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ALIENATION IN PHYSICAL EDUCATION FROM

THE PERSPECTIVES OF CHILDREN

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this exploratory research study was to examine the phenomenon of alienation in physical education from the perspectives of children. Of particular interest were children's perspectives about the three constructs of alienation: powerlessness, meaninglessness and social isolation as defined by Carlson (1995a). A case study methodology was employed with a class of grade 6 children (ages 10 and 11) with a total of 14 participants forming the unit of analysis. Observations, field notes, semi-structured interviews and drawings were used to triangulate the data. The data were analyzed by employing a continuum of inductive and deductive analysis (Patton, 2002). Three themes were identified as representative of the children's perspectives: degree of control, meaning, and social factors. The results are discussed in relation to their potential to contribute to the understanding of the phenomenon of alienation.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Alienation from Physical Education

The benefits of physical education for children are widely recognized.

Physical education (PE) programs, designed to be developmentally appropriate,

address the whole child (physically, cognitively and affectively) and make an

impact on a child's overall quality of life (Gallahue & Cleland Donnelly, 2003).

The school PE setting presents a unique situation for children, where mandatory

participation is aimed at developing the "knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary

to lead an active healthy lifestyle" (Alberta Learning, 2000, p. 5). Furthermore,

while developing competency (through the developmental domains) is the focus

of physical education, the physical activity or movement itself serves as the

vehicle to becoming a physically educated person (Fishburne & Hickson, 2005).

Physical activity may occur in a free play setting, community based recreation

program or school PE class. In the school setting, teachers strive to provide

quality PE experiences for their students, in the hope that lasting health benefits

and life long affirming attitudes toward physical activity are fostered in children.

Educating the physical body through planned learning experiences to meet

specific outcomes for each child is critical in a quality PE program. Ideally, the

school activity setting provides children and youth of all ages with positive

memorable experiences, as well as healthy physical and psychological benefits.

Unfortunately, this ideal is not always achieved. Not all children equate

PE with positive experiences. Graham (1995) underlines "that for too many

youngsters physical education is a distasteful and discomforting experience"

(p. 479). Physical education differs from physical activity in that it typically follows a prescribed curriculum and is very public in nature. Physical tasks in PE are most often executed in public, which presents unique challenges for the teacher when attempting to accommodate children's individual differences. In this mandatory setting, PE students are required to take part and are usually evaluated based on *how* they take part. It may seem intuitive that children who enjoy physical activity are also likely to enjoy PE, however, the demands of physical activity may change enough in this mandatory setting that it becomes negative for these participants. It is therefore possible that some children who enjoy physical activity do not actually enjoy PE. Evidence for this idea was found in a study by Olafson (2002) about adolescent girls' PE experiences where one participant revealed that, "although she liked physical activity, she did not enjoy physical education activities" (p. 69). These children would not typically volunteer to participate in PE if given the choice and often associate negative feelings with the PE experience. In the following quote Kirk (1982) addresses the myth that all children like PE:

> …anyone who has ever taught PE in schools (and, moreover, cares to reflect honestly about the matter), will know that not all pupils, not even a substantial majority, are ever infected with anything remotely resembling enthusiasm for the various activities which make up the subject. The pupil who continually turns up at the p.e. department without kit, or the one who always has some deadly illness (and a note from 'mummy' to prove it), or the lad who habitually turns a dangerous blue

color whilst attempting to imitate a corner flag at every games lesson, will be well known to many p.e. teachers (p. 29).

A number of researchers agree that some children do *not* like PE (Olafson, 2002; Ennis, 2000; Tan, 2001; Carlson, 1995a). For some children it is 'not fun' (Portman, 1995a); they report experiences of 'least fun' activities (Garn & Cothran, 2006) and have a "strong expression of dislike" (Gibbons & Humbert, 2008, p. 170) when PE is perceived as lacking in fun, fairness and safety. An accumulation of these negative feelings may eventually escalate to a phenomenon identified in recent research as *alienation* (Bencal, 2003; Halas, 2002; Carlson, 1995a). It is critical to gain an increased understanding of this phenomenon in order to prevent children from having such negative experiences and in an attempt to realize the aims of an ideal PE program. Children at risk of alienation from PE may miss out on the physical and psychological health benefits that activity affords. If negative experiences in the PE setting are prevalent and persistent in the elementary years, children may withdraw from participation and eventually drop out once it becomes optional in school.

<div align="center">Definitions</div>

Alienation

One of the first definitions of alienation was presented in the work of Karl Marx in the 1840's (Coser, 2003). Karl Marx was a philosopher, social scientist, historian and revolutionary, who described the notion of alienation "as a condition in which men are dominated by forces of their own creation, which confront them as alien powers" (Coser, p.50). According to Sidorkin (2004), Karl Marx was the

first theorist to make a connection between alienation and human productivity. Marx believed that "humans are what they make – the products we create also re-create us" (Sidorkin, p. 252). His description of alienation clarified the powerlessness of the worker in relation to the means of production. Although this original form of alienation seems to have little to do with education, Sidorkin posited that school learning is a form of production and that "many forms of alienation undoubtedly exist in our schools" (p. 255).

Since the time of Karl Marx the term alienation has been commonly used in the social sciences. Seeman (1959) established one of the original sources of the meaning of alienation and referred to those who have been alienated as "the 'unattached', the 'marginal', the 'obsessive', the 'normless', and the 'isolated' individual" (p.783). He proposed five types or varieties of alienation which have since been used in the sociological literature as separate ideas but also appear in combination: "powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, isolation, and self-estrangement" (p. 783).

One of the most frequently cited descriptions of alienation as it relates to PE is outlined by Carlson (1995a), who defined alienation as "the persistent negative feelings some students associate with actively aversive or insufficiently meaningful situations (which students often label with the all-purpose adjective *boring*) in the gymnasium setting" (p. 467). Carlson's definition has been adopted by several researchers in the field of PE (Bencal, 2003; Halas, 2002; Tan, 2001) but employs only three of Seeman's (1959) original five constructs: powerlessness, meaninglessness and social isolation. These three constructs

provided the framework for the present study and are defined in relation to their incidence in and appropriateness to the PE context.

Powerlessness. Seeman (1959) described alienation as *powerlessness* and suggested it may be the most frequently used construct in the literature during his time. He explicitly defined powerlessness as "the expectancy or probability held by the individual that his own behavior cannot determine the occurrence of the outcomes, or reinforcements, he seeks" (p. 784). This construct also appears to be a salient component of current alienation literature in the global school setting and more specifically in the context of PE. Brown, Higgins and Paulsen (2003) concluded that if alienated youngsters feel manipulated by school personnel "and that there is little they can personally do to influence their future in school, they disengage from the schooling process" (p. 4).

In her work, in the PE setting, Carlson (1995a) also adopted powerlessness as one of the three major constructs defining alienation, referring to it as "lack of control" (p.467). For her, it represented the feeling of having no control over what happens in PE (no choice). Carlson confirmed reasons attached to feelings of lack of control by interpreting participant interview statements such as "the teacher always seems to make you compete against other people…I just want to cooperate with other people" (p. 470) as powerlessness. Both alienated and non-alienated students in Carlson's (1995a) study stated that they would like more choice in PE and that this increased sense of control would lead to greater enjoyment. For the alienated group, lack of choices appeared to be a factor contributing to the feeling of lack of control and the resulting dislike of PE. Several other researchers have

placed emphasis on situations of student powerlessness where lack of control leads to endless negative experiences and feelings of resignation (Ennis, Cothran, Davidson, Loftus, Owens, & Swanson, 1997; Halas, 2002; Martel, Gagnon & Tousignant, 2002).

Meaninglessness. Seeman (1959) described *meaninglessness* in terms of an individual's understanding of the experiences that he or she is immediately involved in. According to Seeman, it occurs when "the individual is unclear as to what he ought to believe – when the individual's minimal standards for clarity in decision-making are not met" (p. 786). In this type of situation, the individual does not expect to be able to make accurate predictions about future behaviors. It appears as though Seeman's central theme underpinning meaninglessness refers to a lack of understanding and inability to predict outcomes. This reveals a slightly different focus than the interpretation adopted by Carlson (1995a). Carlson emphasized the students' feeling that there is no apparent purpose for PE or no personal value in it for him/her. She referred to this feeling as "lack of personal meaning" (p. 467). Statements during interviews in Carlson's (1995a) study revealed the prevalence of *meaninglessness*, illustrated in the quotes provided by two teenage students respectively: "Basically I have learned plenty of games, but that is not beneficial" and "It is not going to do me any good later on" (p. 470). Researchers have attempted to gain insight into the construct of meaninglessness by asking questions to identify what the student thinks or feels about the usefulness of activities or their relevance in the future.

Several other studies have also investigated meaninglessness using a similar interpretation to that posited by Carlson (1995a). Meaninglessness is often referred to as lack of *relevance* (Cothran & Ennis, 1999; Ennis, 1999, 2000; Ennis et al, 1997; Gibbons & Humbert, 2008; Halas, 2002) and appears to be widely recognized as an important area to address for children who are disengaged from or disillusioned with PE. Connection and membership are identified as key components which influence students' decisions to attach, commit and involve themselves in school PE (Cothran & Ennis, 1999).

Isolation. According to Seeman (1959) *isolation* describes those who "assign low reward value to goals or beliefs that are typically highly valued in the given society" (p. 789). Although he does recognize that it is a condition of being separate from society, he also clearly states that it is a matter independent of social adjustment. To expand on Seeman's idea Dean (1961) added 'social' to the construct of isolation, which connected it to a feeling of separateness from a group. Several researchers since that time have included social isolation as a construct of alienation, adding feelings of loneliness, social emotional separation, and feelings of exclusion (Brown et al., 2003; Carlson, 1995a; Oerlemans & Jenkins, 1998a). In Carlson's study (1995a) the difference between the alienated participants and the total sample was minimal with respect to feelings of isolation, but in a group of alienated students, isolation "appeared almost universally among the students who identified themselves as lower skilled" (p. 471). For example, one student remarked, "I'm afraid that I'm going to mess up and that everyone is going to laugh at me" (Carlson, 1995a, p. 471). Children at risk of alienation from

PE have shown signs of social isolation which contributed to their negative experiences in the gymnasium (Bencal, 2003; Carlson, 1995a; Cothran & Ennis, 1999; Halas, 2002; Portman, 1995a).

For the purpose of the present research, alienation is understood according to Carlson's (1995a) definition as "the persistent negative feelings some students associate with actively aversive or insufficiently meaningful situations...in the gymnasium setting" (p. 467). Therefore, the alienation constructs of powerlessness, meaninglessness, and social isolation as defined in the previous sections above, were also adopted from Carlson (1995a) for the present research study.

Perspective

Central to the significance and purpose of the present study is the *perspective* of the child. Perspective as defined in a dictionary of psychology by Reber and Reber (2001) is the understanding of a child's perspective as "a mental view, a cognitive orientation, a way of seeing a situation or a scene" (p. 529).

Perception

The term *perception* is used in this study in the broad sense of "those processes that give coherence and unity to sensory input" (Reber & Reber, 2001, p. 519). Children shared their perceptions as recalled in their experiences through memory in physical, cognitive and affective domains.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This study attempts to contribute to the understanding of the phenomenon of alienation in physical education (PE) from the perspectives of children. The literature on alienation acknowledges its importance as a topic of study in PE and has been referred to as a widespread recent crisis and challenge confronting physical educators (Kirk & Macdonald, 1998). While much of the research in this area has recognized that there are negative feelings and behaviors for children at risk of alienation, there appears to be a distinct lack of research that addresses the perceptions of children. This chapter begins with a review of literature on alienation in the global school context, followed by a review of PE specific alienation. Research issues in the area of alienation related to age and identification are then described. Finally, given that the current study emphasizes the child's perspective, a review of research that has recognized the importance of the child's perspective is presented.

Global School Alienation

The overall study of alienation in the socio-psychological literature posits that it is recognized as a widespread problem in schools, connected to general deviant behaviors such as absenteeism, violence (Mau, 1992; Oerlemans & Jenkins, 1998a), school drop out (Trusty & Dooley-Dickey, 1993), drug abuse, sexual promiscuity (Oerlemans & Jenkins, 1998a; Oerlemans & Jenkins, 1998b), and associations with gang membership (Shoho, 1996). Within the school setting alienation has also been identified as problematic, specifically for adolescents. A

significant portion of the literature examining alienation in schools has focused on adolescent populations.

Mau (1992) explored secondary school student alienation to investigate the idea that alienation reflects multidimensionality. He examined the connection between theoretical dimensions of alienation (powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, and social estrangement) and empirical dimensions of student experiences. Using a four point scale, students responded to 24 statements depicting the four theoretical dimensions of alienation. Mau reported that powerlessness for students was felt when they were controlled by authority figures and could not change school policies. For these students, feeling powerless resulted in truancy or frequently cutting classes. Meaninglessness was reflected in students' uncertainty about the correlation between school subjects and future society roles. Viewing school as not particularly useful for the future was most salient for the older students in the study (high school) as they were thinking more about what might happen after graduation. Normlessness, the third dimension of alienation measured in Mau's study, was evident when student responses to questions revealed the belief that socially disapproved behavior and rebelling against school rules was required for the student's own goals. These students did not conform to official school norms, but rather adopted peer norms such as being persuaded to skip class and go to the beach instead. Refusing to conform to societal norms in order to achieve a desired outcome is in keeping with the concept of normlessness. For example, the 'normless' student would think breaking the law or cheating in school was acceptable behavior. The final

dimension of alienation, social estrangement, was apparent for students who did not have friends, did not participate in school activities, had minimal interactions with other people and were dissatisfied with school (Mau, 1992). Mau concluded that there was correspondence between the conceptual and empirical dimensions of alienation "as manifested in a school context by poor academic performance, truancy and rebellion" (p. 738).

The same four dimensions of alienation examined by Mau (1992) formed the foundation for an investigative study by Oerlemans and Jenkins (1998a). To further the understanding of adolescent school alienation, they conducted a case study with 13 persistently absent high school students about their perceptions of sources of alienation. Through the analysis of semi-structured interviews, 12 of the 13 students expressed thoughts and feelings which indicated alienation from school. The results of the study are summarized as follows:

1) Social estrangement – students were not involved in school activities, perceived the environment as hostile and unfriendly, thought teasing and gossiping were common, and felt no sense of belonging or identity with the school.

2) Meaninglessness – students questioned the relevance of some subjects, thought school was a waste of time, and were unable to make meaningful connections with their current schooling to their future lives.

3) Powerlessness – students felt as if they had no control over choice of subjects, that school policy and structured timetabling limited their choice of enjoyable

subjects, and expressed perceptions that teachers hold the power resulting in students' inability to make a difference.

4) Normlessness – only some of the students thought school rules were not important but most students viewed the purpose of rules and norms for protecting individuals from harm rather than seeing rules as way of promoting school community.

In a subsequent position paper by the same authors, Oerlemans and Jenkins (1998b), the four theoretical dimensions described above were further examined and a number of suggested interventions to promote successful student engagement in school were reviewed. The most successful programs included those that took a holistic approach involving all levels of school staff, parents and the community, and focused on the adolescents' needs. Students identified the most successful interventions as those that gave them a sense of belonging and choice in curriculum.

Shoho (1996) conducted a study with middle school students (grade 8) exploring the concept of alienation in relation to gang membership. Shoho contended that within an authoritarian school model, educators may in fact be enabling alienation as "unconscious contributors (rather than inhibitors) to adolescent dysfunction" (p. 3) with implications for gang membership. The results supported the hypothesis that the relationship between alienation and gang members was stronger than that of alienation and non-gang members. Of the three constructs measured, isolation, normlessness, and powerlessness, only the latter two were significant. Shoho suggested that the "evidence indicates that students

who feel a sense of powerlessness over their education and normlessness about their value structure are more susceptible to gang association" (p. 15).

An exploratory study by Trusty and Dooley-Dickey (1993) examined potential predictors of feelings of alienation and drop out tendencies of students in grades 4 to 8. The researchers investigated to what extent several different variables (i.e. race, gender, socioeconomic status, parents' education level, school achievement...etc.) predicted feelings of alienation. Based on the findings for each grade, the degree to which the variables could predict alienation was diverse. For example, the gender variable was one of the best predictors of alienation, while parents' education level had only a weak association with alienation (Trusty & Dooley-Dickey). The study concluded that "levels of alienation from school appear to increase significantly in the sixth grade" (p. 240), and that male students appeared to be more alienated than female students. Based on the nature and interaction of the variables explored in this study, the researchers recommended that longitudinal studies may be more useful and more diverse populations would be valuable to effectively study predictors of alienation.

More recently, scholars have provided commentaries about the severity of the problem of alienation within the school context (Brown, Higgins, & Paulsen, 2003; Staples, 2000). Despite this recognition, there are few empirical studies on the topic of global school alienation. Staples (2000) emphasized the connection between violence and alienated youth in the school context. He argued that violence is "a heightened moment of awareness emerging out of the everyday flow of experience that seeks to overcome alienation" (Staples, 2000, p. 30).

Stated differently, violence is a response to alienation. Staples argued that the existence of violence in schools is in part due to neglect by school administrators to address the fundamental human need for significance and meaningfulness. Brown et al. (2003) agreed that "adolescent alienation is a difficult problem facing many U.S. schools" (p.3) and the concept is not new to teachers. To heighten the awareness for educators, Brown et al. posited that "alienation signifies a separation or distance among two or more entities and involves a sense of anguish or loss, resulting in a student viewing life and school as fragmentary and incomplete" (p. 4). They recommended that school districts address school alienation through recognition of target groups, prevention strategies and various intervention initiatives.

Overall, the literature considering global school alienation focuses primarily on issues for adolescents and in particular the relationship between alienation and deviant behaviors. Furthermore, much of the literature on global school alienation defines alienation in terms of the presence of one or more of the original five constructs outlined by Seeman (1959): powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, isolation, and self-estrangement. These constructs also form the basis for research specific to alienation in the PE setting.

Alienation in Physical Education

A limited number of studies target alienation (and the defined constructs) specifically in PE. There are a greater number of studies that refer to children's risk of alienation using similar concepts such as withdrawal, disillusionment, dislike, disengagement, and lack of relevance or meaning.

Carlson's (1995a) research discloses the nature of persistent negative behaviors and feelings associated with PE, which are characteristic of adolescents at risk of alienation. A study by Carlson (1995a) that examined 105 adolescent students, identified 21% of them as alienated. Interview responses of students with reference to behaviors or strategies to cope with alienation were analyzed and placed into four categories. "Hiding Disillusions" (p. 471) designated youth who counted the costs of withdrawal as too high to want to let anybody know that they did not like PE. These individuals continued to hide how they really felt in order to avoid the risk of others discovering their distaste for the subject that many named as their favorite. "Being a Spectator" or "Becoming a Wallflower" (pp. 471, 472) described students who deliberately sat and watched or tried to blend into the background with almost imperceptible levels of actual activity. The behaviors of lying, pretending to be sick or injured, or simply maintaining a facade of participation was labeled "Faking" (p. 472). The final and perhaps most extreme response strategy identified by Carlson was "Self-banishment" (p. 472). This term was used to describe students who did not attend PE at all, even missing school entirely on gym days, as they were usually willing to accept a failing grade rather than participate.

Other researchers have also investigated the behaviors and feelings of adolescents who dislike PE. Olafson (2002) investigated adolescent girls' perceptions of PE. The participants in this study reported many negative feelings tied to PE, including embarrassment, self-consciousness, inferiority, and negative body image perceptions. These feelings were followed by resistant type behaviors

such as skipping class, obtaining a note to be excused, non-compliance with changing clothes, and refusal to participate. Comparable themes were reported by Martel et al. (2002) in a study that examined PE teachers' and students' views of injustices in the gym. According to the students, injustices in the gymnasium often left them feeling powerless. The findings of the study revealed five categories of injustices with types of injustices identified by students and a corresponding reaction of the PE teacher. For example, within the category "Students who say they are forced to participate in monotonous learning activities", the student injustice named was "teacher forces students to participate in learning activities" and the teacher reaction was coded as "participating in learning activities: A non-negotiable requirement" (Martel et al., 2002, p. 60). Overall, the perceptions of students' and teachers' differed significantly with regard to what was considered just or unjust in gym class. Martel et al. recommended that if teachers examined the consequences of their pedagogical actions, the well-being of their students may benefit in the long term.

