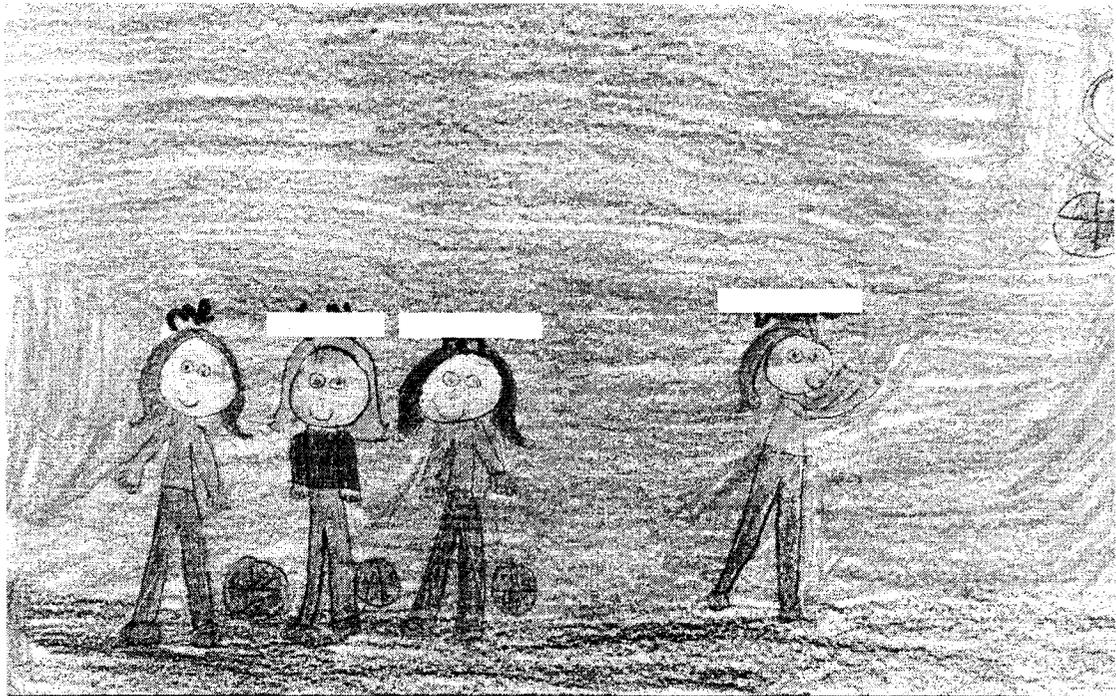
Drawing 17 (grade three boy)



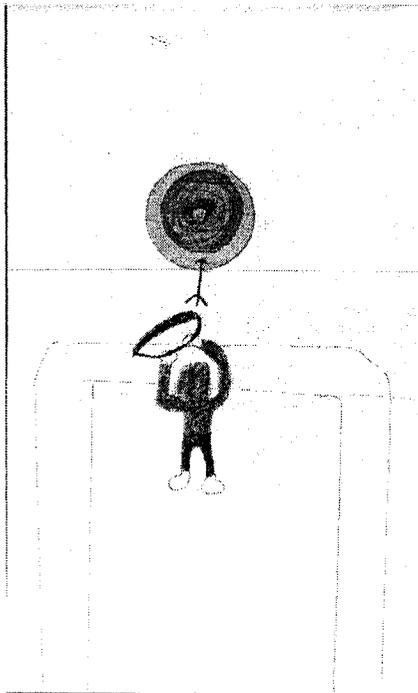
Drawing 18 (grade six girl)