Boredom is often cited in the literature as a reason for disliking PE and can result in withdrawal. In a study by Rice (1988), 22% of a 602 group sample of high school PE students said they agreed or strongly agreed that they felt bored with the subject. Boredom was also experienced by the 14-18 year old students in Carlson's (1995a) study, as revealed by the PE survey question "I think gym is boring and a waste of time" (p. 467). The theme of boredom also emerged in a study conducted by Ennis et al. (1997) during an in-depth interview. One high school student commented on feeling bored with the content due to its repetitive

nature, saying "…most of them we've been playing the same ways since elementary school. It's the same sports over and over, every school you go to. That's why I'm not interested in it much any more" (Ennis et al., 1997, p. 61). Variety in activities was viewed as very important to the grade 6 and 7 participants in a study by Gibbons and Humbert (2008) and to the grade 5 students (some as young as 10 years old) in a subsequent study by Gibbons (2008). These students reported a general dissatisfaction with the current offerings in PE, which usually consisted of sports like basketball, volleyball, soccer and dodgeball, and wished for a wider range of opportunities including individual activities such as dance and gymnastics.

Students who are less skilled than their peers have also expressed feelings of concern in relation to participation in PE, putting them at risk of becoming alienated in this setting. Portman (1995b) interviewed 13 grade 6 students with low skill a total of three times each, twice within a small focus group format and once individually. The purpose of the exploration was to describe the experiences of the sixth graders with a focus on the effects of low skill in the PE environment. In response to failure situations in the gym, these students frequently demonstrated the following behaviors used as coping mechanisms: "avoiding learning tasks, announcing failure in advance, acting out frustration in the form of anger and aggression, and accepting failure while continuing to practice the skill" (Portman, 1995b, p. 34). In another study by Portman (1995a) the following themes emerged from those at risk of being alienated because of low skill: "(a) I like PE when I'm successful, (b) I can't because I can't, (c) Mostly, nobody helps,

and (d) Mostly everyone yells at me." This Portman study revealed that the sixth grade participants endured performance repercussions for their low skill levels (e.g. being yelled at) and had distinct reasons for their successes and failures (e.g. degree of skill mastery equated with degree of success or failure). A similar theme of 'personal competence' emerged in a study by Gibbons and Humbert (2008) with 90 female, grade 6 and 7 students. Personal competence was one of the themes identified through focus group interviews, one-on-one interviews and written questionnaires. Comments from the students such as: "I hate playing soccer when everybody else is way better than me…especially when I don't get to learn how…" (p. 177) and "I sometimes feel sick when I have to do something in front of everybody, especially when I'm not very good" (p. 178) were indicative of a perceived lack of practice time to gain skill and the public nature of the PE environment, respectively.

Personal competence has also been examined in relation to the competitive class environment in PE. According to some researchers, if a competitive class environment forms the basis for the delivery of the PE program, where skill comparison and winning are emphasized, a demoralizing atmosphere may ensue and contribute to alienation (Halas, 2002; Kirk, 2001; Robinson, 1990). Kirk (2001) argued that competitive games "can be extremely stressful for some children" (p. 485) and humiliating due to the 'public' nature of activity, particularly if the child possesses low physical competence. Mixed opinions about competition were expressed in a study by Garn and Cothran (2006) among adult undergraduate students who reflected on their PE experiences in grade school.

Some articulated a positive connection between fun and competition, while others reported that PE was no fun when they had to compete against each other. The study highlighted the importance of fun in PE and its relationship to lifetime physical activity.

Several researchers have underscored the importance of redefining competition in PE. For example, the 'equity approach' proposed by Robinson (1990) addresses competition versus cooperation and stresses that each child must have equal opportunities to succeed. Cooperative activities where involvement and contribution are stressed provide "friendly low key competition and no losers" (p. 31). Instead of concentrating on passing the skill level and achievements of classmates, students look at their own personal goals and work towards improvement. An emphasis on cooperation rather than competition may potentially alleviate the stress of skill comparison in PE class for children at risk of alienation. Minimizing competitive games in PE (perhaps substituting cooperative games) has been encouraged by many educators (Kirk, 2001). Kirk suggested there have been attempts to 'humanize' games because of the violent and aggressive nature of competitive structures in an attempt to promote a less alienating environment. In addition, Portman (1995a) concluded that "competitive games may produce the greatest threat for low-skilled students" (p. 37) and PE should be based on improvement, which stresses individual success at some level, rather than comparison between individuals (1995b). Walling and Martinek (1995) supported this notion, advocating for success by stressing "effort and improvement over outcome" (p. 465). The emphasis on improvement was central

to another study conducted by Halas (2002) with troubled youth at a treatment center. The youth in this study were not concerned if ability levels were different; they viewed the gym as a place for everyone. Attention centered on participation, acceptance of all and a place of fun. Comparing skill and striving to win were de-emphasized and appeared to positively impact the students' experiences.

As evidenced in the research findings, the feelings and behaviors of students who are at risk of alienation or appear to be in the beginning stages of the process are for the most part negative and discouraging. Although rather bleak, the evidence for negativity associated with PE, appears frequently in the literature. In contrast, the study conducted by Halas (2002) focused on the prospect of successful PE participation for at risk students. In this phenomenological case study, Halas described experiences of discouragement contributing to alienation in the gym, for youth at an adolescent treatment centre, using four categories: "climates of futility, learned irresponsibility, loss of purpose and destructive relationships" (p. 268). She further portrayed the program at the treatment center as attempting to eliminate these obstructive aspects through intentionally creating a safe, encouraging PE environment. This included redefining competition and where a "lack of competence is positioned as an opportunity to learn." (p. 267). Halas appeals to the readers' emotional being to enable them to identify with the feelings of the participants, often quoting what students and teachers said. It is through these descriptions and personal stories that the audience develops an inside understanding of the participants' experiences and an appreciation for how

seemingly alienating circumstances can be reversed to reclaim youth and successfully engage them in PE.

In the reviewed research numerous contributors to alienation are proposed. Alienation is associated with boredom (Carlson, 1995a; Couturier, 2005; Ennis et al., 1997; Gibbons, 2008; Gibbons & Humbert, 2008; Rice 1988); lack of meaning or lack of relevance (Carlson, 1995a; Cothran & Ennis, 1999; Ennis, 1999; Ennis et al., 1997; Halas, 2002); teacher behaviors (Carlson, 1995a; Kirk 2001; Martel et al., 2002; Portman, 1995a; Robinson, 1990); low skill or perceived ability (Carlson, 1995a; Olafson, 2002; Portman, 1995a, 1995b; Robinson, 1990); embarrassment (Couturier et al., 2005; Ennis et al, 1997; Humbert, 1995; Olafson, 2002); and competitive class environment (Ennis, 1999; Garn & Cothran, 2006; Halas, 2002; Kirk, 2001; Robinson, 1990). Although the majority of these researchers focused on adolescents, several also studied pre-adolescents including children as young as 10 years old.

Alienation and Age

According to the literature, the phenomenon of alienation may not be fully realized until late adolescence, but seeds of its existence may be present in earlier years. The following statement by Trusty and Dooley-Dickey (1993) reflects this idea with respect to global school alienation:

> Students may not manifest the negative effects of low achievement, failure, or incongruence of their culture and the school's culture until their early high school years. Alienation may be a phenomenon that results from experiences in the early elementary and middle school years, but

these experiences may not come to bear on students' feelings of belonging

with school or valuing of school until adolescence. (p. 239)

Based on their study examining school alienation with students in grades 4 to 8,

Trusty and Dooley-Dickey concluded that levels of alienation from school

significantly increased in grade 6.

It appears that alienation from the PE setting is also likely to begin in

elementary school. Results from studies with children of all ages regarding their

perceptions and experiences of PE reveal that disillusionment starts in the

elementary school years (Fenton, Frisby & Luke, 1999; Gibbons, 2008; Gibbons

& Humbert, 2008). Children as young as grade 5 have expressed dissatisfaction

with PE and the opinions they form at this early age may influence future

decisions about PE participation (Gibbons). Moreover, when given the choice to

participate in PE after grade 10, many students reported that their decisions were

largely based on their experiences in earlier grades (Gibbons, Wharf Higgins,

Gaul, & Van Gyn, 1999). Pangrazi and Gibbons (2009) concur by emphasizing

the long term significance of PE for elementary aged children, "lifetime

involvement in physical activity often depends on early positive participation" (p.

19).

Although alienation may not be identified until adolescence, the factors

leading to it appear to originate in the impressionable elementary years. Early

recognition of the signs and symptoms of alienation becomes extremely important

in order to take steps to deal with the problem early on. Early recognition or even

awareness may enable some level of prevention. As a result, the present case

study was purposefully conducted with grade 6 children. The literature indicates that children of this age may be at risk of experiencing the onset of alienation.

Identifying Children who are Alienated

The measurement of constructs is a tenuous issue in the social and psychological sciences and the measurement of alienation is no exception. In reference to studies of alienation, Calabrese (1987) suggested that "researchers seem to be content to develop studies that are independent, offer minimal replication, and use different instruments" (p. 932). He further contended that researchers have used measures that were not initially intended for the topic of alienation and seem to resemble a mixture of items from various scales or revised traditional scales. Although Calabrese made these observations in the late 1980's, his estimation of inconsistencies in the measurement of alienation remains. During the late 1980's, a review of existing instruments to measure alienation was completed by Fetro and Vitello (1988), and the major weaknesses disclosed were poor comprehensibility because of vocabulary used, limited choice in Likert-scale options, and poor item construction. Fetro and Vitello also recommended that longitudinal studies should be conducted to consider similarities and differences in alienating feelings attributed to maturational changes.

A number of studies both in the PE and global school education contexts have labeled children as alienated, distinguishing them from a non-alienated group (Brown et al., Carlson, 1995a; Mau, 1992; Tan, 2001). Various scales, surveys, and questionnaires have been used to determine whether children and adolescents fit the profile of alienated youth. The Carlson (1995a) study referred

to earlier employed a survey with questions posed to adolescent students relating to three categories: lack of personal meaning, lack of control, and isolation. Carlson's 'physical education survey' contains "the first statement ('I love gym') [and] was used to identify the students in the alienated group" (p. 476). Twenty-one percent of the total 105 surveyed participants said that they disagreed with the first statement and were therefore referred to as alienated. Although single item indicators are used in research, the use of this single statement to identify adolescents as alienated is problematic because it is one-dimensional, unlike the construct of alienation. Rather than identifying the alienated group using a single question and then administering the questionnaire to discover characteristics of meaninglessness, powerlessness and social isolation, perhaps it would initially be more useful to use the three constructs to help determine, at the outset, which students were alienated.

Tan (2001) adapted Carlson's (1995a) non-alienation/alienation questionnaire and used a similar phrase "I enjoy PE class" as a single item indicator for alienation. In Tan's study, 17% of 226 total participants were categorized as alienated from PE. This is in major contrast to the 139 items in the alienation scale from one of the original measurement instruments designed to measure alienation (Dean, 1961). Although alienation was not the central focus of Tan's (2001) investigation, the identification of students as alienated using this single indicator is questionable.

Scales unrelated to PE have also been used to measure alienation. Scholars such as Dean (1961), Dillon & Grout (1976), Mackey & Ahlgren,

(1977), and Mau (1992), developed statements representing different constructs associated with alienation, with which participants either agreed or disagreed. More recently, in an article entitled "Adolescent Alienation: What Is It and What Can Educators Do About It?" Brown et al. (2003) offered suggestions of how to identify alienated students. Although they did not conduct a study, Brown et al. supply questions that educators can ask if they suspect that students have feelings of powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, or social isolation/estrangement. For example, to illustrate the concept of meaninglessness, the teacher could ask, "Does the student think of excuses to avoid schoolwork? Do you, the teacher, make schoolwork interesting? Does the student feel he or she is wasting time at school?" (Brown et al., p. 5). These types of questions may be easily modified to reflect the PE setting, while maintaining the intention of identifying the presence of the construct of focus. For example, the last question posed by Brown et al. could be adapted by asking 'Does the student feel he or she is wasting time in physical education?' While there is value in questions directed toward educators, it may be even more useful to ask the students themselves. Perhaps alienation would best be detected by researchers through the children who experience it. It is worth noting that even though the article by Brown et al. was published in 2003, the majority of the 26 references used to write the article are from the 1980's or earlier. Perhaps this gap in the literature signifies a lack of attention to the issue of measuring alienation.

The lack of a current consistent and reliable measurement tool to investigate the topic of alienation within the PE setting was a significant factor

guiding the direction of this study. Rather than attempting to identify children who are alienated using a measurement tool, underpinning the rationale for this study was to focus on children's perceptions of alienation, regardless of whether or not they have experienced it. This is in contrast to traditional approaches that seek to identify alienated children initially and then investigate their experiences.

Differing Perceptions

In addition to valuable insights from researchers and teachers about alienation, it is important to access the views of those who may be directly affected by it, the children. Investigating children's perceptions and experiences in PE may potentially lead towards enhanced understanding the phenomenon of alienation. Several researchers have examined the differences between students' and teachers' perceptions of PE. Studies that reveal differences between child and adult interpretations and perspectives strengthen the idea that accessing children's perceptions in research is not only relevant, but essential to our understanding of the world as viewed through the eyes of a child.

A number of studies confirm a distinct difference between children's views and adults' views about various issues in PE. Differing perceptions of physical activity, play and sport were reported in a study by MacDougal, Schiller and Darbyshire (2004) with children 4-12 years old. The distinction between 'play' and 'sport' was a main focus of the study and results revealed that children of all ages identified 'play' as child centered while 'sport' was controlled by adults. Play had powerful meanings for the children in terms of fun and freedom, while the concept that 'play' opportunities are provided by adults in 'sport' was a

foreign idea to the children. Differing perceptions were demonstrated when the children in the MacDougal et al. (2004) study were surprised that adults typically considered television (TV) and computer games as barriers to physical activity participation. Children saw TV and computer games as either coexisting with or promoting physical activity.

Martel et al. (2002) studied the remarks made by children and their teachers regarding the types of perceived injustices that occurred in the gym (e.g. unequal opportunity for practice, teachers always choosing the same students for demonstrations, boring learning activities). The researchers noted striking differences between student and teacher perceptions in terms of what they viewed to be just or unjust in gym classes. For example, students thought that the procedure of forming teams in PE was inadequate and often perceived them as unjust, whereas teachers did not recognize student dissatisfaction regarding team formation as legitimate. Teachers thought that the discontent was a result of students using a responsibility incorrectly or simply being disgruntled with not having friends on the same team. Teachers did not view this situation as unjust and contended that they do form "relatively equal teams, and that unfair situations usually arise when it is the students forming the teams" (Martel et. al, 2002, p. 62). Martel et al. concluded that students felt *powerless* to change the injustices they perceived and that they suffered from the effects of negativity in the gym. In light of these results, the researchers recommended that teachers recognize the importance of perceived student injustices and that teachers begin to reflect on their own conduct in the gym and the impact on the learning climate.

Garn and Cothran (2006) also reported remarkable differences between students and teachers in their perceptions of fun in PE. Among the sources of data collection, the critical incident technique (CIT) was used as a framework for gathering descriptions from students and teachers about how they viewed fun in PE. The CIT was done by asking the participants (146 undergraduate students and 45 teachers) to describe, in writing, two significant incidents: the most fun day in PE and the least fun day in PE. Participants were encouraged to remember any incidents that happened in any grade (kindergarten to grade 12) and prompted to include details such as activity, setting, feelings, and what others in the class did. Although both participant groups (students and teachers) in this study valued fun in PE, there were some differences in views revealed using the CIT for three themes: teacher, task, and social (Garn & Cothran). The first theme, 'teacher', referred to students' perceptions that teacher student relationships were directly responsible for creating or reducing fun in PE. Some of the teachers agreed that they were key determinants of fun in PE for their students. The second theme, 'task', referred to the actual activities delivered in PE and the notion that an appropriate level of challenge and student success was necessary for fun PE classes. Both students and teachers agreed that personal competence in PE tasks influenced the fun factor. In the final theme of 'social', students remembered spending time with peers as a key determinant to having fun in PE whereas teachers' CIT descriptions "never specified allowing students working with friends as a key part of their memories of fun lessons" (Garn & Cothran, 2006, p. 292). The differing perceptions of students and teachers which are highlighted in

many of the studies mentioned, accentuates the importance of considering the voices of children in the research, particularly about issues which impact their world.

Perspective of the Child

How useful are the perspectives of children in research? Historically, many researchers have relied on adult participants (teachers or parents) when reporting on childhood issues rather than asking children (Scott, 2000). "Children in most societies are valued for their potential and for what they will grow up to be but are devalued in terms of their present perspectives and experiences" (Greene & Hill, 2005, p. 3). While the perspectives of children have not often been accessed in research, there is a growing demand to consider the voices of children in a society where children's roles as citizens are essential (Scott). Although more researchers appear to recognize the importance of the child's perspective, concerns about cognitive ability, potential power imbalance between child and researcher, and ethical considerations remain at the forefront of accessing and utilizing children's perspectives as primary sources of information in research.

The issue of cognitive abilities of children as participants in research is prevalent in the literature. One reason why researchers prefer to rely on adult participants for information about children is the concern that children's cognitive abilities to understand and respond to questions about perception is limited (Scott). Yet some researchers claim that children (especially school age and teens) are amazingly competent in question and answer type communications. Greig,

Taylor and MacKay (2007) refer to the assumptions about a child's limited capability to deal with direct research questions as myths and propose a number of considerations to address the issue of how to question children. Specifically, researchers should have a solid understanding of child development and design questions appropriate to the child's individual abilities. It would also be important to consider the context in which interviews occur and to inform the child of what will happen during every step of the process (Greig et al.). Similarly, Scott (2000) suggests that when pre-adolescent children are asked questions about events that are meaningful to their lives, they are in fact able to give trustworthy and insightful responses. Paradoxically, while much evidence exists confirming that pre-teen children are very capable of accurately telling adults about themselves, they "have also mastered the art of impression management and...[become] adept at controlling what they reveal" (Scott, 2000, p. 102). During interviews with children who have presumably reached the age at which they are capable of responding accurately to questions, it is possible that they might also be editing their answers and even withholding their thoughts. According to Salkind (2002), pre-adolescent children are flexible in their thinking and able to think logically about concrete events, particularly using inductive logic, which requires going from a specific experience to a general principle. Moreover, Greig et al. call attention to the fact that children become comparable to adults at the end of the primary school years when it comes to memory capacity. Responses to questions that rely on memory can be influenced by associated emotions or circumstances of the event in question. Although concerns are warranted regarding the cognitive

abilities of children as participants in research, when age, developmental appropriateness and attention to context are taken into account, children can be valuable and insightful contributors to the knowledge base.

Children's cognitive abilities are not the only concerns researcher's have when attempting to access children's perceptions. There is also the issue of a potential power imbalance between the child and researcher in the interview situation (Eder & Fingerson, 2002; Greene & Hill, 2005; Kvale, 2007; Punch, 2002; Scott, 2000). Punch contends that children have been dominated by adults for much of their lives and the possibility exists that, because of the unequal power relationship in research, children are more vulnerable than adults. As a result, children may construct answers that are likely to please the interviewer or that they think the interviewer would want to hear. It is critical that the interviewer not give the impression that there is one right answer to any given question so to avoid the tendency for the child to search for the answer they perceive as correct, instead of responding truthfully. In the interview situation, the researcher not only tends to be the one in control because he or she is asking the questions, but also because of the age difference (Eder & Fingerson, 2002). Typically the researcher has control over the research process which can impact power dynamics.

In a school setting, Eder and Fingerson (2002) recommend that the interviewer avoid being associated with the classroom teacher to minimize the power imbalance. As children would typically view their classroom teacher in an authoritative role within the context of a lesson, where right answers are sought,

the researcher should disassociate with this role and make an attempt to avoid controlling type behaviors. Researchers should avoid "asking respondents to stop fidgeting or to stop being silly" and resist "being the one to initiate all activities during the interview" (Eder & Fingerson, p. 185). Inviting children to ask questions or comment during the interview can be empowering for them. The interview situation with a power imbalance has also been referred to by Nunkoosing (2005) as "interrogation or confession" (p. 701), which has connotations of the interviewer being in control of the interviewee. Nunkoosing contends that even though interviews are the most widely used method in qualitative research for data collection, the problems with interviews in relation to power and resistance are always present. To further address the power imbalance issue, researchers need to be aware of "ways of giving up some of the power in the research situation by, for example, allowing the children to choose the time and place of interviews" (Greene & Hill, 2005, p. 11).

Ethical considerations should also be at the forefront when engaging in research about children's perceptions. According to Hill (2005) a number of principles should be adhered to in an ethical approach to research with children regarding their rights. These include "self-determination, privacy, dignity, anonymity, confidentiality, fair treatment and protection from discomfort or harm" (p. 65). Oberg and Ellis (2006) agree that researchers have a responsibility to protect the comfort and privacy of children by making certain that their views are not perceived as being evaluated or judged. Researchers should take the steps to obtain informed consent, establish gatekeeper (principal and teacher)

relationships to gain access, ensure confidentiality and use appropriate methods. When doing research with children, the methods employed should match what is developmentally appropriate for each child in any given context. That is, researchers should attempt to use methods that match the child's level of understanding, knowledge, and interests in the context of their social world (Greene & Hill, 2005). Developmental appropriateness considers age related (not age dependent) factors but more importantly regards children as unique with abilities and interests all their own (Gallahue & Cleland Donnelly, 2003; Greene & Hill, 2005). Qualitative methods appropriate for research with children "tend to be open-ended, narrative and holistic" (Greene & Hill, 2005, p. 13), some of which include observations, interviews, creative methods such as drawing or taking photos, self-reports, narratives, material props or visual prompts. Every attempt should be made to match the methods chosen with the purpose of the research (Greene & Hill).

"There is a new demand for research that focuses on children as actors in their own right" (Scott, 2000, p. 98). Research with children about childhood issues accentuates the importance of recognizing the differences between research with children and research with adults (Punch, 2002; Scott, 2000). Throughout the present study the following research issues unique to children and recommended by Punch (2002) were deliberately considered: imposition of the researcher's own perceptions, clarity of language, attention to interview context, rapport building and appropriate research methods. Additional recommendations by Oberg and Ellis (2006), from their review of school context sensitive studies about research

with children and youth, were considered, including attempts to "preserve the comfort of participating children and youth; recognize their agency and competence; protect their rights and autonomy; reduce the power difference between adult researchers and children; and create opportunities for developing shared meaning" (p. 110). Gathering information from children about their perceptions and experiences in PE may potentially reveal valuable insights into the phenomenon of alienation. Recognizing that what is relevant for adults is not always relevant for children and acknowledging that differing perceptions of PE may help to shape future practices (MacDougal et al., 2004). It is useful to know how children experience PE to better inform teachers about content delivery. By hearing what children have to say about their experiences, the teachers who structure the PE environment may gain further insight into the associated causes, risks and prevention of alienation.

<div align="center">Purpose</div>

The purpose of this exploratory research study was to gain an understanding of the phenomenon of alienation in the PE setting from the perspectives of children. Specifically, elementary school aged children (grade 6) formed the participant group. A deliberate effort was made to focus on the children's perspectives about the phenomenon rather than drawing attention to their own personal identification with alienation tendencies. In order to fully explore the children's perceptions, a case study methodology was employed.

CHAPTER THREE: METHOD

The purpose of this exploratory research study was to gain an understanding of the phenomenon of alienation in the physical education (PE) setting from the perspectives of children in grade 6. A qualitative approach to research was adopted using a holistic perspective (Patton, 2002) to facilitate the exploration of alienation from the perspectives of the children in the situational and personal context of the grade 6 class in PE, in keeping with the purpose of the study. As qualitative researchers "study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 3), this study focused on children's experiences and their perceptions of PE in their familiar grade 6 gym class setting. Although the exploration focused on the gymnasium setting, activities in the classroom were also observed for the main purpose of becoming familiar with the participants. Specifically, a qualitative case study methodology was used to organize an in-depth study of a group of children (Patton, 2002; Stake, 2005) to explore alienation from their perspectives. This study concentrated on revealing what children think and feel about the constructs of alienation, regardless of whether or not they identified experiencing them personally. Case study was an appropriate methodological fit given the purpose of the investigation.

Case Study

Designs or approaches to case study research are often determined by their purpose and the perspectives adopted by a particular discipline (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006). Merriam (1998) organizes case study types by disciplinary

orientation into ethnographic, historical, psychological and sociological categories. Yin (2003) outlines three main types of case study designs: exploratory, explanatory and descriptive. Types of case study have also been categorized as intrinsic, instrumental and multiple or collective (Creswell, 2005; Stake, 2005). It is evident that "case study is not easily summarized as a single coherent form of research" and that it is "fed by many different theoretical tributaries" (Stark & Torrence, 2005, p. 33). Careful attention must be given to selecting an approach to best represent the context and purpose of the investigation. For this research study, an instrumental case study approach was employed as it "provide[s] insight into an issue" and "facilitates our understanding of something else" (Stake, 2005, p. 445). Instrumental case study provides insight into an issue or concern and focuses on a single case to illuminate that issue (Creswell, 2007; Stake, 1995; Stake, 2005). Rather than an interest in the particular traits of a group of children as a unique case in itself (intrinsic), the primary interest was an exploration of the alienation phenomenon from the perspectives of a group of children (instrumental).

The instrumental case study demands that the researcher be attuned to two main requirements: boundedness and patterning (Stake, 2005). Stake emphasizes that in order to study a phenomenon the case must be a bounded system. A bounded system refers to the parameters around which the case can be defined in space and time. The research case was bounded by the individuals in the intact group of students and the teacher for a single classroom. The classroom had its own unique sense of community within the larger context of the school and was

bounded by the specific members themselves and the actual physical space. Time was also a factor in deciding on the boundaries of the case as "some case studies may not have clean beginning and ending points" (Creswell, 2007, p. 76). A time period of 9 weeks (approximately 25% of the total school year) was singled out to surround the case in terms of the time boundary. Although boundedness is important, Stake specifies that the actual issues are dominant and of highest importance in an instrumental type case study. Creswell (2005) also emphasizes that the instrumental type case is aptly named "because it serves the purpose of illuminating a particular issue" (p. 439).

In addition to boundedness, Stake (2005) outlines the necessity of the activity (i.e. the goings-on of the grade 6 class of children) being patterned with "coherence and sequence" (p. 444). The classroom activities in this case study had intentionally structured routines, repeated in a predictable way on a daily basis, including when they went to gym period. The time table for the children followed a set schedule and expectations for events and behaviors were well known. Therefore, the grade 6 class activities were patterned. According to Stake, satisfying the conditions of boundedness and activity patterns define the case for the ultimate purpose of studying a phenomenon. As such, this case study defined by the classroom and its members within the structure of the daily activities in the designated time frame at the research sight, enhanced further understanding of alienation and its constructs of powerlessness, meaninglessness and social isolation. This was accomplished in the context of the case, specifically the physical setting of the classroom and the gymnasium. Instrumental case study

methodology was an appropriate match not only for the nature of this study but also its intended purpose.

Participants

Characteristic of case study methodology, the unit of analysis (Patton, 2002) for the present research study was one group of children within the context of their school, physically situated each day in a classroom space and four times each week in the gymnasium space. A grade 6 classroom at Brookside School (pseudonym), serving grades 4-8, located outside a major Canadian city was the focus of the study. Participants in grade 6 (10-11 years old) were chosen because research based indicators predict that alienation may originate in the elementary years, but not become totally apparent until adolescence (Gibbons, 2008; Trusty & Dooley-Dickey, 1993). Grade 6 children appear to be at a critical age for the onset of alienation. It is also recognized that children of this age are cognitively able to understand questions, express thoughts and opinions and are "quite capable of providing meaningful and insightful information" (Scott, 2000, p. 115).

In this way, the case was a purposeful sample (Patton, 2002) of grade 6 students selected intentionally to understand the phenomenon of alienation from their perspectives. Within the bounded system of the classroom of 23 students and one teacher, Ms. Winston (pseudonym), which represented the case, a total of 14 children provided consent and were interviewed (9 girls and 5 boys). The average age of participants was 10 years and 9 months. Consistent with qualitative case study methodology, the goal of the researcher was to pursue in-depth rich descriptions of experiences and perceptions (Patton, 2002). Regarding depth

versus coverage, Stark and Torrence (2005) point out that "within the logic of case study approach, the recommended choice is always depth" (p. 35). As such, all participants for whom consent was provided were observed and interviewed for this study.

Procedure

The initial contact for the research study was made with the principal of Brookside School to inquire about the involvement of a teacher and grade 6 classroom. A meeting was arranged with the principal, the grade 6 teacher, Ms. Winston, and the PE specialist. An information letter was provided along with an explanation of purpose of the study and a proposed timeline for research activities. The school staff were supportive of the research and willing to participate. After approval from the school district superintendent, data collection proceeded for 9 weeks at Brookside. Prior to data collection approval from the university research ethics board had been granted for this study.

In the first 2-3 weeks at Brookside School the researcher focused on building rapport and gaining entry into the world of the participants (Patton, 2002; Punch, 2002). In addition to obtaining permission from the main gatekeepers (principal and teacher), gaining entry involved checking in and out of the school each time the researcher visited. A guest badge was provided to the researcher to make her identity known to all students and staff. The researcher was diligent in establishing relationships with the main gatekeepers in order to gain trust and acceptance during field work and in particular, making Ms. Winston comfortable. The researcher initiated conversation with Ms. Winston about the focus of the

study not being on her teaching or what she was doing, but rather on the children. Addressing this concern early and continuing to be aware of it facilitated a smooth entry and subsequent comfortable relationship for the duration of the study. Ms. Winston played a critical role in the researcher's gaining access to the grade 6 children. Particular attention was also paid to respecting the classroom routines and not interfering with academic learning time. Creswell (2007) advises that for case studies, the researcher should approach the cultural system slowly as one of the key questions for the gatekeeper may be "Will the researcher's presence be disruptive?" (p. 125). The research timetable was arranged according to classroom routines and always with advance permission from the teacher. Ms. Winston was provided with a schedule of visits, including intentions regarding classroom or gymnasium observation sessions.

During the first week, an initial visit to the grade 6 classroom was made for the researcher to introduce herself and speak with the children about the research study. A verbal explanation was given to the students in the classroom to ensure that they understood the study, the researcher's presence in their classroom and the interview intentions. The explanation of the research study was presented in developmentally appropriate child-friendly language. A few of the children asked questions and a short discussion took place. Also during the first week, consent forms were sent home with the children along with a parent information letter. Parents were encouraged to discuss the study with their children and along with their own signature they had their children sign the form if they both agreed to participate. Ms. Winston helped to facilitate the process of distributing and

collecting the informed consent forms and on a couple of occasions contacted

parents to remind them about returning the forms to school with their child. A

total of 14 consent forms, representing 61% of the class, were returned.

The actual time in the school varied each week from full days to half days,

usually 3 or 4 days out of each week for a total of 9 weeks. An additional two

visits to the school occurred a few weeks after the 9 week time frame to thank the

students and teacher by providing special gym instruction. The researcher

conducted two classes with large stability balls, as this was an area of expertise

for the researcher. A timeline summary of fieldwork activities in the research

setting is presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Fieldwork Timeline

	Rapport Building	Consent Forms	Observation	Drawings	Interviews	Member Checks	Debrief
Week 1	███	███	███				
Week 2	███		███				
Week 3	███		███				
Week 4			███				
Week 5			███	███			
Week 6			███		███		
Week 7			███		███		
Week 8					███		
Week 9						███	███

Researcher Qualifications

The importance of the researcher's qualifications cannot be overlooked. Patton (2002) reminds us that "Qualitative inquiry depends, at every stage, on the skills, training, insights, and capabilities of the inquirer" (p. 433). Researchers as human beings are the instruments themselves for the methods they undertake and thus developing self-awareness in fieldwork and analysis is beneficial (Patton).

A number of factors contributed to the preparedness of the researcher to undertake this research study. As a master's student, the researcher gained interview training and experience in university courses, as well as experience interviewing several children for an unrelated University of Alberta research study. The researcher also taught PE in schools to elementary aged children on a contract basis for several years. In addition, the knowledge gained from teaching PE and elementary education courses at the university undergraduate level contributed significantly to the researcher's understanding of the benefits and challenges in the field. Given this extensive involvement in many settings similar to this research study setting (albeit in a different role) the notion of *neutrality* must be addressed. According to Patton (2002) any credible research strategy includes a commitment by the researcher to avoid setting out to prove an already existing theory or support any predetermined results. The researcher should adopt a stance of neutrality "to understand the world as it unfolds, be true to complexities and multiple perspectives as they emerge" (Patton, p. 51). The initial interest in the exploration of alienation was based on the researcher's previous experiences in teaching situations where the phenomenon seemed apparent.

Knowing this, the researcher felt responsible to make certain that she would not undertake a research strategy attempting to find what she already believed to exist. Conscious efforts were made by the researcher to recognize potential biases and remain neutral, yet not to detach from her existing knowledge and experience in the field. This qualitative exploration "depends on, uses, and enhances the researcher's direct experiences in the world and insight about those experiences" (Patton, p. 51).

Data Collection

Data were collected using a number of different techniques over the time spent at the research site. "The data collection in case study research is typically extensive..." (Creswell, 2007, p. 75). Sources of information included observations, field notes, drawings and interviews collected over 8 of the 9 weeks spent at Brookside School in order to build a comprehensive picture of the case (Creswell).

Observations and field notes. From the initial rapport building time at the research site until the end of week 7, data were collected in the form of observations of classroom and PE sessions and were recorded as field notes. By the middle of the second week the researcher had blended into the school climate and her presence was no longer novel to the grade 6 children. The children seemed accepting of the researcher as she came in and out of the classroom, went with them through the hallways from class to class and joined them for gym. There were several occasions for informal conversations with the students as they

were getting ready for recess or going to and from the gym. Efforts were made to ensure that observations were as unobtrusive as possible.

Although the researcher was especially interested in the PE setting, the value of also observing in the classroom was immediately apparent. Seeing the students in the classroom revealed more about the children and provided additional opportunities for the researcher to become acquainted with them as they participated in other subjects such as math, language arts, health and social studies. The children were also able to get to know the researcher in their natural setting which provided an opportunity to become comfortable with the interactions within the first 2 weeks. These informal interactions were helpful for the one-on-one interview situations in weeks 6 to 8, as the children were already familiar with the researcher.

Observations began in a 'non-participant observer role' switching to a 'changing observational role' to include a 'participant-observer role' (Creswell, 2005). According to Creswell shifting roles is advantageous as it allows both subjective and objective involvement. During the initial weeks, observation occurred from a position on the side lines, with the researcher as an onlooker, both in the classroom and the gymnasium. In this role as a non-participant observer, the researcher could be present, take notes, and be minimally intrusive as the participants became accustomed with her presence. Closer to the third week there were occasions to participate in more of an assistant role by performing tasks such as handing out booklets in the classroom and helping with equipment distribution in the gym. Observations continued in the fourth week as the role

switched to participant observer. The researcher played two outside games with the students for PE class and on one occasion participated in group work for science with the grade 6's in the classroom. Towards the end of the research time line (week 7), the role of the researcher reverted back to more of an observer on the side lines. The researcher attempted to fade out of the setting gradually towards the end of the study, as the children were quite used to having her around. The researcher deliberately used a range of observational roles for the duration of time in the research setting. Patton (2002) recognizes the variations in observational methods along a continuum from complete immersion as a participant to total separation as a spectator. This continuum of observational methods was evident in the current study. Given the nature of the context, the researcher was somewhat limited in participating fully as 'one of the children' but did participate as an outsider accepted willingly into their culture.

The question of what to observe was considered prior to fieldwork and became clearer during the first week at Brookside School. While the initial intent was to observe as much as possible in the setting, it quickly became apparent that "no one can observe everything" (Merriam, 1998, p. 97). Key elements suggested by Merriam guided the observation sessions. The elements observed were (a) the physical setting including the classroom and the gym, (b) the participants, namely the 14 grade 6 children who had consent, (c) the activities and events performed in classroom and gymnasium instructional sessions, (d) the interactions and conversations between the researcher and students, as well as among students, verbal and non-verbal.

As "observations work the researcher toward greater understanding of the case" (Stake, 1995, p. 60), a record of events in the research setting was kept in the form of field notes. Stake (1995, 2006) also emphasizes the importance of many repeated observations along with attention to the contexts in the particular situation of the single case in order to gain a good understanding. Therefore, the researcher made frequent shorter visits versus infrequent longer visits for observation sessions. A notebook for field notes was used to record observations including descriptions of setting, dates, events, people, direct quotations, interactions and comments (Merriam, 1998; Patton, 2002). The flow of activities was typically recorded during the observation sessions while conversations were going on between participant and researcher. Occasionally writing was abandoned and the notebook was stored under a bench to keep the note taking from being a distraction. On occasion taking notes appeared to inhibit interactions. Often within the same observation session the notebook was retrieved to resume writing. During active participant observations, notes were recorded immediately after the session. The descriptive field notes served to recall the scenes in the gym and classroom as they happened and, as Patton affirms, provided the "fundamental database for constructing [the] case" (p. 305). At the end of each day the field notes were reviewed and additional reflections were recorded in a separate journal. This afforded an opportunity for further interpretation.

Drawings. For all participants with consent (14 students) two drawing activity sessions during the fifth week at the research site provided the students an opportunity for a more active role in the research process (Punch, 2002). The

purpose of the drawings was twofold. First they provided students an opportunity to express their thoughts about gym through drawings. Second, the drawings served as a springboard for conversation in the interviews to support further discussion about gym. A number of researchers recognize the usefulness of student drawings. According to Punch "the drawings themselves are rich visual illustrations which directly show how children see their world" (p. 331). Others have found this form of data collection a valuable tool to generate important information that may not otherwise be gained through interviews, which tend to require an immediate response (Goodwin & Watkinson, 2000; MacPhail & Kinchin, 2004; Morgan, Gibbs, Maxwell, & Britten, 2002; Mowling, Brock & Hastie, 2006). After briefly explaining the purpose of the drawing activity and informing the children that they would be able to tell the researcher about their drawings on interview day, they were asked to draw a picture of a general memory of gym. The following day the children were instructed to draw one picture that represented a *good day* in gym and one that depicted a *bad day* in gym. The framework for the second and third drawings was modeled after the thematic summary in a study by Goodwin and Watkinson with good days and bad days emerging as central ideas from the data analysis.

Besides the advantage of viewing the drawing itself as a communication tool, Mowling et al. (2006) emphasize that "it is even more beneficial to the researcher when used to assist children in their verbal communication" (p. 12). The participant drawings in the present study were used primarily as a starting point to begin conversation in the individual interviews, giving the children an

opportunity to verbally express their thoughts about PE. At the start of each interview, the three drawings were presented. A conversation then followed between the interviewer and child that included descriptions of the drawings, what was happening and, in some cases the expression of feelings and emotions related to the drawings. The drawings also provided thinking time for what the children wished to depict. In some instances drawings afforded an avenue to prompt stories about PE experiences or to highlight likes and dislikes associated with gym. In general, the participant drawings played a supporting role (Merriam, 1998) for the other main forms of data collection (observations and interviews). Permission from 12 of 14 participants was given to the researcher to keep the drawings.

Interviews. The completion of pilot interviews provides the researcher the opportunity to practice his or her interviewing skills, as well as a chance to revise questions based on feedback from the respondent (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 1998; Stake 1995). Prior to formal interviews, a pilot interview was completed with a child of the same age as the participants. The most useful information gained from the pilot interview was the importance of wording. It is critical that questions be worded in child friendly language, as well as having alternative ways to rephrase questions to ensure that the child understands what is being asked.

The semi-structured interview technique was employed as the primary method of data collection in this study. Kvale (2007) defines a semi-structured interview as one "with the purpose of obtaining descriptions of the life world of the interviewee with respect to interpreting the meaning of the described phenomenon" (p. 8) and further underlines the importance of a focus on

participant perspectives. In keeping with the purpose of this research the meaning of alienation was explored through the perspectives of grade 6 children using interviews as the main source of data collection. A balance was intentionally kept between the research interests in gaining knowledge and a respect for the integrity of the participants (Kvale, 2007). The researcher accomplished this through an ethical respect for the participant and a continual awareness of the interview climate to ensure children felt free and safe to share their thoughts. If the researcher sensed that the participant was uncomfortable, an immediate and deliberate change in the line of questioning took place, in addition to the use of encouraging or reassuring words. Students were asked about their drawings of gym, their own PE experiences and to share their perceptions as the researcher presented the concept of alienation. The three constructs of alienation, (meaninglessness, powerlessness and social isolation) were explored in developmentally appropriate language, namely usefulness, choices and being left out respectively. Sample questions are listed in Table 2 to illustrate the three constructs (see Appendix A for complete interview guide).

Alienation Construct	Sample Interview Questions
Meaninglessness	Do you think that kids would say gym is useful for later in their life? How would it be useful? How would it be useless?
Powerlessness	Do kids get to make choices in gym? In what way? Do kids like to decide? What do kids like to make decisions about in gym? What would happen if kids never got to decide about anything that happens in gym?
Social Isolation	Do you think kids sometimes feel left out in gym? Can you think of a time that you or your friends have been left out in gym? Can you describe that time for me? What would be some other reasons for kids feeling separate or not participating?