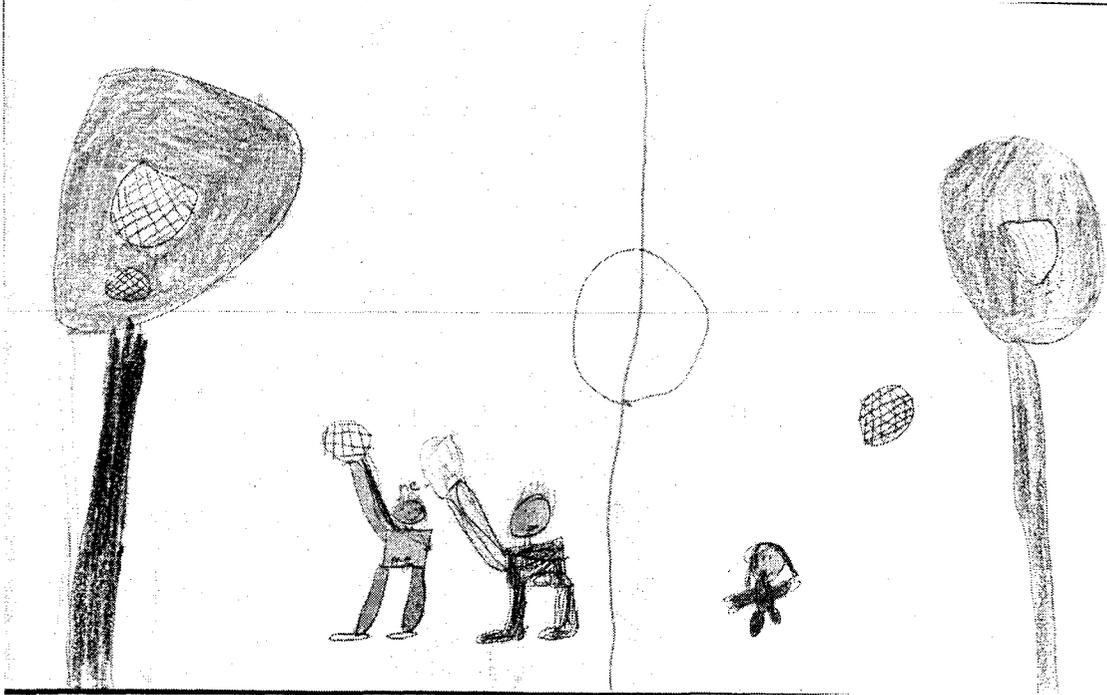
Drawing 19 (grade five girl)



Drawing 20 (grade five boy)



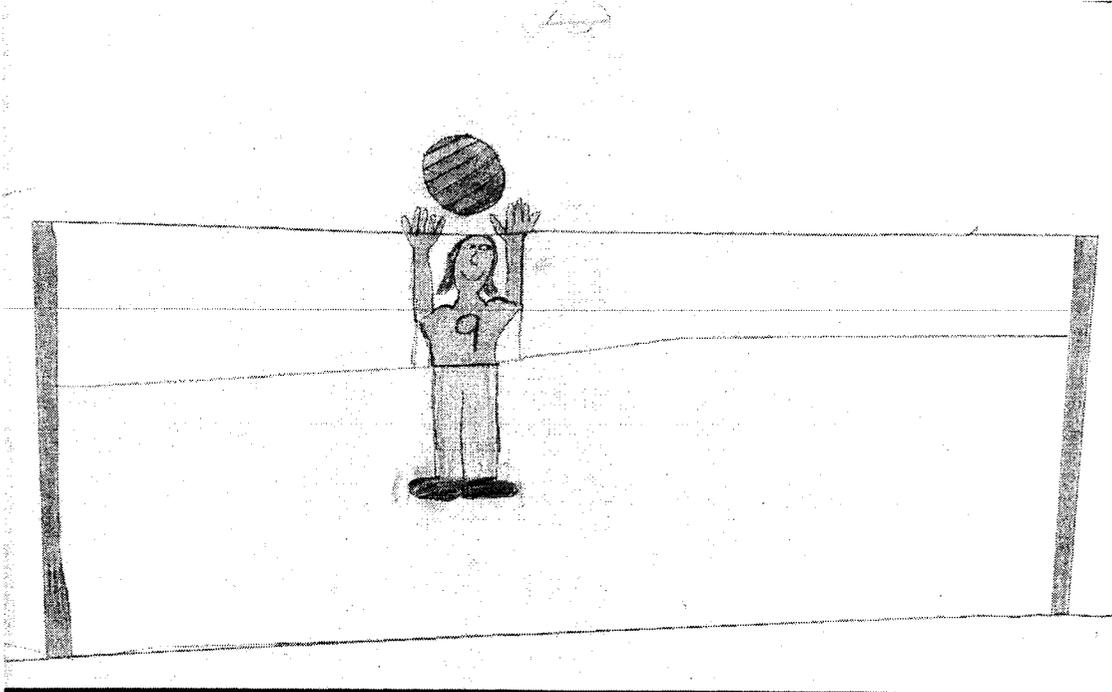
Drawing 21 (grade four boy)