Table 2. Sample interview guide questions

As the word 'alienation' would not typically be used by a child in grade 6, the topic of alienation was addressed through the three constructs presented in Table 2 in a vocabulary familiar to the children. To target the idea of "persistent negative feelings" in PE as Carlson's (1995a) definition of alienation states, the participants were often asked how the children would feel if a situation were to be repeated over time. Questions were frequently followed by probes either verbally (detail oriented) or non-verbally (head nod or smile) in order to enhance the depth of response (Patton, 2002). Care was taken when asking questions and responding to answers in order to convey empathy but without judgment (Patton). At the start of each interview the children were reassured that there were no right or wrong answers, that they were the experts on their own perceptions and that confidentiality would be guaranteed. At the close of each interview the participants were asked to add anything else they wanted to say or that the

researcher neglected to ask in an attempt to provide the children with the final say in the interview session (Patton).

The 14 interviews varied in duration, ranging from 11 to 45 minutes in length. All interviews took place within the school building but not consistently in one location. This proved to be somewhat problematic in a few instances. For example, 4 of the 14 interviews took place in the PE office adjacent to the gym where classes were still going on. Background noise and a few interruptions made the location challenging. Another 2 of the 14 interviews took place in a very small space adjacent to the fitness studio and was also not ideal because of the size of the room. The remaining 9 of the 14 interviews were carried out in a quiet comfortable conference room without interruption or distraction. This was undoubtedly the best location overall. All interviews except one were audio taped. One of the participants did not provide consent to have his interview recorded but gave permission for note taking during the interview. All recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim by the researcher. It is generally considered advantageous to do one's own transcribing as it affords familiarity with the data and encourages the process of developing in-depth insight (Merriam, 1998; Patton, 2002).

Data Analysis

Analysis occurred simultaneously with data collection (Creswell, 2007). While "analysis is a matter of giving meaning to first impressions as well as to final compilations" (Stake, 1995, p. 71), there was a period of time where analysis was the main focus through managing and working with the data. To make sense

of the data, the interview transcripts, observation field notes and reflective journal entries were initially read through in their entirety. The children's drawings were also reviewed during the initial read through. A preliminary exploratory analysis (Creswell, 2005) was done to get a general sense of the data and how the case was represented through interview transcripts, observation field notes and reflective journal entries. This included listening to audio recordings of the interviews to get a sense of the context, emotion, and intention embedded in the conversations. Hearing the voices of the children gave increased insight into potential meanings of the words they spoke. Memos, ideas and impressions were jotted down as an initial exploration of the data.

After the preliminary exploratory analysis, interview transcript data were organized and all information significant to the research question was coded to build descriptions and themes (Creswell, 2005). Initially this was done by highlighting sections of interest, remaining open to any ideas related to the focus of the study, in an inductive discovery oriented approach (Patton, 2002). Inductive analysis allows the important themes in the data to emerge from patterns found, without predetermined categories or theory in advance of analysis. Following an inductive strategy, analysis continued in a deductively oriented approach, intentionally using the three pre-conceived constructs of alienation (meaninglessness, powerlessness, and social isolation), focusing on patterns in the data in relation to the phenomenon under investigation. Patton attests that both inductive and deductive approaches are often used in a study and should be recognized along a continuum which typically moves back and forth throughout

the process of analysis. This emphasized the importance of remaining open to float between inductive and deductive reasoning, recognizing that, while new ideas and issues emerged from the data, there was a purposeful exploration of the alienation constructs.

Specific to case study methodology Merriam (1998) points out that the goal is to communicate understanding. Stake (1995) concurs and further stipulates two types of analytic strategies: categorical aggregation and direct interpretation. Categorical aggregation denotes the collection of instances from the coded data and direct interpretation refers to drawing key meanings from the instances (Stake). From the participant transcripts, the coding process was accomplished by identifying text segments (Creswell, 2005) in the data by placing brackets around words, phrases or paragraphs and assigning a code word or descriptive phrase to each text segment. The text segments were cut out and grouped together before codes were again reviewed and revised, lists were made and further groupings of similar codes eventually formed the basis for overall themes. The intent of the researcher was to proceed with analysis by "trying to pull it apart and put it back together again more meaningfully" (Stake, 1995, p. 75) in order to arrive at themes which represented the voices of the 14 children in the case.

Direct interpretation followed categorical aggregation (Stake, 1995). Data analysis for this study proceeded with rich descriptions of the case and evolved into descriptions of PE experiences and perceptions in the words of the children within the case to embody meaning related to the alienation phenomenon. Case studies tend to have a greater proportion of descriptions than other types of

qualitative research (Merriam, 1998). Thick rich descriptions formed the foundation of the qualitative analysis and case report (Patton, 2002). The final stage of analysis continued to move beyond description to include interpretation. Interpretation of meaning from the participants' quotes contributed to the understanding of the phenomenon of alienation from the perspectives of 14 grade 6 children.

Quality of Research/Trustworthiness

In order to establish trustworthiness the researcher was mindful of the following criteria while collecting and analyzing the data: credibility, transferability, dependability, and comfirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility refers to the plausibility of the research findings to the participants and other individuals involved through the use of such techniques as prolonged engagement and member checks (Lincoln & Guba). Transferability was addressed through rich descriptions of the data in order for judgments to be made about the possible transfer of information to the participants' own experiences (Lincoln & Guba). Lincoln and Guba refer to dependability as how consistent or dependable the results of the study are so that it makes sense to the reader (not necessarily that it yields the *same* results as others). Comfirmability indicates to what extent the results of the study can be confirmed, internally coherent and can be accepted (Lincoln & Guba). The criterion for trustworthiness were accomplished for the present study through the use of the following techniques.

Triangulation of data sources. To address credibility, triangulation of data sources (observations, field notes, drawings and interviews) "can be brought

together in a case study to illuminate various aspects of a phenomenon" (Patton, 2002, p. 559). The expectation was not that different methods of data collection would lead to a single understanding of alienation as a phenomenon, but rather provide a variety of ways to capture perceptions about it. Triangulation ensured a strategy for gathering information accurately and in various ways in order to enhance validity and trustworthiness of the meanings the data represented (Stake, 1995).

Reflexive notes. In addition to the observation field notes, notes were also taken in a reflective manner throughout the research process through "pondering the impressions, deliberating on recollections and records" (Stake, 2005) to record the researcher's own thoughts and feelings. Patton (2002) encourages the practice of reflexivity to be self-aware or conscious about one's own perspective. A separate journal was kept for these notes, and thoughts were recorded immediately after visits to the research site. All four of the trustworthiness criteria were addressed by the technique of a reflexive journal (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Member checking. The process of asking the participants to scrutinize and confirm plausibility is referred to as member checking. This occurs continuously (formally and informally) and increases trustworthiness in analysis (Creswell, 2005; Lincoln & Guba, 1995; Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995). Checking with the children about the meanings of what they said (interviews) and what they demonstrated (observations) generated confidence regarding the research results. Formal member checks were done through a second interview with 20% of the total participant group (3 out of 14) during the last week at the research site.

Informal member checks were done during the interviews after statements made by the children. The researcher often checked on meaning by repeating what the children said and then asking if it was correct. This was effective as a way of ensuring that the intended meaning of what the participant said was clearly understood by the researcher.

Second coding. The technique of second coding was accomplished by enlisting another researcher knowledgeable in the area of inquiry to validate the coding scheme. The second coder was given 60% of the relevant raw data from the participant's transcripts (text segments) along with the main themes and the descriptions of the themes to determine how they fit together. The data was displayed in a table format, one column for text segments and another column for codes. Along with the data, a verbal explanation of the phenomenon of alienation was provided to the second coder to ensure understanding of the main concepts involved. After second coding was accomplished, the primary researcher completed a comparison between the secondary coding of text segments and the original primary coding analysis. There was complete agreement between the primary researcher and the second coder for the second coded text segments. The second coding process continued with a more in depth procedure whereby the second coder was asked to code additional potential subthemes under each of the main themes. Discussion of the coded data followed. While specific word choice in subthemes was not always the same as the primary researcher's word choice, the in depth second coding process resulted in complete agreement with the meanings of subthemes.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Introduction

The purpose of this case study was to gain an understanding of the

phenomenon of alienation in the PE setting from the perspectives of grade 6

children. Consistent with its purpose and methodology, the results of this

qualitative case study are presented using a case study structure approach

recommended by Stake (1995). According to Creswell (2007), Stake's

organizational structure for case presentation is of value "because it provides

description of the case; presents themes, assertions, or interpretations of the

researcher; and begins and ends with realistic scenarios" (p. 196). Therefore,

guided by Stake's framework, this chapter begins and ends with entry and closing

vignettes respectively. These vignettes represent short accounts of actual episodes

observed during data collection and are intended to provide a vicarious experience

for the reader, and to develop a connection to the time and place of the research

site. The entry vignette is followed by the results. The results are presented using

narrative description of the case and participants, development and presentation of

themes and document details. Interpretation and discussion of the findings are

presented within each theme and subtheme, followed by a general discussion and

the closing vignette.

Entry vignette

The doors to the gym flew open and the sound of children talking and

laughing filled the air. The brightly lit gymnasium was soon occupied by 23

children, most of them clustered in small groups, chatting amongst each other and

some enjoying the sound of their own loud voices in the vast open space. It was evident as the children moved to the meeting area that many felt the physical freedom of the large space, running in spurts, jumping randomly, and some even spinning in circles. The whistle blew, partially stopping the children's movements and sounds. As the game was explained, some appeared eager to play while others seemed content to keep socializing and appeared to miss the instructions altogether. Floor hockey was the game of the day, visibly celebrated by some, but lamented by others. The noise level grew louder as the game began and conversation on the bench, with players waiting to enter the game at shift change, was at close range shouting level. The sticks clacked together, banged on the floor, and slid along with scraping sounds. Players called each others names continuously through the game, before almost every pass of the puck. Mary plopped down on the bench and let out an audible sigh, "I really hate floor hockey". Rick (the most athletic in the class) yelled from the floor "That's a foul, he pushed me". Two girls at the other end were detached from the game, yet still in the playing space; they giggled and played with their pinnies on their heads as the action continued around them. Every 5-7 minutes the whistle blew to signal a change of shift; new players entered the game while others took a turn on the bench. The fast paced rhythm of the game seemed to separate the highly skilled participants from those more noticeably on the outskirts of the action. The teacher whistled then shouted, "Game over!" It was obvious that for some it was a very short time to play, for others, an eternity.

Description of the case

Creswell (2007) states that "description becomes a good place to start in qualitative study (after reading and managing data), and it plays a central role in…case studies" (p. 151). Establishing the context and boundaries of the case through rich description facilitates a sense of being in the setting and is important for understanding the case (Merriam, 1998; Patton, 2002; Stake, 1995). To elucidate the case, this account proceeds with descriptions of the school, classroom, gymnasium and participants.

The School

Brookside School is located outside a major Canadian city and offers English and French immersion classes to 490 students from grades 4 to 8. A total of 49 teaching staff, support staff and administrators are employed at Brookside School. The school building first opened in 1978 and is well kept, surrounded by large playing fields and an updated playground. Brookside's mission statement is "To empower students to reach their potential through quality leaning opportunities" (school website).

The Classroom

The classroom for this case study was located in the center of Brookside school, with individual desks arranged in 5 rows. The teacher's desk was in one corner and a reading center with a large padded chair was located in another corner. There was a group work table at the back of the classroom. The walls were decorated with creative projects and artwork done by the students. Although the

classroom was considered their homeroom, the children often traveled to other rooms in the school for health, computer class, library, and gym.

The Gymnasium

Upon entering Brookside School, the main doors to the gymnasium were located immediately to the right, beside a main hallway. The gymnasium was a large rectangular space with a main entrance and another side door entrance at the opposite end. There was a large well organized storage room for equipment and supplies. A small PE office was located opposite the storage room, in the corner of the gym. Locker rooms for male and female students were located at the opposite end of the gym from the main entrance where all grade 6 students were expected to change into appropriate clothing before gym classes. There was a divider curtain that could be used to separate the gym into two halves, allowing two classes to operate in the gym independently. When using the gym, the sixth graders often shared the space with another grade 6 class and although Ms. Winston was always the instructor of gym, the PE specialist for the school was also present with the other grade 6 class for many of the gym sessions observed while at the research site.

The Participants

The grade 6 class consisted of 23 students (14 girls and 9 boys) ages 10-12, one teacher (Ms. Winston) and a part-time aide. This class was one of three grade 6 classes at Brookside. Although the entire classroom was considered as the case, bounded by space and time, the unit of analysis was represented by the 14 students who provided consent to participate in the study. As "a qualitative case

study seeks to describe that unit in depth and detail, holistically, and in context"
(Patton, 2002, p. 55), a description of each study participant is provided below.
More about each participant is revealed through out this chapter as the students
shared their perspectives on alienation. In all instances, pseudonyms were used to
protect the identity of the participants.

Mary. Mary was an outgoing and talkative girl who seemed to enjoy
school. She was often seen socializing with peers and was also very interested in
talking with the researcher. Each day the researcher came to the school, Mary was
always the first child to greet her, usually with a story to share. Mary was very
expressive and enjoyed verbalizing her feelings to classmates, Ms. Winston, and
the researcher.

Karen. Karen was a quiet unassuming girl who often giggled during social
interactions with classmates, and also throughout the interview with the
researcher. She was a happy girl and well-behaved student.

Carson. Carson was very quiet in class. Although fairly shy in the
interview with the researcher, Carson was very interested in the questions and was
keen to please the researcher. He was observed often spending time by himself.

Alison. Alison was a pleasant student who got along well with everyone.
She was a diligent worker in learning activities in the classroom and particularly
focused on accomplishing the required tasks. Alison was extremely quiet in the
interview with the researcher and did not volunteer her thoughts and feelings
easily.

Colby. Colby was a very self confident boy who felt comfortable talking with adults and got along well with classmates. He enjoyed gym and viewed himself as a 'good player'. Colby applied himself whole-heartedly to everything he did. In the interview setting, Colby was very talkative and comfortable with the researcher.

Mark. Mark was an extremely polite boy who was eager to please the teacher and others in authority. He was very conscious of doing the right thing and having the right answers. In the interview, Mark was hesitant to share his opinion and shrugged his shoulders often, saying he didn't know the answers.

Talia. Talia was a very social girl who often focused much of her time on friends. She was always negotiating relationships within a small group of girls with the ever changing scenarios of being friends one day and not the next. Talia was very self conscious of her physical appearance which was often evident in her gestures and posture. She was sometimes the target of attention from the boys in the class. Talia was very talkative in the interview and frequently shared stories about friends.

Jess. Jess was a very good student and often volunteered to answer questions in class. Self confidence was apparent in her interactions with others and through her attention to school work. Jess was happy to be interviewed and was comfortable sharing thoughts and feelings.

Ann. Ann was a very conscientious worker in class and enjoyed creative physical activities (e.g. dance) more than sport activities (e.g. floor hockey). She was very comfortable talking with the researcher and shared her honest opinions

and feelings in a descriptive manner. Friends were very important to her and she appeared to be well-liked by her classmates.

Don. Don had a tendency to complain in the gym setting, usually about what he viewed as unfair play, but still enjoyed gym a great deal. Don did not want to be audio taped in the interview because he did not like the sound of his voice. He was very willing to talk and shared thoughts readily, and gave the researcher permission to write down what he said. He was sometimes the target of teasing by classmates.

Kristine. Kristine was quiet in class and a hard-working student. Friends were very important to her but she always waited until recess or others breaks to socialize with them. Kristine was a mature girl for her age and enjoyed conversations with adults. Although quiet and soft spoken in the interview, Kristine willingly engaged in conversation and showed a genuine interest in the research process.

Rick. Rick was the most athletic boy in the class and his peers recognized this by commenting on his high skill level. He was often restless in the classroom setting and anticipated PE participation with great enthusiasm. Rick struggled at times with following classroom rules and responded to discipline with smiles and laughter. He could often be heard speaking out of turn and sometimes inappropriately. In the interview with the researcher Rick initially displayed silly behavior and was reluctant to answer questions. Rick became more comfortable during the interview but remained somewhat hesitant in his responses.

Tessa. Tessa was an extremely talkative girl who often sought adult attention. She tried hard to socialize with her peers but was often unsuccessful in reciprocal friendships. Tessa sometimes left the grade 6 room for special sessions in the library and often had an educational assistant working with her during class. Tessa was always happy to see the researcher, often wanting hugs, and drew extra pictures for the researcher. In her interview, Tessa's excitement to share stories was apparent and at times she would stray off topic.

Rachel. Rachel was an intelligent, well behaved student and was often called upon in class for answers to questions. She worked conscientiously at academics and was a highly physically active girl both in school PE and in extracurricular activities. She was extremely mature, well spoken, and interesting to talk to. Rachel engaged in conversations with great ease and enjoyed talking with adults. This was the case in her interview as she showed a genuine interest in the research topic and responded with thoughtful comments.

<center>Central Themes and Subthemes</center>

Case study researchers "seek to portray the case comprehensively, using ample but non-technical description and narrative" (Stake, 1995, p. 134). The findings of this case study are presented using description and narrative in the form of three central themes, each with related subthemes. A visual representation of the findings is displayed in Figure 1.

```
Degree of Control  <  Skill
                      Choice

Meaning  <  Lack of Meaning
            Future Relevance

Social Factors  <  Having Friends
                   Feeling Rejected
```
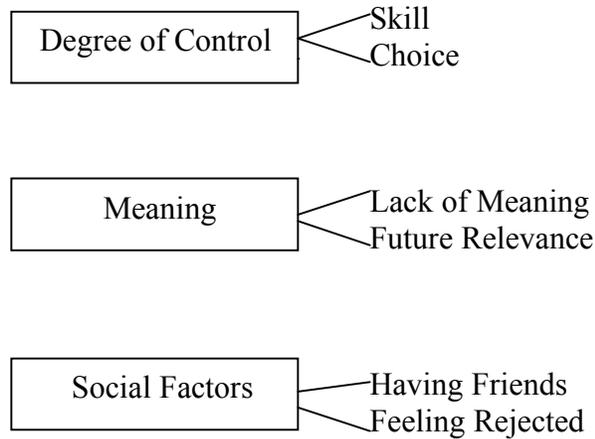
Figure 1 - Visual representation of overview of findings

The main themes: a. degree of control, b. meaning, and c. social factors, were

based on the alienation constructs of powerlessness, meaninglessness, and social

isolation, respectively. Although based on these original constructs, following

analysis of the data the researcher elected to identify the main themes of the study

in more neutral terms. This was seen as most appropriate, given the variety of

responses from the children, ranging from positive to negative in nature. Within

each theme, two subthemes were also identified. Despite strong affiliation to their

respective themes, these subthemes are not mutually exclusive. That is, some of

the ideas presented within one subtheme, may reemerge in another subtheme. This

cross-over of ideas can be attributed to the nature of the constructs of alienation.

Although differing in some ways, each construct is based on the common

phenomenon of alienation and as a result there are commonalities among the

subthemes. For example skill, a subtheme of degree of control was also apparent

in the theme of social factors (i.e. feeling left out or rejected because of low skill).

These similarities are highlighted in the results and discussion that follow.

While the purpose of the study was to gain an understanding of the phenomenon of alienation from the perspectives of children, and not to explore their individual experiences, the children in this study often personalized the answers to questions about children in general. For example, when asked if children thought that gym was a useful subject, some participants reported what they thought was true for most children their age and also volunteered what they thought was true for themselves. In some instances their own views differed from what they perceived to be true for others. Generally the comments and perceptions shared by the participants were representative of their own experiences and what they believed to be true for other children. The results are presented in the children's own words.

Degree of Control

The theme of 'degree of control,' was based on the alienation construct of powerlessness, referring to the feeling of having no control over what happens in PE (Carlson, 1995a). While the main category of powerlessness was the construct being explored through observation and interview questions, the more neutral term 'degree of control' seemed to best represent the participant's perspectives. The scope of these perspectives fell on a continuum ranging from positive to negative (i.e. control to no control). The participants in this case study expressed their views about the degree of control they thought children possessed in PE. These views are presented in the subthemes of: 'skill' and 'choice' (see figure 2).

```
                                    ┌─Skill
        ┌──────────────────┐────────┘
        │ Degree of Control│
        └──────────────────┘────────┐
                                    └─Choice
```

Figure 2. Degree of Control Subthemes

Skill. In response to questions about powerlessness in PE, participants often referred to the importance of skill level in lack of control, primarily because of the consequences associated with low skill. These consequences included being judged by peers in the form of teasing, ridicule and not being picked for teams. Team selection was referred to by a number of children and was associated with situations where children with high and low abilities were differentiated. This often resulted in embarrassment and at times nonparticipation for the children with low skill. Low skill was also linked to a lack of enjoyment in PE. Children shared that skill level could impact participation and feelings in relation to the degree of control a child might perceive he or she had in PE, with low skill being associated with less control and high skill associated with greater control.

Feeling judged by peers because of skill level was commonly referred to by the children in this study and was often associated with feeling embarrassed and being the subject of ridicule. Not having the ability to play was recognized as important in games in particular. When talking with the interviewer about dislikes in gym class, Tessa shared the following:

> Tessa: You're afraid to get embarrassed in front of a game or like you're afraid you just don't fit into the game and you don't do well and you're afraid that your team's gonna get mad at you for doing the wrong thing.
>
> Interviewer: Okay

Tessa: So, you try to do the right thing.

Interviewer: So the embarrassed part, can you describe that?

Tessa: The embarrassed part is like, you try to do the best you can and you embarrass yourself by doing it. (Tessa's interview transcript, p. 6, 7)

Alison also commented about "people who can't play the games" and when asked how they might feel she said, "they feel like they can't do much…and everyone else is really good at it, but you're not."

In addition to feelings of embarrassment, being subject to ridicule by peers due to lower skill levels was a reality for some participants. Don commented, "Push ups, I can't do those very well. It bothers me cause everyone else can do it and I can't. Abe makes fun of me, 'you're sucky, you don't even know how to do a push up.'" Don was visibly upset at the point in the interview when he shared this comment and clearly viewed it as an experience out of his control. When discussing her drawing of a 'bad day' in gym, Karen referred to the idea of being judged by peers. In her drawing of floor hockey, a caption from someone on Karen's team read, "why does she have to be in goal?" Karen explained that this was what she thought the player would be saying in her head, not necessarily out loud. Karen felt that her team mates might judge her skill level as not being adequate and therefore would not value her as a contributing member of their team. Also having to do with peer judgment, Jess shared an aspect related to skill in gym that she disliked, "if you don't make the shot people yell at you." She said that it made her feel bad in gym when that happened. When the interviewer asked for her perspective on how other children might view gym she replied, "maybe

they also don't like to be yelled at." Jess imagined that other children might feel just like her in a situation where ridicule was the result of not being skilled enough to make a successful shot in basketball.

Skill level was also an important component of team selection which contributed to the sense of having little control over outcomes. Mary conveyed a story about a non-skilled player at her previous school who was not chosen when teams were selected, and as a result was subject to name calling.

> Mary: They wouldn't let him be the goalie cause he was, everybody didn't pick him not just because he was, like, annoying, but didn't pick him cause they thought he was a bad player, and at goalie and stuff he'd always let these goals in but he did, I kinda looked at him once when we were playing and I think he did it on purpose kind of.
>
> Interviewer: Oh, interesting, I wonder why he'd do that.
>
> Mary: Cause he's mad probably, nobody picks him and nobody lets him be goalie.
>
> Interviewer: Okay
>
> Mary: Everyone calls him names. (Mary's member check transcript, p. 2)

Team selection based on skill could also result in nonparticipation or withdrawal by some children which contributed to the sense of no control. Jess spoke about how classmates viewed a student as an inadequate goalie when picking teams and as a result "he would just sit on the bench" for the whole class.

Participants made the distinction between 'good players' and 'not so good players' during gym class and also in the interviews. In Colby's interview he

stated, "usually most guys are more athletic." He explained the importance of having an even number of boys on each team so teams would have equal numbers of highly skilled players. Kristine also talked about how teams were selected in her description of a bad day in gym, "I think it was when no one was on my team that was really good at playing…most of the good players were on the other team." For Kristine, it was a bad day in gym when the skill level of players was not equal between teams, a variable that was out of her control and in turn made it less enjoyable to play the game.

Children often referred to the 'good players' as those who scored goals, and were athletic. This was demonstrated in the observations of Ms. Winston's gym class when children were waiting for a turn to play the game. The following observation field note entry illustrates the participants' skill-related comments about their peers while on the sidelines.

> 1:20 Change shifts again. Rick says "He's a shift hog" (about Don). Tessa tells me Rick's the best player. Tessa sits by me and is pressed right up against me. Some of the girls discuss how their teacher doesn't like backboard dodge ball because the girls get hurt. She [teacher] says in dodge ball the boys can't hit the girls but the girls can hit the boys. "The boys are better." (Tessa).
> (Field notes, November 7, p. 30-31)

Finally, skill level was associated with enjoyment or lack of enjoyment in PE. Talia expressed her views about the relationship between becoming skilled and increased enjoyment of gym when she said, "you'd probably want to do gym

more often because you're better at the activities." She also indicated that negative experiences resulting from low skill would likely lead to disengagement if a child experienced repeated failure in PE. Increasing personal skill level was desirable and also viewed as a possibility to gain competence if extra-curricular lessons were pursued outside of school PE. Karen commented, "go sign up for it and you'll end up being really good." Low skill was linked to not enjoying PE activities as represented in Mary's statement about floor hockey, "I'm like bad at it, and I just hate playing." Alison also equated lack of skill with not having fun in PE. She said, "if you're not good at soccer, and you play soccer a lot, then you're not really having fun cause you're not very good and no one will want to pass to you cause you're not very good at it."

Discussion of Skill. The findings of this case study regarding the subtheme of skill were consistent with the literature exploring alienation in PE. In particular, student's perceptions of their own low skill or the low skill of others were associated with feelings of alienation, in the form of lack of control or powerlessness (Carlson, 1995a; Carlson, 1995b; Cothran & Ennis, 1999; Fenton et al., 1999; Gibbons & Humbert, 2008; Humbert, 1995; Portman, 1995a; Portman 1995b). The subtheme of skill appears to play a role in the perceptions of grade 6 students in terms of the degree of control afforded in the PE setting. The children were aware of skill differences and often compared themselves to the more skilled players. When they recognized low skill in either themselves or others, children were conscious of the possible negative repercussions such as

judgment by peers, embarrassment, ridicule and not being selected for teams, which were also associated with not enjoying PE.

Peer judgment was apparent in Humbert's (1995) study as she witnessed many disparaging comments in PE class by the boys toward the girls. Fifty young women in high school were interviewed in groups of three or four and the most common dislike of PE, frequently with reference to the girls' skill level, was the fact that "the boys often made comments that 'cut them down', ridiculed and hurt them" (Humbert, p. 66). Similar stories from grade 4 girls in a case study by Fenton, Frisby and Luke (1999) with students in a low-income multiracial school found "frequent examples of teasing by the boys…most of which denigrated the girls' skill levels" (p. 14). While similarities exist within the present case study, peer judgment and teasing were not exclusive to gender. Peer judgment seemed to be common for both boys and girls. For example, in Don's interview, he made reference to being judged by Abe in various ways, and numerous times. Peer judgment and a lack of control were also evident in Alison's interview when she spoke about the people that can't play the games, feeling "like they can't do much."

Embarrassment and ridicule tied to low skill were apparent in the results of this case study and are congruent with the findings of several studies examining the PE experiences of children and adolescents. In a study conducted by Ennis et al. (1997) that explored situational and contextual factors that students and teachers perceived as enhancing or minimizing student engagement, the authors found that high school students were embarrassed to perform in front of people in

PE. Similarly, Portman (1995a) discovered a common theme among 13 sixth

graders who demonstrated low skill. The theme of, "Mostly everybody yells at

me," punctuated the children's fear of being yelled at or made fun of when others

saw their lack of skill in the gym. This is similar to what Jess referred to, in the

present case study, as she spoke about being yelled at when she did not make the

shot in basketball. Couturier et al. (2005) surveyed 5308 students ages 11 to 20

about the reasons they had for choosing to participating or choosing not to

participating in PE. They found that 15.6% of students surveyed agreed with the

statement, "I am afraid other students will make fun of me" (p.172). Couturier et

al. reported a number of students' reasons to participate or not participate and

concluded that teachers could benefit from the information gained about student

perspectives in PE for future program delivery. The public nature of PE was also a

factor related to skill for the students in a study by Gibbons and Humbert (2008)

who investigated what adolescent girls are looking for in their PE experiences.

According to these students personal competence was important to their comfort

level in PE as demonstrated by statements like, "I sometimes feel sick when I

have to do something in front of everybody, especially when I know I'm not very

good" (p. 178). Although the public nature of PE was not specifically identified

by the participants in the present case study, they were concerned with how their

peers viewed them and were aware of the skill levels of those around them.

Embarrassment and ridicule in relation to low skill featured prominently in

this study. Cothran and Ennis (1999) point out the potential danger that "the low

skilled students often quit participating or participate on a limited basis because of

peer comments and attitudes" (p.243). Indicators of this were evident in several of the current study interviews. For example, Jess told the interviewer about a student who was judged by everyone as 'too short' to be goalie, causing him to sit on the bench for the rest of the class, feeling badly and staring at the ground.

Team selection issues have been a chronic source of negativity for those chosen last or not chosen at all for a team in PE class. Williams (1996) contends, "...there is no need to subject our students to this institutionalized psychological torture" (p. 47). The Council on Physical Education for Children (2000) warns that it is an inappropriate practice when "teams are formed by student 'captains' publicly selecting one child at a time, sometimes with a system of alternating gender, and always exposing the lower skilled children to peer ridicule or embarrassment" (p.15). This seemed to be a frequent source of discontent in the present case participants' perspectives. Despite recommendations against public team selections, the process of assigning team captains to pick children one at a time was prevalent in several of the interviews in this study. Although physical educators may attempt to derail negativity in PE and promote a positive developmentally appropriate climate for learning, evidence persists that peer judgment, embarrassment, ridicule and inappropriate team selection are common issues in the PE environment.

According to the children in this study, enjoyment of PE was also influenced by skill. This relationship has also been demonstrated in the PE literature. One theme that emerged in Portman's (1995a) study about the experiences of sixth grade students who demonstrated low skill was, "I like PE

when I am successful" (p.448). A similar theme, "I hate playing soccer when everybody else is way better than me," was identified in Gibbons and Humbert's (2008, p.177). This study examined adolescent students' opinions about what they wanted to experience in PE, what barriers they perceived toward participation and their perceptions of health in relation to physical activity. Personal competence affecting enjoyment was one of four themes that was significant for many of the grade 6 and 7 girls in their study. The girls expressed how important it was to have enough time to practice so they could become skillful, especially because PE was executed in a public environment where everyone was always watching. Furthermore, the girls felt "inadequate and uncomfortable when they were compared to more skilled classmates" (Gibbons & Humbert, 2008, p. 181) and would likely enjoy PE more if developmentally appropriate tasks and progressions were used along with provisions for adequate practice time. Garn and Cothran (2006) also found that the adult participants in their study expressed the importance of personal competency when they recalled their grade school memories of the most fun and least fun experiences in PE. Feeling competent in an activity was a source of fun while lack of success was a barrier to fun. Similarly, the grade 6 participants in the present study attributed fun in PE with being skilled enough to participate on par with their classmates. Conversely, several children expressed that being less skilled resulted in not enjoying gym.

It was not surprising that children reported negative stories and associated feelings when reflecting about how skill level affected their gym experiences and the experiences of others. The role of skill in feelings of powerlessness is

generally well supported by the literature and was apparent in the interviews in this study. It is less clear how severe the repercussions of low skill must be, or for long they must occur, in order to lead to feelings of alienation from PE. According to Carlson (1995a) it is the "persistent negative feelings" (p. 467) that put children at risk of alienation. Repeated unsuccessful experiences in PE may lead to the eventual feeling that achievement is beyond their control. Portman (1995a) adds that "failure breeds failure" (p. 452) as low skilled students can get caught in a negative cycle of no success at skills, limited practice, no improvement, and therefore more failure and eventual withdrawal from participation. The persistent negative consequences of low skill in PE appear to be a critical component contributing to the identification with alienation.

Skill competency is recognized in the literature as an important pedagogical consideration, starting at a very young age (Gallahue & Cleland Donnelly, 2003; Kovar, Combs, Campbell, Napper-Owen & Worrell, 2009; Pangrazi & Gibbons, 2009). Competence is particularly important in the upper elementary grades, as children become aware of the value society places on successful motor skill performance in PE (Kovar et al., 2009). Pedagogical techniques recommended by Kovar et al. to encourage, motivate and instill feelings of skill competence in students include: 1) Avoid embarrassment of children, 2) Respect differences in physical ability, 3) Maximize opportunities to practice skills, 4) Provide task variations, 5) Provide task progressions within lesson activities, 6) Focus on student learning and improvement (p. 267). Although teachers who employ developmentally appropriate PE practices may

utilize these strategies, the findings of this study underscore the value of what children can tell us and the need for pedagogical techniques to address children at risk of alienation. The voices of the children in this case study reveal the importance of being and feeling skillful to positive experiences and the impact of low skill on negative experiences and perceived lack of control.

Choice. All of the children in this case study referred to the importance of choice in PE when discussing perceived control. The participants agreed that children like to be given choices in gym, specifically decisions about types of activities, partners and team selection. However, all participants agreed that PE was more fun when children were able to decide on some aspects of the gym experience, subsequently giving them a sense of control over what happens in the PE setting. Children also spoke about not having choices in PE and how this lack of control could lead to nonparticipation, lack of effort and frustration.

A number of children referred to voting on which activity to play, as a way for children to exercise choice in PE. Despite having a say, the outcome was not always positive. Kristine reported an instance where voting did not have a favorable outcome for her and resulted in reduced motivation to take part. She said, "sometimes we'll have a vote between floor hockey or dodgeball...maybe you feel like playing dodgeball one day, and everyone else votes floor hockey so then you might feel kind of like you wouldn't want to play as much." Ann also expressed discontent about a situation in grade 5 where no choice was given for teams or activities. She then shared an experience in grade 6 where students were allowed to vote on the activity as evidenced in the following dialogue:

Interviewer: So when would there be a time when you can remember, where there were no decisions for the kids and the teacher just decided everything?

Ann: In grade 5, my teacher…she just kind a took the class and completely split it up, then you don't get to choose like kind of who you were with and it was, I think it was handball at the time and I wanted to play handball, but then she made us play floor hockey. And the boys didn't even want to play floor hockey either so it was kind of like….AHHHHH!! *(loud scream of frustration).*

Interviewer: Do you ever get to decide on the activities?

Ann: Yeah, sometimes, sort of sometimes…a few days ago we were playing against the French kids and she said 'K, there's either gonna be a big game of handball or a big game of floor hockey' and we voted.

Interviewer: Okay, you voted.

Ann: And the majority said handball so we played handball.

Interviewer: Okay, kids like deciding?

Ann: Um Hum.   (Ann's interview transcript, p. 9)

In this conversation, Ann was clearly frustrated when all the control over decisions in PE was teacher dominated and no control was granted to the children. She liked the idea of voting and accepted the outcome of a vote as fair for all. This sense of children being given some control over the outcome was preferable for Ann. She also expressed her preference that dance should be included in PE: "I tried soccer but I didn't like it, I tried a lot of sports but I don't really like

them…Wednesdays I'm in jazz and Saturdays I'm in hip hop, so it's what I like to do." She further stated that it would be fun to do more dance in PE.

Mark felt that kids do not normally get to make decisions about the activities in gym, but they desire choices to be offered. He reported with excitement that "sometimes when it's your birthday you get to choose." Carson, whose birthday was the week following the interview, was also looking forward to choice in gym and said, "I'm going to ask the teacher if I can choose what we do for gym." He told the interviewer that he asked in grade 4 and 5 and his teachers gave him permission to choose the activities for gym on his birthday both years. These examples from Mark and Carson reveal that individual choice of activity tends to be a special opportunity, not the norm.

Some participants talked about choice in terms of partners and team selection. Picking partners or teams had an impact on the degree of control the children felt in the PE setting. There were several stories shared by participants who recognized the injustice of picking teams via team captains. The connection between picking teams and degree of control in PE is illustrated by Ann's conversation with the interviewer:

> Ann: It was just like an example of me and Scott being the captains and he picked his friends, I picked mine and then I kept going like until like I would say 'Jess, Elsa, Jack and Tucker' kind a and then um, and then Mat and Don are left and people kind of go 'Mat, come on' *(sighing)* 'Don be on our team then' *(sighing)*

Interviewer: Yeah, so for that child, whoever it is whether it's Don, Mat or

whoever, that person feeling that they're picked last, how do you think

that affects their attitude towards gym?

Ann: They probably won't like playing that game anymore because of the

fear of being the last one picked again.

Interviewer: And do you think if that happened over and over and over...

Ann: They wouldn't really like playing anymore, they'd just kind of,

they'd fake kind of, they'd probably fake an injury or fake being sick.

Interviewer: Does that happen.

Ann: Sometimes   (Ann's interview transcript, p. 10-11)

According to Ann, the repeated experience of not being picked, or being

reluctantly picked last would be enough to make a child fake injury or illness.

Other sixth graders in the present case study also talked about the

experience of picking teams and in only one instance (Rachel's interview) was

there any mention of an alternative method to choosing teams by assigning

captains. Rachel saw the value in having the teacher decide on teams. Regarding

the significance of who picks individuals to make up a team, Rachel commented,

"It depends cause sometimes there's an odd number and then one person gets left

out and so it's kind of better if the teacher does it" (Rachel's interview transcript,

p. 14). However, Rachel also expressed frustration with teacher decisions when

she referred to a day in grade 5 which was "not fair' and "just stupid." On this

particular day the girls and boys played dodgeball in separate halves of the gym

and she disagreed with separation by gender.

Participants often mentioned non-participation and lack of effort as a result of the frustration of having no choice in PE. When asked if kids like to make choices in gym, Karen responded:

Sometime last year, like, sometimes if the boys, if they didn't like it they'd sit out and the teacher would make them come back in and play and they didn't want to so they'd just come in and sit down in the middle of the floor sort of.

Similarly Jess described the result of no choice in activities: "if we're playing a game they don't like then they just, then they don't try," and Carson pointed out the feelings and behaviors of kids who want more choice: "they don't feel good, they don't like it and wish they had more say in it…if I was them I think I'd rather be more active than just sit and pout." Rachel also commented on lack of choice resulting in low effort and said, "all the other girls don't like ball hockey" (even though she does) and concluded that because they didn't get their choice of activity, "they don't try and then they just sort of sit there."

Children also spoke of non-participation and frustration when the choice to take part was removed completely when a teacher would attempt to manage behavior by using PE as either a punishment or a privilege. Colby explained how exercise was used as punishment, essentially removing all choice of activity and affecting children's perceived degree of control in the PE environment. He said, "Sometimes like when our teacher gets a little upset with us she'll say, okay, we'll just do some kind of drills and running around." Mary also shared about a situation where undesirable behavior resulted in exercise as punishment "There

was this time when my class wasn't behaving and we had to do like push ups and jumping jacks and stuff, and we had to run laps" she said. Carson reported a slightly different consequence for misbehaving, lack of choice in partnering, which also had repercussions for feelings of lack of control. Carson said, "We weren't being quiet, we kept like talking and she was waiting for us and we wasted a lot of time in gym so she pairs us up like, pairs up three girls and one boy…so it was really annoying." Prior to this comment, Carson had just finished telling the interviewer that the teacher usually lets the students pick teams so everyone can play with someone they know.

Participation in PE was viewed as a privilege in two of the interviews. Kristine explained that if the teacher perceived undesirable behavior by a student, the result may be a withdrawal of the privilege to play. She said, "Maybe their attitude is really bad and they just didn't want to play or your attitude was bad and they did want to play, but the teacher benched them." Kristine clarified that being 'benched' meant the "you have to sit out because you weren't playing fairly or pushing or something." The second situation was explained by Ann as she said, "Abe…he had to miss gym because his locker wasn't clean and organized so he had to miss gym because of that…everybody else got to play and he didn't." Whether choice is removed through non-participation by withholding PE privileges, or undesirable activities are assigned (e.g. push ups) as punishment, children perceived a lack of control in these circumstances.

Participants were also asked how it might affect children if, over time and repeatedly, they were never given the opportunity to make choices in PE. Don

said, "If the teacher picks all the stuff, makes all the choices, then kids would not like gym after a while." When talking about choices, the interviewer asked Kristine, "If [children] went through grade after grade never really feeling like there's any say about activities…", she finished the interviewer's sentence by saying, "they probably wouldn't want to play, they'd want their own choices." The consequences of not making choices over time were articulated by Rachel in her interview as illustrated in the following dialogue:

> Interviewer: Now do you think that if somebody was in that situation where they kept not getting their choice of the activity… do you think if they were always experiencing that, do you think that might affect if they like gym or not?
>
> Rachel: Um not really, well it might if you did it like every gym class because if that happened every gym class then you wouldn't like gym but if it happened once in a while you'd still like gym. (Rachel's interview transcript, p. 17).

Rachel distinguished frequency of no choice over time as a determining factor of liking or disliking gym.

Discussion of Choice. Choice appears to be a critical part of perceived control in PE from the perspectives of the children in this study. Choice was associated with various positive aspects of PE such as enjoyment and having a sense of control. However, the participants more often spoke about having a lack of choice and the frustration, lack of effort and disengagement that could potentially ensue.