Drawing 22 (grade four girl)



Drawing 23 (grade four girl)



Drawing 24 (grade five boy)



Drawing 25 (grade five girl)



Drawing 26 (grade five boy)



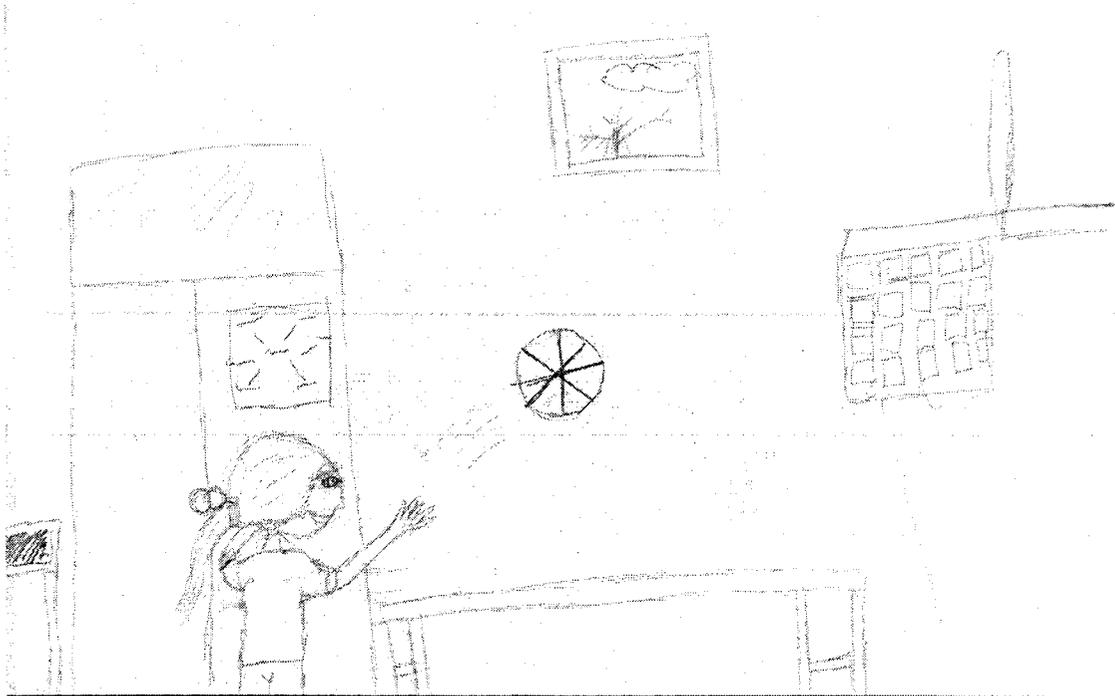
Drawing 27 (grade five girl)