Several researchers have highlighted the importance of *choice* as a factor affecting the degree of control students have over what happens in PE (Carlson, 1995a; Couturier et al., 2005; Gibbons, 2008; Martel et al., 2002; Olafson, 2002). Similar to the opinions of the participants in this study, choice was identified as a factor in the Carlson (1995a) study that would lead to increased control and therefore more enjoyment in PE. A desire for more choices in the curriculum was also expressed by girls in grades 7 and 8 in a study by Olafson (2002). Many of the girls in Olafson's study were discontent with the traditional sports approach and military-like form of exercise in their PE classes and viewed them as barriers to participation in PE. They viewed freedom of choice in activities where students could select their preferences as a way of removing existing barriers to participation in PE. Gibbons (2008) also found choice and variety in activities to be a salient component of engagement in PE for grade 5 students. The participants in the Gibbons study were unhappy with their current PE offerings and expressed a desire to have a wider variety of options in physical activities. Most often, these students expressed a desire for activities that were perceived to be different than the typical PE units (e.g. basketball) and instead, had an emphasis on lifetime activities. They saw the need to include activities such as swimming or individual activities like dance, in the PE program. Similarly, Cothran and Ennis (1999) found that the 16 students interviewed in grades 9 to12 investigating students' perspectives on school membership and its relationship to PE, held the view that curriculum choices should be partially based on student input. The children in this

study enjoyed and looked forward to opportunities to make choices, thereby increasing their sense of control, about the types of activities performed in PE.

Although children spoke about having choices in team selection, this was not always viewed favorably. As discussed earlier in this chapter, team selection processes can be a source of adversity for students with lower skills in particular. Dissatisfaction with team formation was reported in a study by Martel et al. (2002), where students identified various perceived injustices in PE. The students felt that the procedure for forming teams via students creating the teams, was inadequate and led to inequality. The teachers in this study recognized that forming teams was "a chronic source of discontent" (Martel et al., 2002, p. 62) for their students whether the teachers formed the teams or the students formed the teams. Having no control over the process or outcome of team picking has the potential to lead to situations where children attempt to gain back some control (e.g. create a false case for non-participation) in an effort to overcome the sense of total powerlessness in PE. According to one child in the present study, if not selected or selected last for a team occurs on a regular basis, a child might fake injury or illness. Similarly, one of four themes in Carlson's (1995a) study described faking as a behavior to cope with alienation. This behavior involves "pretending to participate or faking illness or injuries" (Carlson, 1995a, p. 472). Faking was described as one of the strategies adopted by the alienated adolescent participants as a response to aversive PE experiences. Faking and other coping behaviors may go unnoticed by teachers and have the potential to become an

escape mechanism for children who find themselves powerless to exercise choice in PE.

Physical education as punishment or privilege was also associated with choice and therefore degree of control in this study. The Council on Physical Education for Children (2000) advises that it is an inappropriate practice when "exercise (running or push-ups, etc.) is used as a punishment for misbehavior and/or lack of participation" (p. 12). Such practices may portray exercise negatively (Himberg, 2000) and prevent children from adhering to the active healthy lifestyles physical educators promote. In a study by Halas (2002) conducted with adolescents in a treatment center, an alternative PE program was proposed to reclaim a learning environment free of situations where PE was used as punishment. According to Halas, "Punitive encounters such as these typify the process by which irresponsibility becomes a behavior outcome that leads to alienation from physical education" (p. 270). The alternative program did not use exercise as punishment and gave students the choice to participate or not in PE. The result was an increase in participation and a successful learning environment.

Much of what the participants in this case study shared regarding choice support the literature assertions. However, the important feature of *persistence* in the negative experiences of no choice inherent in the alienation definition appears critical to understanding the phenomenon of alienation. To address this, children were reminded during the interviews that they could recall perceptions and experiences from any or all of their elementary years. When children referred to a situation or event which appeared to exist in several grades, they were asked

specifically about the idea of persistence. This idea was presented in child friendly language (e.g. rather than 'persistence' the interviewer said 'over and over'), so that the children would understand the concept. It may be that children who experience a lack of choice, and consequent lack of control in PE, on an occasional basis, may not be at risk of alienation. However, children may become disengaged from PE which contributes to the alienation process, if they are continually feeling no control over what happens in PE through lack of choices. Rachel aptly concluded that she would still like gym if there was no choice given on occasion, but perhaps she would not like gym as much if no choice was a regular occurrence.

According to the children in this study having more control over what happens in PE through opportunities to make more choices, would increase enjoyment of PE. Engagement may potentially lead to enjoyment of PE over time and increases the likelihood of remaining enrolled throughout the high school years (Gibbons & Humbert, 2008; Gibbons, Wharf Higgins, Gaul and Van Gyn, 1999). Several researchers emphasize the importance of choice in PE to successful engagement (Gibbons, 2008; Gibbons and Gaul, 2004; Gibbons et al.,1999; Kovar et al., 2009; Pangrazi & Gibbons, 2009). Furthermore, future PE involvement for young children may depend on early positive experiences in the form of choices as revealed in studies by Gibbons et al. (1999) and Gibbons and Gaul (2004). Results in the Gibbons et al. study included the theme of "Choice and Control" where "a sense of control [was] associated with choice and participation" (p. 7). The Gibbons and Gaul study identified "more choice and

control in the determination of physical activities" (p.5) as one of eight themes influencing students' decisions to enroll in elective PE programs. While more choice in PE and the connection to more enjoyment of the subject is well supported in the literature, less is understood about the persistence of no choice linked to alienation.

Summary of Degree of Control

According to Stake (2005) the "illustration of how a phenomenon occurs in the circumstances of several exemplars can provide valued and trustworthy knowledge" (p. 459). When asked questions related to alienation in PE, specifically about powerlessness, the children in this study shared that skill and choice were key determinants of positive and negative experiences. Children also expressed the importance of having some degree of control over what occurs in PE. The stories shared by the participants in this study supported the idea that the consequences of low skill and lack of choices on an occasional basis, could lead to nonparticipation, frustration and a lack of enjoyment. The key consideration for alienation however, appears to be one of persistence in terms of degree of control. According to some of the children the frequency of negative experiences associated with low skill and no choice, therefore no control, could over time lead to a strong dislike of PE. This dislike is one factor that has the potential to contribute to the alienation process. As the exploratory nature of this study dictates, children were asked about this construct, powerlessness, and expressed perceptions of the degree of control they felt they had, or thought others might have, in the PE environment. This construct was explored as only one of the three

constructs that define alienation and therefore may not project a clear picture of what children think about alienation, only about powerlessness.

As a key construct of alienation, powerlessness relates to degree of control towards the negative end of the continuum. The feeling of having no control in PE (Carlson, 1995a) was seen in the perceptions of the grade 6 participants through their voices and their desire to have some control, or at best share the control. This concept of 'shared control' is not a new idea for educators who teach developmentally appropriate PE. Shared control of learning in PE is recommended by Stork and Sanders (2000) through clear communication of goals, open negotiation by consultation, offering appropriate options and choice, and allowing group work. In efforts to promote engagement in PE it may be of interest to teachers to look at the benefits of sharing the control of decisions with the students. Through an intentional design to include the perspectives of children, "student can be physically and emotionally drawn into lessons when teachers share control with them" (Kovar et al., 2009, p, 278). This shared control can take on the form of increased choice in small ways such as where the PE task is performed, which activity to pick from a list of possibilities, or with whom to perform a task. In essence, through giving away control to students, the teacher gains control.

Meaning

The second major theme represented in the data was *meaning*. This theme was based on the alienation construct of meaninglessness, referring to the feeling that PE has no purpose or no personal meaning (Carlson, 1995a). While the main

category of meaninglessness was the construct explored through observations and interview questions, the more neutral term of 'meaning' seemed to best represent the participants' perspectives. As was the case with degree of control, participant descriptions of PE ranged from meaningful to meaningless. Meaning was explored in terms familiar to the children such as usefulness and value. The researcher asked if the children knew what it meant to value something to ensure the questions to follow would be clearly understood. The theme of meaning was further divided into two subthemes: *lack of meaning* and *future relevance* (see figure 3).

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┌─────────────────┐  ⟨ Lack of Meaning
│     Meaning     │  ⟨ Future Relevance
└─────────────────┘
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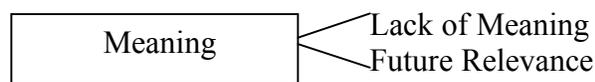
Figure 3. Meaning Subthemes

Lack of Meaning. When asked about the meaningfulness of PE, children most often shared perspectives related to a perceived lack of meaning. Specifically, children associated a lack of meaning in PE with boredom, not learning anything, and no future job use. At the end of each interview, each child was also asked for his or her thoughts on factors that could be changed to increase the meaningfulness of PE.

A number of participants identified boredom with a lack of meaning in PE. Conversations with participants about the usefulness of gym revealed that repetition of activities or activities perceived to be purposeless contributed to the feeling that PE had no personal meaning. Karen and Alison both referred to specific activities in PE they found boring. For Karen boredom in floor hockey stemmed from a lack of opportunity to feel involved in the game. She stated that

floor hockey was boring because she "didn't get to touch the puck." In reference to kickball, Alison said, "When we play it a lot it gets boring." Jess also spoke about the lack of variability in activities. She recalled that Grade 3 was her least favorite year in gym because according to her "every gym class we did the same thing and it gets boring after a while." When discussing meaning in PE, Colby also talked about repetition of activities as contributing to boredom and therefore lack of meaning:

> The activity - that could also get boring too - cause if it's something they don't like and then we just keep on playing it and playing it and playing it and then you try to ask, and then you get in trouble, so. (Colby's interview transcript, p. 8).

This statement also reveals similarities to the theme of 'degree of control' and subtheme of choice. Colby was reluctant to ask for a change of activity for fear of getting in trouble from the teacher. Ann provided an example of a repetitive circuit activity that occurred each year in the previous school she attended. Ann's perception of lack of meaning in this activity is illustrated in the following dialogue:

> Ann: It was the same activities every single Friday. There was the odd Friday that we wouldn't have it but it was more normally the same activities.
>
> Interviewer: Okay, and what grade was that?
>
> Ann: Kindergarten to about grade 4.
>
> Interviewer: Okay, so can you describe that circuit a little bit to me?

Ann: You come into the gym doors and basically you go around, like our gym kind of, and we used to have a jungle gym …then there's like relay like they put up the benches and you had to like jump over them and there's pylons that told you what to do and everything. And it was kind of fun in grade 4 because you were the leadership people in grade 4 and you got to do it with the kindergarteners, you got to bring the kindergarteners around which was fun.

Interviewer: Mm hum

Ann: But that's the only year that was really fun because you didn't have to do the circuit.

Interviewer: Mm hum, so what about the circuit didn't you like?

Ann: It just was the same things over and over again and I didn't really like it.

Interviewer: okay, so it made you feel...

Ann: It just wasn't very fun because it made me feel like I was doing the same things and they might have felt we weren't learning it enough so they kept doing it again and again. (Ann's interview transcript, p. 4-5)

According to Ann, the only fun aspect of the circuit was that in Grade 4 she got to lead the kindergarteners through it, and therefore was not required to participate in it herself. The circuit format in gym was also mentioned by other participants as one of their least favorite activities. In addition to Ann's lack of interest in the circuit that she experienced from kindergarten to grade 4, she also expressed her perspective on how gym has changed for her over time. Ann seemed to be losing

interest in PE when she said, "Nowadays, you're getting older and you don't really like gym so much anymore." For Ann, PE was not as much fun now as is was in grade 1 and 2, and therefore less meaningful. When asked if most children would agree that PE was more fun in the earlier grades, Ann responded in this way:

> No because most kids my age say that gym is still fun, like the boys would because of floor hockey and stuff and they're really competitive, but some of the girls might say that it's probably not as fun any more. (Ann's interview transcript, p. 5).

If Ann were given the opportunity to change gym she said, "no more soccer, no more floor hockey" and wanted to see more dance and gymnastics included in the PE program. Running laps was also typically viewed as boring by many children and resulted in negative feelings that were associated with a lack of meaning in PE. Several participants depicted this idea in their drawings of 'a bad day in gym'. For example, Rachel drew a picture of herself and two friends running laps and included speech bubbles to show what they were saying in the picture. During the interview Rachel commented on her drawing:

Rachel: Running laps is the worst thing ever, I just don't like it.

Interviewer: Okay…read the bubbles for me.

Rachel: 'I hate running laps, me two, me three.'

Interviewer: So this is you and your friends agreeing on the fact that running laps is not your favorite thing to do.

Rachel: Yeah, it sucks. (Rachel's interview transcript, p. 3)

Rachel told the interviewer that laps were regularly run in PE, but that she did not know the reason why running laps were included in PE. She said, "I don't know, we just do" and later commented, "…there's no reason, just for running." Rick also did not appreciate running laps but identified that the purpose was to warm-up prior to a game. His primary complaint about laps was that it took away from valuable game play time. He said of running laps, "it sucks…it wastes time" because he wanted to "play for more than 10 minutes." The researcher regularly observed Rick's enthusiasm to play each day. His performance in the gym setting and eagerness to play were consistent with his shared perceptions about running laps and other exercises that might take away from playing the game. When asked about other exercises like push ups and sits ups, Rick's reaction was, "Those are boring." Talia had a similar viewpoint to Rick, about running laps, and would rather run in the actual game than use up time and energy on laps. Kristine agreed that neither she nor her friends enjoyed running laps and in her drawing of a 'bad day in gym' there were several children running with sad faces. The drawing was labeled with the caption, "The only good thing about this is I'm running with my friends."

Also related to lack of meaning, were comments from the participants who expressed the opinion that PE was not really a subject where learning took place. When asked about the usefulness of gym, Alison thought that some students might not find it particularly useful and said, "Cause you don't really learn anything." Rachel also commented on the usefulness of gym and said, "you don't learn everything in gym." She thought that gym was a fun break from classroom

learning, "cause you're not writing and you're not sitting." Rachel's perception of gym was summed up by her comment that "It's like recess but, instead of the whole class going off doing separate things, we all do it together, which is fun." Ann also explained one of her favorite things about gym was "being able to have a period where you just don't really have to learn anything, well, you kind of are learning things, but in a fun way." These participants seemed to view the classroom for learning while the gym was for fun. Only Ann made the connection that one could have fun while learning in PE.

When children were asked about their perceptions of whether gym might be useful for children later in life, some participants made an interesting connection between lack of meaning presently in gym and the thought that it may not be useful for future vocations that do not require physical skill. Although Ann thought gym would be useful for later, she acknowledged that some children may not, depending on their future job. Regarding whether all children think gym is meaningful, she said, "No not everybody. Some people that wanna be just like the person who sits in offices all day probably don't want to be, probably don't think it's important, but I think it's important." She further explained that some children might not see the activities they do now as relevant later. She said, "Because it depends on basically what kind of job you get, like if you get a job that basically you just sit in an office all day long and don't really do anything, it's not really the best job because you don't really have physical activity in it." Rachel shared a similar viewpoint connecting the usefulness of activity in PE to future job orientation. She said, "Depends, cause if you have a job that you need to be

active, but if you have a job that you are sitting down then, like a work office, then not really." Kristine thought that people without future employment, may not find gym very useful. "Probably someone who doesn't really have a job or have to do anything because then, yeah, they wouldn't really need to know" she said.

In addition to the thoughts shared by participants about the lack of meaning in PE, when asked how they would change gym to make it more meaningful they shared a variety of ideas. There were many suggestions for change regarding types of activities and the delivery of activities. Alison would "choose games that everyone really liked" and Jess would "make it something new every week." Ann would do more dance and no sports and she also suggested, "Get boys out of gym. Boys and girls in separate gyms…Like two gyms, one for girls and one for boys." Many of the participants suggested activities that were not typically part of the elementary school PE curriculum. Kristine thought golf would be fun to include as well as "more sports that schools don't usually offer, so like sports you have to pay for." If it were up to Kristine, "we would probably do, not as much dodge ball, but more sports we don't do very often, like badminton or tennis." Other new or novel activities that participants expressed a desire to incorporate into the PE program included trampoline, swimming, field trips, horseback riding, gymnastics and dance.

Other suggestions to increase the meaningfulness of PE experiences included comments about the delivery of the activities. Mary saw the value in changing rules to involve more players in a game, and create equal chances to touch the ball. The following quote epitomizes Mary's perspective:

Well, I would change some of the rules so it's more like there's more like fitness and not just like standing around waiting for the ball and saying 'here here' like in handball some people just stand around and say 'here, give me the ball' or something or yell at the person to give them the ball…and so I would change so they have to run, like run back if the closest person has to run and the people, if you were back, you have to run forwards so it gives them a chance to get the ball. Most of the time people just throw to the back or they just throw to the side.

Jess also pointed out that kickball was one of her least favorite gym activities and said, "I don't really like to play kickball cause we go around from the three bases and then we sit down until the whole class goes." Jess did not enjoy games with a lot of sitting and would change gym to include more active involvement. Colby commented on the traditional delivery format of volleyball and expressed dislike for the game. He agreed that he did not get to touch the ball very much and said, "It's just kind a the way of the game…that's probably most of the reason why…most of the time when we play in gym it usually goes just back and forth in the same kind of pattern." He further explained that "usually it goes from this side, to this side, back and keeps on going like that…until someone misses it." Colby thought, "until we kind of get older, it doesn't really move a lot."

Additional areas for potential change offered by the sixth graders were associated with facilities and equipment. Many of the participants suggested that they would have gym outside more often. Some participants also desired more space when they were in the gym, and wished they could have gym class in the

whole gym rather than using the divider to share with the other grade 6 class.

Mary explained that it was more fun to have the whole gym "cause we have more

room and you're not bumping into people and crashing, like someone pushing you

into the wall." Finally the children suggested equipment considerations that could

make gym better for some participants (e.g. the correct size hockey stick and

fixing the broken equipment).

Discussion of Lack of Meaning. It was not unexpected that boredom

surfaced as a prevalent idea within the subtheme of lack of meaning. There is

widespread support in the literature that student boredom in PE exists, and

contributes to feelings of meaninglessness or lack of relevance (Carlson, 1995a;

Ennis et al., 1997; Garn & Cothran, 2006; Gibbons & Humbert, 2008; Gibbons et

al., 1999; Rice, 1988). Among the findings in the Ennis et al. (1997) study that

examined situational and personal contextual factors that enhance or minimize

student engagement in PE, one participant identified boredom due to the repetitive

nature of activities as impacting his motivation to take part. This is evidenced in

the following quote:

> Most of them we've been playing the same ways since elementary school.
>
> It's the same sports over and over, every school you go to. That's why I'm
>
> not interested in it much any more. It gets old playing the same thing over
>
> and over again" (Ennis et al., 1997, p. 61).

In a study conducted by Garn and Cothran (2006), disclosing undergraduate

students' retrospective views of least and most fun PE activities, "calisthenics and

fitness activities were frequently mentioned by students as having no meaning or

no fun" (p. 291). Similar statements were heard in the voices of the participants in the present study. Activities that were perceived to be boring were kickball, floor hockey, running laps, circuits, push ups, and sit ups. Ann, the girl who provided the extensive description of the circuit that was done for most of her elementary school years, also commented on how her enjoyment of PE had changed over time. Specifically she referred to losing interest, as she was getting older, in part because of the repetitive nature of gym activities. This reoccurring lack of meaning in PE over a number of years, ties into the critical component of persistence associated with the phenomenon of alienation. It is the accumulation of these and other meaningless experiences that have the potential to contribute to alienation from PE.

Running laps was the most predominant dislike contributing to a of *lack of meaning* in PE and emerged in all data sources (observations, drawings, and interviews). Although there was a general consensus that running laps was boring, some of the participants could see the purpose (i.e. for warm up) while others could not understand why they were running laps. Pedagogical considerations for elementary aged children regarding student engagement to avoid boredom in both warm up activities and learning activities include short practice sessions with varied teaching approaches in an intrinsically motivating success-oriented environment (Kovar et al., 2009; Pangrazi & Gibbons, 2009). Children expressed a desire for less repetition and more variety to reduce boredom in PE. Providing choice, as discussed in the theme 'degree of control' may be at least in part a solution to children's complaints about boredom due to repetition of activities.

Participants also wanted to understand the purpose behind the activities they viewed as boring (e.g. running laps) in order to find value and increase the meaningfulness of PE.

When asked about meaning in PE, participants also spoke about the idea of not learning anything as contributing to a perceived lack of meaning. Other researchers have also found an association between student perceptions of PE and lack of learning. In a study by Couturier et al. (2005), 18.7% of 5308 students ranging in age from 11 to 20 agreed with the statement, "I never learn anything in Physical Education" (p. 172) when surveyed about PE. One of the participants in the Carlson (1995a) study was asked about what she had learned in PE and responded, "Nothing that I can think of. Basically I have learned plenty of games, but that is not beneficial" (p. 470). Similar to the participants in the present case study, this adolescent was expressing her view that the games in gym were irrelevant in her life and she did not believe learning occurred in PE. Alison, Rachel and Ann all talked about the idea that learning did not happen in gym for either themselves or others. Gym class was typically viewed as a change from classroom work and a welcomed fun break in the routine. Ann was of the opinion that the reason behind repeating the circuit was because the teachers may have thought learning was not occurring. Participating in the circuit lacked meaning for Ann and it did not appear to hold any value in terms of exercise or mastery of movement skills.