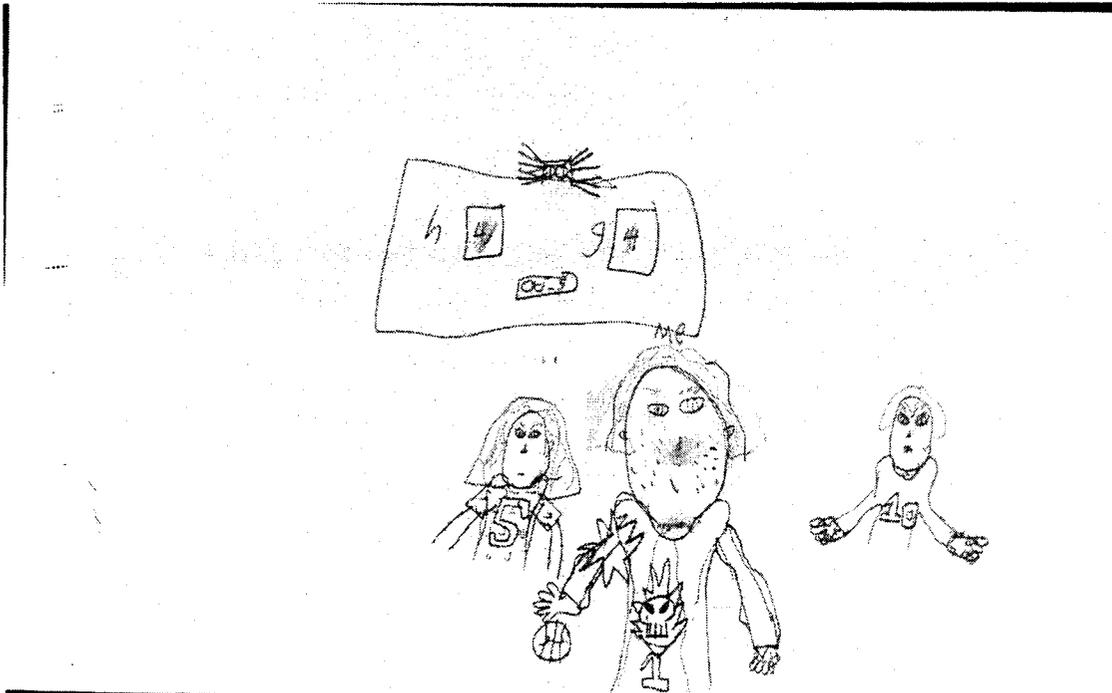
Drawing 28 (grade six boy)



Drawing 29 (grade six girl)



Drawing 30 (grade six boy)



Appendix G: Taxonomy Of Responses To Drawing Questions #2, Part 2

Category	3 Girls	3 Boys	4 Girls	4 Boys
Like a specific Activity	- I like skipping	- I like jumping stuff	- I like it (ribbon activities) - it is my favorite thing to do (hoola hoping) - I like skipping.	- volleyball is one of my favorite sports. - I like to play hockey. - because I like to play basketball.
Like gym in general	I like gym		- because I am in my gym class and I enjoy gym!	- I love gym.
Having fun, enjoyment	I am having fun	- it makes me feel happy - it is fun.	- I am having fun - (feel happy) and am having fun. - because I am having fun.	- school is fun! - I am having fun.
Have mastered a task	- I am doing the long jump 5 feet long		- because I know how to play volleyball. - because I have learned the face pass.	
Being with friends		- I get to play with others	- because I am with my friends	- with my friends. - I am playing with my friends.
Experiencing success/failure (winning, first)			- we may not beat the grade 6's (feeling nervous)	- because I am in first place.
Physiological Reactions	- because we were skipping (on feeling hot)			
Other	- because I'm doing something		(feel cool) because a big audience is watching me.	
Reference to drawing		- I like my drawing. It looks cool.		

Category	5 Girls	5 Boys	6 Girls	6 Boys
Like a specific Activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - because I love basketball, it calms me down. - because I am playing a sport I love. - because I just love playing soccer so much. - because I never get to play basketball and it's my favorite sport. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - because I love to play basketball. It's fun!!!!!!! because I will do a back <i>flip</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - playing my favorite sport. - playing one of my favorite sports. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I love handball.
Like gym in general		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - like gym 	PE is the best part of the day.	
Having fun, enjoyment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - feel like I am going to have fun. - 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - get out of the classroom and to have fun. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ready to have fun because we play games. - having fun - having a great time - having fun 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Having fun - enjoying myself
Have mastered a task	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - because I'm not good at basketball but in the picture I might get the ball in the net. ** 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I feel determined then when I shoot it in I feel happy. I'm determined to get it in the net. ** 	
Being with friends	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - with my friends - because I am playing with my friends in the picture. - because I am with my friends. - because I am with my friends and not alone. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - with friends - get to play with a friend. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - with my friends. - playing with my friends. - playing with friends. - because I am with my friends 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - playing with my friends - because I am around other people.
Experiencing success/failure (winning, first)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - because I got a goal - because I got the ball in (bball) 		Because my team always wins
Physiological Reactions		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - feel alert and ready because someone is going to throw a dodgeball at me. 		
Other			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - not doing work in the classroom. 	
reference to drawing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I think it is nice (feel good about drawing). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - probably the best drawing I've ever done 		