The children's responses about learning in PE bring into question the importance of children recognizing learning outcomes. Physical Education is

often positively associated with fun, however learning is also an essential part of PE (Gallahue & Cleland Donnelly, 2003; Kovar et al., 2009). For example, in order for improvement in motor skills to occur, student awareness and understanding of the body as a vehicle for movement in various settings is essential. Involving children in the assessment of their own performance in PE may also provide an element of realism to overcome lack of meaning as noted by Pangrazi and Gibbons (2009). According to these authors, "effective assessment and evaluation should be as meaningful as possible to the student and a realistic indication of their achievement and progress" (p. 98). Promoting cognitive understanding of the objectives of PE and its benefits may increase the recognition of its value and therefore relevance as a subject for children.

Also as a factor contributing to the overall feeling of lack of meaning presented earlier in this chapter was the idea that there was limited usefulness for gym in relation to future job pursuits. Several participants expressed that gym may not be helpful particularly if a future vocation was sedentary. Future job irrelevance was echoed in the Carlson (1995a) study through the voices of all eight participants identified as alienated. For example, one participant sarcastically commented:

> I don't understand why you think it [physical education] will make a difference later in your life 'cause what am I going to do? I'm in the office, and I can shoot a wad a paper into the waste basket. It is not going to do me any good later on. (Carlson, 1995a, p. 470).

Instead of considering future job pursuits, it may be more meaningful for children to realize the immediate value of being physically active. Given that "elementary-age children are motivated by the concrete reality of 'here and now,' most of the reasons for being active should be grounded in the present, not in what will happen in the future" (Kovar et al., 2009, p. 279). Although it is unlikely that children's perceptions of gym as not useful to a future vocation would lead to alienation, it is note worthy that it appears to contribute to children's overall sense of 'lack of meaning' in PE.

The suggestions by participants for changes to PE added a positive angle to address 'lack of meaning' by focusing on the kinds of modifications that the children envision for gym classes. Variety and being able to try new and novel activities was a suggestion by many, and reminiscent of the subtheme of 'choice' as discussed in 'degree of control.' Previous research supports this notion of desired change. The students in a study by Halas (2002) participated in the impetus toward an alternate PE program where many of their suggestions for change resulted in a more engaging climate overall. Halas suggested that "providing a small but popular slate of activity options that are personally relevant and meaningful to students may encourage greater participation" (p. 283). The children also expressed a desire to change the delivery of activities. Jess did not like the fact that there was a 'lot of sitting' in the game of kickball and she would rather be more active in gym. When Mary suggested that she might change the rules to a handball game so that more people had a chance to touch the ball, she captured the essence of developmentally appropriate PE where success and

engagement for all participants is the goal when delivering games content (Pangrazi & Gibbons, 2009). Approaches such as Teaching Games for Understanding (TGfU) emphasize the modification of formal games and rules to give maximum practice to all players (strategic before technical approach) resulting in physical, cognitive and affective engagement (Hopper, 2002). One of the claims of the TGfU approach is that is gives meaning to playing games and purpose to how to use skills within a game situation (Hopper, 2002; Kretchmar, 2005). According to Kretchmar (2005) TGfU is "a holistic approach that relies on understanding and meaning, not just on rote movement..." (p. 210). Approaches such as TGfU may help to address meaning for children by engaging them in fun, active participation while fostering an understanding of the game components and developing skills.

Future Relevance. Although many participants described a lack of meaningful participation opportunities in PE, they also identified meaningful aspects linked to future relevance. A frequent reflection shared by the participants was the idea that present PE involvement in school might contribute to opportunities for professional sport involvement in the future. According to Mary, activities done in the gym at school were useful and have meaning "cause if you're gonna be like an Olympics person then that'll help." Kristine also saw the value in gym for future participation in the Olympics when she said, "Cause you could try out for a volleyball team and go to the Olympics or skating or skiing or something like that." Kristine aspired to participate in figure skating in the future at the Olympics. There were also several participants who talked about

professional hockey in the future as relevant to their current participation in gym. Colby said, "For me, I want to grow up and try to get into the national hockey league…now that we're doing kind of floor hockey and things like that, like teamwork and things." Rick also wanted to try out for a national hockey league team and thought it would be great to get paid to play hockey "instead of having to pay to play hockey." Floor hockey in gym was one of Rick's favorite activities and he equated the purpose for current participation with future possibilities. Rachel also connected the relevance of current activities with future possibilities when she said, "I know that this isn't very easy to do, but if you became like a professional sports player or something." One participant, Karen, mentioned professional soccer as a future aspiration. Soccer was the subject of her drawing of a 'good day in gym' and discussion with the researcher during Karen's interview revealed the connections she made between soccer in gym and soccer outside the school setting. She said, "It's a good sport soccer, I play it a lot" and was excited to tell the researcher, "This outdoor season…my soccer team won gold, gold in provincials." For Karen, PE held meaning because playing soccer in gym had on impact on her soccer pursuits outside of school.

Besides perceptions of future relevance in terms of professional sport involvement, some of the participants made connections to future jobs which also required one to be active. For example, both Alison and Tessa thought current gym participation would be pertinent if one would like to become a gym teacher or instructor in the future. Other participants mentioned jobs that have an activity requirement and evaluated the usefulness of gym depending on the type of job one

pursues. Mentioned earlier in the *lack of meaning* subtheme, Ann recognized that gym may not be relevant in an office job, but did see relevance in other vocations. For example, Ann's description of how her parents' jobs relate to PE is outlined in the following quote:

My mom, she has to go up and down the stairs from the main part, like her office kind of, and then just basically running around with two kids too. And then my dad's a plumber and he has to, he works putting in pipes and everything in buildings and he has to go up, he works in basements so he has to go up and down stairs…my dad being a plumber you kind of really really need it [physical activity] (Ann's interview transcript, p. 6).

Rachel recognized the value of being active in PE now for the future, "if you have a job that you need to be active." She agreed that a job like a fireman would require a person to be active, "I guess, cause you have to be quick," she said.

Future relevance as a subtheme also included the sixth grader's perceptions of health as a viable purpose for participation in, and useful of, PE. When asked about the usefulness of PE, Alison said, "It keeps you active and healthy", Carson said, "You get exercise moving around," and Mark said gym is "so you could stay healthy…diseases and stuff." Jess attested that gym was "helping you build up your energy…and you're getting lots of exercise." She viewed this as valuable for later, as "exercising helps you when you're older…then you'd be more energetic later and it would be easier for you to walk a long ways." The physical endurance to walk a long distance was also referred to by Ann as she spoke about the demands of camping. "You go on nature walks and

you have to be able to last the whole thing," she said. She related other camping skills to the physical skills gained in gym, including being strong enough to hook up the motor home and chop wood. Another example of a camping scenario where gym was perceived as valuable in transference of skills, was portrayed by Tessa when she concluded, "if they're like teaching you how to climb and [when camping] there's a bear coming after you, that would be a good time to use your gym skills." For both Ann and Tessa, the physical health benefits of PE transferred over to some very practical aspects of their lives, therefore making meaningful links. Even though Don also saw the relationship between gym and health, his dislike for the subject appeared to be a barrier to attaining health. He said, "Probably some people don't really like gym. I wish, I wish I liked it so I could be healthy."

Discussion of Future Relevance. When asked questions about whether children might view gym as useful for later in life, participants spoke about its relevance in terms of future possibilities including professional sport, future vocations and health. Several participants made the connection between meaning in PE and involvement in professional sport. All the examples provided by the participants with the exception of Kristine's (figure skating), centered on the framework of a traditional sport model where team games (e.g. hockey or soccer) dominate the curriculum and were seen as potential future professional sporting opportunities. It appeared that from the perspectives of grade 6 children, successful involvement in professional sport was a viable option despite the fact that few athletes actually succeed in sport (Coakley, 2009). Only Rachel

mentioned that success at high level sport was difficult to achieve. Participants also provided several examples of other jobs that might be connected to physical attributes gained in PE, potentially making gym classes more meaningful. These included jobs such as gym instructor, fireman, and other vocations requiring physical skills.

Children associated meaning in PE with the health benefits of physical activity. Children spoke about future wellbeing in connection with PE, viewing exercise as a contributor to overall health. Gibbons and Humbert (2008) reported similar findings in their study with grade 6 and 7 girls. The theme, "A healthy body is a moving body" (p. 178) articulated the position that activity in PE leads to health. Gibbons (2008) also found the concept of healthy living (both activity in PE and eating habits) to be relevant for the grade 5 participants in her study. One of four themes in Gibbon's study reflects this student awareness of health in the title, "Meaning of Health and Physical Activity is Recognized and Understood" p. 19). This same awareness was present in the comments of several participants in the present study who recognized and understood that in part, the purpose of gym was for health benefits. One participant (Don) identified a desire to be healthy through participation in PE, but indicated he would not benefit because his dislike of gym would circumvent his participation. Despite knowledge of health and healthy outcomes, this knowledge was not substantial enough to overcome Don's dislike of PE to result in reaping the health benefits. A study conducted by Ferguson, Yesalis, Pomrehn and Kirkpatrick (1989) examined the attitudes of students in grades 6 to 8 toward PE and their knowledge of the

benefits of exercise to predict exercise intentions and behaviors. These authors concluded that "students who perceived exercise as beneficial [and] exhibited positive attitudes about physical education…were more likely to intend to exercise in the future than those who did not exhibit such attitudes" (Ferguson et al., 1989, p. 115). Although Don demonstrated knowledge of the benefits of activity participation through PE, his dislike of gym remained a barrier to achieving health. While knowledge of benefits is important, lack of enjoyment in PE appears to be, at least in Don's case, the more significant determinant of future participation. This highlights the salience of enjoyment to participation. While knowledge of health outcomes may contribute to the relevance of PE from the perspectives of children, alone it may not lead to engagement.

Summary of Meaning.

The participants in this study spoke about meaning in PE in relation to both the present and the future on a continuum from meaningful to meaningless. A lack of meaning in PE was associated with boredom and repetition of activities. Suggestions for change included adding variety to activities and alternative forms of activity delivery. Lack of meaning was also associated with 'not learning anything.' While some participants made connections between 'not learning anything' and meaninglessness, others related the meaning of PE to the future vocation one might pursue. Through all participant descriptions with the subtheme of *lack of meaning*, engagement in PE appeared to be in part influenced by the meaningfulness gym had for them personally.

Lack of meaning was the most significant dimension for alienated students

in Carlson's (1995a) study. Beyond lack of control or isolation, lack of personal meaning was established as having the most influence on whether students were at risk of alienation in PE. Carlson (1995a) outlines the importance of meaning in the following summary:

This meaning leads down one of two paths. If physical education class makes sense to students (i.e., if the subject is perceived as having positive value for them personally), they take the nonalienation path. The alternate path is taken when students find physical education does not fill a need in their lives…students who do not see the use for physical education may find themselves alienated by the requirement that they participate (p. 474).

Carlson suggested that if students decide that PE has personal meaning, it may help them overlook negative situations in particular gym classes, and therefore avoid the eventual path of alienation. Conversely, if aversive experiences are continual in PE and negative perceptions are difficult to abandon, students may perceive no meaning (and consequent isolation and lack of control) leading towards the path of alienation. In the perceptions of the sixth grade participants in the present study, the most salient component of lack of meaning was described in terms of activities (e.g. running laps, doing circuits) that were perceived as meaningless. It is possible that the persistence of meaningless situations over time in the form of activities that children view as irrelevant may contribute to alienation.

In order to promote meaning in PE, Pagnano (2006) suggests "student-centered learning, cooperative learning, critical thinking and curricular models

such as TGfU" be incorporated into the PE teaching and learning environment. While many of these concepts are not new to physical educators, it remains challenging to implement them. Chen (1998) encourages educators to "…help students transform the purpose of an activity into a personal desire, turn their interest in an activity into a personal striving, and bridge their knowledge and skill into willingness so they continue to pursue a physically active lifestyle" (p. 304). It appears that the actual activities themselves (content) and the teaching methods (delivery) may have a significant influence on meaning in PE for students. It may be advantageous for teachers to be aware of the perceptions children have about PE (engagement and alienation) in terms of the meaning PE holds for them, in order to consciously align pedagogical intentions with the needs of their students. If teachers of PE are cognizant of planning for meaningful experiences, it follows that children will have opportunities to apply meaning to their experiences and reap the benefits in the long term. This conclusion is shared by Pagnano (2006): "As physical educators, we can almost universally agree that if we want our middle school students to adopt a physically active life-style, then they must engage in movement experiences that are personally meaningful" (p. 12).

How can the PE experience be made more meaningful for children? Similar to the concept of shared control presented in the previous theme 'degree of control', the concept of shared meaning may help teachers to achieve the goal of enhanced meaning in PE for their students. A lack of shared meaning appears to exist between students and teachers as children see PE as a place to play and have fun whereas teachers see PE as a time for purposeful instruction (Stork &

Sanders, 2000). Meaningful experiences in PE may not have the same connotations for children as they do for adults. Stork and Sanders contend that "teachers must attempt to share the meaning that students have for their instructional experiences rather than expecting students to take on the perspective of the teacher" (p. 70). This underscores the value of listening to the voices of children regarding the issues that affect them. In order to create meaningful experiences for children in PE, their perspectives must be taken into consideration. In this study, the subthemes of 'lack of meaning' and 'future relevance' bring attention to what contributes to meaningful PE experiences for children.

Social Factors

Social factors was identified as the third and final major theme of this study. This theme is representative of the alienation construct of social isolation. Social isolation refers to the feeling of being alone or isolated, either socially or emotionally, from peers in the PE setting (Carlson, 1995a). While the main category of social isolation was the construct under investigation, the term 'social factors' best represented the participant's perspectives about the types of social interactions, or lack of interactions, affecting their perceptions of PE. Two subthemes of social factors were identified in the data: 'having friends' and 'feeling rejected' (see figure 4).

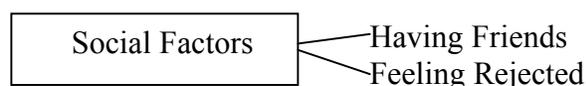Social Factors —— Having Friends / Feeling Rejected

Figure 4. Social Factors Subthemes

When asked questions about the construct of social isolation, children shared dichotomous perspectives. On one hand, children spoke about the importance of having friends and how taking part with friends in PE increased their enjoyment of gym. On the other hand, participants also referred to feeling rejected in PE. These feelings were associated with feeling left out due to low skill, not being selected for teams, and being ridiculed or bullied. Although the interviews were the primary data sources, observations and drawings also contributed to the understanding of the subthemes of 'having friends' and 'feeling rejected' within the theme of 'social factors.'

Having Friends. Children recognized the importance of friends in PE. Having friends to participate with made gym more fun and not having friends to engage with made gym less fun. At the beginning of Talia's interview, she mentioned a positive memory of gym as the time she first met her friend Jess. Throughout the interview, Talia shared numerous stories about friendships that were tied to her personal enjoyment of gym. In the following interview conversation, Talia expressed her perceptions about why other children might not enjoy gym and also applied the example to her own experience.

> Talia: Well maybe there's someone that's in their group and they're not
> friends with them or something
> Interviewer: Okay
> Talia: Maybe they don't enjoy gym because of that, because that happened
> to me once.
> Interviewer: Yeah?

Talia: ...and then you're partners with someone and they sit beside you and they say something mean to you and you don't really want to be on their team.

Interviewer: Right

Talia: Then you tell the teacher and then you have to tell the teacher why and then it'll be like, oh you don't like that person, no it's just because you said this thing, right? (Talia's interview transcript, p. 6).

Making friends and having friends in gym appeared to have a substantial influence on Talia's perception of enjoyment of the subject. When asked if she would change anything about gym, Talia said, "you get to pick your friends that go with you" meaning that she would get to take part with her friends. Kristine agreed that a 'good day' in gym was when "all my friends are on my team." Later in her interview Kristine highlighted the importance of friends in relation to engaging in activity. She thought that not being with a friend on a team may affect how children viewed gym. She said that if you didn't have a friend, "then you would have to go with someone else and you wouldn't really be paying attention and you'd be paying attention to the other people and you'd be watching them have fun and then you wouldn't be." The interviewer then probed further about the idea of persistence inherent in the definition of alienation. The interviewer began, "Now do you think if that happened to you every day…" and before the sentence was completed, Kristine said emphatically, "That would feel kind of bad." Kristine confirmed her viewpoint of the importance of friends in her

drawing of a 'bad day' in gym as the caption above her illustration of running laps read, "The only good thing about this is I'm running with my friends."

Rick also commented on how it might feel for children to never be on the same team with a friend when he said, "Sad kind a cause you don't get to be with your friends ever." Knowing that Rick was a competitive player in gym, the interviewer asked if it mattered to Rick if he could not be with friends when he played. Rick responded, "Not really." He recognized that for many children, being with friends was an important part of PE, but his personal enjoyment was not dependent on playing with friends. Rachel thought that being on a team with your friends was an advantage. She explained, "And the reason you want to be with your friends is because you work with them better and then if you work with them better, then you'll have a funner time." Rachel explained that some children would make sure they were with friends when the teacher used the 'numbering off' method for team division. This method is when the teacher creates two teams by lining the children up and counting one, two alternately down the line. Rachel explained how the children would count ahead and change positions in the line up to be on the same team with their friends Other participants also reported similar scenarios, highlighting the importance children placed on being with their friends in PE.

The salience of friends was not only apparent in the interview data, but was also supported in the observation field notes. The researcher noticed that the sixth graders socialized often, not only in the classroom, but in PE as well. This

was evident in the following field note entries taken during observations of handball and floor hockey on two separate occasions.

Observation Notes, October 22nd, p. 8

1:53 Rotation of teams. I sit on the bench with the team that waits. Chatting on the bench with the kids. Some acknowledge me. Three boys talk and play with pylons – not watching the game. Put the pylons on their heads; yell through them like a megaphone – lots of chatter, laughter.

Observation Notes, November 7th, p. 28

1:10 Game on. Girls on the bench are talking about who's going to Jess' birthday party. Then there's talk about who is away, who they're missing.

Discussion of Having Friends. When asked question about social isolation, the participants in this case study spoke about their perceptions of this construct in a positive light. Specifically, they talked about having friends, and the importance of friends for the enjoyment of PE. The importance of friends is well documented in the literature with regard to feeling included and enjoying PE (Garn & Cothran, 2006; Gibbons et al., 1999; Gosling et al., 2008). The social aspects of PE were regarded among the most fun memories, recalled by the undergraduate participants' in a study by Garn and Cothran. Participants shared incidents of making new friends in PE and that activities were always fun as long as friends were involved. Similarly in this present study, Talia identified meeting her friend Jess, when asked about a good memory of gym. In a study by Gosling et al. (2008) that explored the perceptions of physical activity and healthy eating for fifth grade students, the importance of friends was also highlighted. The authors

noted that "inherent in all the discussions [with focus group participants] that friends played an important part in their enjoyment of the activity" (p. 172). Gibbons et al. (1999) explored the factors that encouraged and discouraged adolescent females to enroll in elective PE classes. Gibbons and her colleagues found that a major source of enjoyment in PE for the students was the social environment considered unique to the gym setting. The students felt that PE classes afforded opportunities to have fun with their friends as opposed to the "other classes [where] you're working the whole time" (p. 9). A number of participants in the present study also identified having fun in PE as tied to activity engagement with friends. Smith (1999) conducted a study to examine the perceptions of grade 7 and 8 adolescents about peer relationships and physical activity participation. Social factors in physical activity settings (including PE) such as friendships and peer acceptance were found to contribute to the participants' formation of positive attitudes and behaviors towards the activity. According to Smith, "enhancing peer relationships in the physical activity setting might be a viable approach to promoting active living among young people" (p. 346-347).

Weiss (2007) also emphasized the direct influence that peers (and other social supports) such as teammates and close friends, have on perceived competence and consequent feelings of enjoyment and motivation. According to Weiss, "Children and adolescents experience fun when there are opportunities for...affirming friendships" (p. 9). One of the goals in a study conducted by Weiss and Smith (2002) with junior youth participants enrolled in tennis programs, was

to examine the quality of sport friendships. Theses researchers found that the youth associated more fun in tennis with "…companionship and pleasant play…" (p. 433). In a review of literature examining the quality of friendships in sport contexts Weiss (2004) concluded that, "having a close friend, experiencing positive friendship quality, and perceiving social support from friends are strong predictors of positive self-evaluation, affective responses, and motivational processes in the physical domain" (p.183) for children. Similarly, the participants in the present study referred to the importance of friends in PE to their enjoyment and motivation to take part. Although the participants were asked questions related to social isolation, the emphasis they placed on having friends appears critical to positive PE experiences.

Feeling Rejected. When asked questions about the construct of social isolation, children shared stories and experiences related to feeling rejected in PE. Specifically, children spoke about feeling left out due to low skill, not being chosen during team selection, and being ridiculed or bullied. Feeling rejected was tied to the behaviors of others, peers in particular, in the PE setting.

Being lower skilled than classmates often resulted in feelings of rejection. This idea was also represented in the *skill* subtheme of *degree of control* earlier in this chapter. Feeling left out as a result of low skill was apparent in Mary's experience. She said, "There was this one time…in handball the other day no one was passing me the ball so I kind of felt left out cause I can get goals and stuff but not all the time." Mary concluded that because she could not score all the time, her teammates did not pass her the ball and as a result she felt left out. Jess also

commented about a classmate feeling rejected due to low skill as illustrated in the
following dialogue:

> Jess: There was this really short person in our class and everybody would
> say that he was too short to be the goalie so he would feel left out so he
> would just sit on the bench.
>
> Interviewer: Oh, so he didn't even play as a player?
>
> Jess: No
>
> Interviewer: He'd just sit out. For the whole class?
>
> Jess: Yeah
>
> Interviewer: Wow, that's hard for him. Yeah, so how does that make him
> feel?
>
> Jess: Made him feel bad.
>
> Interviewer: Did you see how he acted?
>
> Jess: Yeah, he was always just sitting around and he was just staring at the
> ground.
>
> Interviewer: Oh okay. Yeah, so, do you think that happens often in gym?
>
> Jess: Some, Um Yeah. (Jess's interview transcript, p. 9-10)

Later in her interview Jess made reference to this same episode. She said, "if
someone wants to be goalie and then someone says 'no you can't cause you're not
good enough,' they feel like they aren't good enough to play so you feel left out."
Don talked about his own experience regarding being left out and feeling rejected.
Although he thought of himself as a 'good goalie' Don reported, "No one gives

me a chance." He also referred to low skill level when asked why some people are picked last, "They probably suck," he said.

Feelings of being left out or excluded were also echoed in the voices of many participants when referring to team selections, in particular not being chosen or being chosen last. When asked about a time when children may have felt left out, Mary spoke about a boy at her old school as illustrated in the following conversation:

> Mary: Oh, well there's - in grade, well - for a few years at my old school until grade, from kindergarten to grade 4 there's this one named Shawn, he was um, nobody like, cause he was he was very skinny and stuff and like he didn't really like, like he was active but nobody really liked him cause he was annoying cause he bothered everybody and stuff and nobody would pick him first for the team, nobody would pass him the ball, no one would like let him be goalie, nobody would let him do anything. Then finally one day we were playing soccer outside and I was a team captain and I pick Shawn first and he was so happy.
>
> Interviewer: Good, wow, did you do that on purpose?
>
> Mary: Yup
>
> Interviewer: Just so that he would be included?
>
> Mary: Yup
>
> Interviewer: Good for you. So when he was left out, let's just think about him, when he was left out like that and all those things are happening, how did he look, or what did you do?

Mary: Well, I could tell by his face, he wasn't happy and he didn't like, like he felt like, he looked kind of lonely and sad. Where when I picked that day he looked really happy and excited.

Interviewer: Oh, that's great.

Mary: He was being friendly cause when no one picked him he'd be kind of mean and then we'd ask him to pass the ball or something if he actually got it for the first time he'd be like "NO" and he would start running with it and stuff.

Interviewer: Oh.

Mary: That time he actually cooperated when I picked him.

Interviewer: Oh yeah, well, that's good for you. Do you think that happens quite often in gym?

Mary: Yeah.

Interviewer: Okay.

Mary: Cause some people don't like other people.

According to Mary, there were several reasons why Shawn felt excluded, including not being chosen during the team selection process. In Mary's follow-up interview she spoke again about Shawn and the interviewer probed about persistence. The interviewer said, "if he was always left out and always the guy who wasn't picked and that kind of thing, year after year, class after class, how do you think that would affect his attitude towards gym?" Mary responded, "He probably wouldn't like it very much, it would be his worst, [subject] probably because he'd be like 'nobody likes, or nobody picks me,' so." Colby also spoke

about a student who might be feeling rejected because he was not chosen, as illustrated in the following dialogue:

> Colby: I don't really know a lot this year but last year there was a boy that I tried to get involved but nobody else really did so I don't think that boy felt very good.
>
> Interviewer: Yes
>
> Colby: And nobody really gives them a chance…and that wouldn't feel very good. (Colby's interview transcript, p. 8).

Tessa said of students who were always chosen last for a team, "They get kind of not appreciated." She then elaborated:

> "Say there's four kids, and three kids left. 'I'll take him.'…'no you take him' 'no no not me' fighting saying no…fighting over like, no no no I don't want him on my team. And that makes you feel left out…But then the teacher says, 'take him!'"

When asked whether Tessa thought children experienced being left out during the team selection process over and over again, she shared that the teacher would intervene.

Karen referred to the feeling of rejection when it came to choosing partners in PE. She said, "Sometimes if we're choosing partners and somebody might be like the only one not being asked, and then they feel left out." Ann was asked to expand on the topic of being left out in PE and how often that might happen, to explore the impact of persistence. This is illustrated in the following dialogue:

Interviewer: What if kids had these negative experiences repeatedly?

Ann: That would definitely affect the way they participate in gym cause if they kept getting left out in gym they wouldn't want to play again. They wouldn't try out for teams in grade 7, 8, and 9. It might happen all year but not through all the grades because that probably wouldn't happen. Normally it happens for a while during a year and then it's over with.

Some of the children in this case study referred to the experience of feeling rejected in the form of being ridiculed or bullied in PE. While ridicule often occurred as a result of low skill that children associated with 'degree of control' in PE, it was relevant to the context of social factors as well.

Tessa referred to a few incidents where derogatory comments and name calling occurred as a result of the team selection process in PE. She shared several examples in the following quote:

> "Don says, like he says to Abe, 'you're fat.'…well look at him, they're both the same, and then they pick on him. He picks on me and says that I'm fat. Of course we're just made like that. And everybody makes fun of first nation and we're like, what's wrong with first nation?"

Later in the interview Tessa shared more about being subjected to bullying at recess. She said, "They throw wood chips at me." She also referred to the yelling that takes place during dodgeball. She said, "Don yells at them so much…he's yelly…doesn't feel too like a good day in gym." When sharing the episode about yelling, Tessa pointed out that the best part about dodgeball was "probably the sitting out part cause then you don't have to get hit all the time." Jess was also

subject to yelling when she shared "if you don't make the shot people yell at you…it makes me feel bad" and added that other kids "don't like to be yelled at." In his interview, Don also shared several incidents he felt were unjust, all in relation to his classmate Abe. This was evident in a number of comments shared throughout Don's interview:

> I also don't like when people trip me, and I'm not doing anything…But Abe still trips everyone…Grade 4 Abe was in my class, like the bad days in gym, we played a lot of dodgeball and Abe still trips people…It bothers me cause everyone else can do it and I can't. Abe makes fun of me, 'you're sucky you don't even know how to do a push up'…If I try out for a football team in High School, Abe will probably too, and ruin my fun…If Abe was on my team and he was freaking out then I would go to the side and let him play.

At the end of the interview the researcher asked Don what he might like to change about PE. He replied, "No tripping people on purpose."

Discussion of Feeling Rejected. The children in this case study identified a number of social factors tied to feeling rejected in PE. The impact of low perceived skill by classmates on feeling left out was referred to by several children in this study. Suomi, Collier and Brown (2003) examined the factors that affected the social experiences in PE of 12 students (six kindergarteners and six grade 4's), either positively or negatively. They found, "In some cases, negative social experiences occurred, especially for the students who were struggling...these children often felt left out" (p. 199). The researchers defined the

'strugglers' as those who were less skilled than their peers. Carlson's (1995b) study investigated the PE experiences of eight students with low skill. One of the goals of this study was to examine the students' relationships with their teammates. Although these students were conscious of their limitations they valued being included by their higher skilled counterparts and "trust from their teammates was very important" (p.7).

According to the participants in this study, not being chosen for a team or being chosen last contributed to feeling rejected. In their study, Suomi, Collier and Brown (2003) labeled these types of students the "leftovers" when it came time to choose partners or teams. They were the students who would inevitably be the last chosen and appeared to endure the social repercussions of the 'leftover' subculture including feelings of exclusion and behaviors of withdrawal. Feelings of rejection, when it came to choosing partners, were also experienced by the participants in a study by Bencal (2003). Bencal studied the lived experiences in PE of four participants who were referred to as non-aggressive socially isolated (NASI) students. NASI students were defined as those who were typically socially estranged from most of their peers, demonstrating self-isolating behaviors or experience exclusion from peers. These students were most successful when they could be involved in selecting teams and partners. When they were not chosen or partnered with an accepting friend, the NASI students reported "increased feelings of isolation" (p. 112). This is similar to the story of Shawn's experience of exclusion as described by Mary. Shawn demonstrated excitement and cooperation when chosen first, but appeared lonely and withdrawn when not

selected. In a study by Martel et al. (2002) about students' and teachers' views on injustices in the gym, forming teams was a contentious issue. When students were asked to form teams, the result was rejection of certain students who were never asked. When teachers formed the teams, the students complained that the teams were unequal in skill caliber. The teachers attributed student complaints about team formation, not to the skill inequalities but rather to the "frustration of students not being on the same team as their friends" (p. 62).

It was not unexpected that ridicule and bullying were present within the major theme of social factors. There is support in the literature that these situations in PE exist, and contribute to a negative social climate of PE (Carlson, 1995a; Cothran & Ennis, 1999; Humbert, 1995; Portman, 1995a). Carlson (1995a) investigated the feelings and actions of adolescent students identified as alienated from PE. These students reported a "strong sense of separation from their peers" (p. 471) with responses such as "I am afraid that I am going to mess up and that everyone is going to laugh at me" (p. 471). Similar stories of being made fun of were shared by the students with low skill in Portman's (1995a) study where participants "felt they would be more successful in class if they were not publicly criticized by their peers" (p. 451). Both Tessa and Jess spoke of situations where yelling in gym did not contribute to a positive social climate, similar to the theme in Portman's study "Mostly Everyone Yells at Me" (p. 451). Yelling in PE was also referred to by a participant in the Cothran and Ennis (1999) study examining students' sense of membership in PE when she said "Like I want to be in here with people I don't even know and have them be yelling at me" (p. 243). Humbert

(1995) investigated the experiences of adolescent females in grades 9 to 12 using case study methodology and she "repeatedly heard stories of boys ridiculing, harassing and excluding young women from physical activity" (p. 74) in PE. Numerous comments about ridicule and intimidation were also reported by grade 5 girls who were targeted by the boys, in a study conducted by Gibbons (2008) about female perceptions of PE. Although some participants in the present study (Tessa, Don and Jess) shared stories of ridicule and bullying, these episodes were not specific to gender. Never-the-less they indicate that despite knowledge of these problems in PE, they continue to occur.

The persistence of negative experiences is inherent in the definition of alienation (Carlson, 1995a). Although the children in this study were asked questions about the persistence of feeling left out because of a variety of reasons (e.g. low skill, not being chosen) their responses did not appear to indicate risk of alienation from PE. For example, Ann was asked what the consequences of continual negative experiences of feeling left out might be for children. Although she thought that feeling left out would affect participation, perhaps even to the point of not wanting to play again or try out for teams in Junior High, she added that it would not realistically occur throughout all the grades in school, but rather just for a while and perhaps only in one grade. Though it may appear that from the perspectives of the children in this study that feeling rejected in PE may not be a significant contributor to alienation, with respect to the persistence factor, the negative experiences shared within this theme of social factors suggests the potential to influence the alienation process.

Summary of Social Factors.

The participants in this study reported social factors in PE tied to 'having friends' and 'feeling rejected' when asked questions about the construct of social isolation. Having friends was associated with the importance of friends and enjoyment of PE. Conversely, feeling rejected was associated with situations of feeling left out due to low skill, not being chosen during team selection and being ridiculed or bullied.

According to Gallahue & Donnelly (2003), social interaction is one of the healthy benefits of PE. Children view PE as an opportunity to spend time with peers as an important part of their social world (Gosling et al., 2008). The proposed social isolation construct in Carlson's (1995a) definition of alienation suggests that children may "feel alone, they withdraw, and feel isolated from their peers in physical education class" (p.467). Although the eight alienated students who were interviewed by Carlson shared feelings of being left out and some situations of being ridiculed, the total survey results of all participants did not show significant differences between the alienated group and the whole group in the social isolation dimension. Peer relationships become increasingly more important in early adolescence than in early childhood (Salkind, 2002). The participants in this study identified both positive (having friends) and negative (feeling rejected) situations and experiences in their perceptions of PE. According to the literature and the responses of the children in this study, social factors do influence children's PE experiences. However, it is unclear to what extent these factors might put them at risk of alienation.

Discussion

The purpose of this exploratory research study was to gain an understanding of the phenomenon of alienation in the PE setting from the perspectives of grade 6 children. The phenomenon was explored by asking children about the three constructs of alienation: powerlessness, meaninglessness and social isolation. These constructs formed the basis for the interview questions and were explored separately in neutral terms that the children could understand. The following main themes and corresponding subthemes were revealed: a. degree of control (skill and choice), b. meaning (lack of meaning and future relevance), and c. social factors (having friends and feeling rejected). The results established the main themes as representative of both positive and negative perspectives from the children. The cross over of ideas found within the subthemes can be attributed to the complex nature of alienation and the interrelatedness of its constructs.

Summary of Main Themes and Subthemes

The theme of 'degree of control' based on the alienation construct of powerlessness was representative of two subthemes: skill and choice. Participants shared how situations for themselves and other children could potentially have an effect on the degree of control they felt in the PE setting. Skill differences were recognized and children often compared themselves to higher skilled classmates. When low skill was a factor for either themselves or other children, the participants talked about instances of peer judgment, embarrassment, ridicule, not being picked for a team or unjust situations where PE was used as a punishment

or privilege. Many of these perceptions led to opinions about not enjoying PE when no control was afforded. Participants also expressed a desire for choice in PE in relation to control. They felt that choice in team selection and types of activities would lead to engagement and a sense of control over some aspects of PE. Conversely, situations of no choice led to a sense of having no control at times leading to nonparticipation and frustration. Choice was also removed from the perspectives of participants when exercise was used as punishment, or the privilege of PE participation was withdrawn.

The alienation construct of meaninglessness was explored by asking children about what they perceived as useful or not useful about gym. The theme of 'meaning' surfaced to represent children's perspectives that varied from meaningless to meaningful. Two subthemes: lack of meaning and future relevance emerged within the theme of meaning. Lack of meaning was associated with boredom, not learning anything and no future job use. Boredom was a significant reason for lack of meaning in the views of the participants, seen through stories of repetition in activities, running laps and other activities with no perceived purpose. The idea that learning does not occur in gym was apparent as some children thought gym was just a fun break from classroom work. Only one participant made the connection that one could have fun while learning in PE. Lack of meaning was also represented in the idea that gym might not be useful depending on future vocation. Most often, children made links with sedentary jobs and concluded that gym may not be useful in the future for those situations. When asked about changing PE to make it more useful most participants had

suggestions about including novel activities that they normally do not do in gym. Some participants suggested changes to the delivery of current activities to make games more active and increase chances to interact with the game object (e.g. puck) by changing the rules or structure of the games. Changes in terms of facilities (e.g. more outside PE, use of the whole gym) and equipment (e.g. fix hockey sticks) were also mentioned by the participants.

Within the theme of 'meaning' children also described meaningful aspects of PE which were referred to in the subtheme of 'future relevance.' Participants thought that gym might be relevant if the pursuit of professional sporting opportunities were a goal. Although this idea was mentioned by many of the children, only one girl realized that it may not be easily attainable. Other future vocations were mentioned in terms of their relevance to gym, specifically jobs that would require physical skill. Finally, health benefits stemming from PE were also mentioned by the children in terms of future relevance. It was generally recognized that exercise and activity in gym was useful for overall health and well-being. The meaningfulness of gym appeared to be important to the children as they referred to situations of meaning and of no meaning.

The third theme, 'social factors', contributed to the understanding of how children perceived the alienation construct of social isolation. The subthemes of 'having friends' and 'feeling rejected' were identified in the data as salient for participants. Children referred to the importance of friends and an increased enjoyment of gym when they could be together with friends on the same team. Memories of meeting new friends were also associated with enjoyment in gym.

As well as having friends, opposite feelings of rejection in gym related to low skill, not being selected for teams, and being ridiculed or bullied were shared by participants within the 'social factors' theme. Feelings of rejection or being left out were present for some participants when they perceived themselves or others to be lower skilled than their classmates. The process of team selection where team captains were assigned to choose players, was also a source of feeling rejected, as children shared stories of classmates never being picked or always picked last. Finally, some children shared stories of being ridiculed or bullied as significant to their experiences in PE.

Limitations

While the perspectives of children are recognized as essential for the understanding of childhood issues (Scott, 2000), interviewing children about a complex issue, such as alienation, is particularly challenging. Each interview began with a conversation about a 'good day in gym' and a 'bad day in gym' as depicted in the students' drawings. This led into questions that explored both the positive and negative aspects of gym. This approach provided children the freedom to share their thoughts on either end of the spectrum. The semi-structured format of interviewing allowed for open discussion regarding what was important to the child. The interviewer took special care to balance her research interests of gaining knowledge with a respect for the integrity of the participants (Kvale, 2007). Being continually aware of the interview climate, at times the interviewer changed the line of questioning if the participant appeared uncomfortable or was exceptionally quiet. There were many occasions where some of the core issues

that may be at the heart of alienation, were not further explored due to the researcher's ethical responsibilities.

Although techniques to ensure understanding were effectively utilized (e.g. pilot interview, child friendly language, checking for understanding), the phenomenon of alienation appears to be a complex concept to ask children about. In part, this may be attributed to the nature of alienation being an adult concept. That is, it may not be a familiar concept within a child's world. Translating alienation from an adult concept to a child concept presents potential difficulties. Understanding alienation as a phenomenon in its entirety appears to be significantly different from understanding each of the three constructs separately. Children's perceptions about how the three themes (degree of control, meaning, and social factors) might be interrelated are unclear. Are all three constructs required in a child's experience in order to be at risk of alienation? This idea is not addressed in the literature on alienation. As the exploration of the constructs occurred separately with the participants in this study, results about how children might perceive them collectively, remains to be examined.

Recommendations and Future Directions

Although there is uncertainty around how alienation is perceived collectively, the results of this study do provide some future directions for practitioners. In particular, the concept of membership (Cothran & Ennis, 1999) may be used by practitioners to influence the PE setting in ways that increase the degree of control, meaning and positive social interactions that children experience. The concept of membership (Cothran & Ennis, 1999) has been

proposed as a potential framework for meeting the needs of students in PE. Cothran and Ennis investigated 16 high school students' perspectives on school membership in relation to PE. According to these authors, school membership occurs when students displayed the components of sense of attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief in PE and were therefore engaged in the subject. The researchers interviewed students to gain insight into whether they experienced these components within the framework of membership and to what extent, within the PE setting. They found that, "These students described school and physical education experiences that frequently were detriments to, rather than positive contributors to, school membership" (Cothran & Ennis, 1999, p. 244). These authors proposed that educators address the primary issues of relevance and connection in order to "reverse this pattern of alienation and disengagement" (p. 245). Cothran and Ennis' approach to membership appears to have strong ties to issues of alienation and in particular the three constructs explored in this study. The authors suggested that relevance of PE could be addressed by scrutinizing the choices provided in the curriculum and also how those choices are offered to students (degree of control). They further recommended that connection be addressed to meet students' needs to increase attachment to PE (meaning) and to each other socially (social factors). Specifically, the researchers emphasized PE (beyond regular school subjects) as a unique opportunity to promote positive interactions between students and between students and teachers. By directing attention toward students' needs for relevance and connection through these recommendations for membership, teachers may also be addressing issues related

to powerlessness (degree of control), meaninglessness (meaning) and social isolation (social factors) evident in the current study. Addressing these needs may have the potential to negate some of the circumstances that lead to alienation.

Another concept that may hold promise for practitioners concerned with children's experiences in PE (and potentially alienation) is that of shared meaning (Stork & Sanders, 2000) referred to earlier in this chapter. This concept also addresses relevance and connection in order to create meaning for children in PE. Revealing children's perceptions of alienation may increase teacher awareness of how they might avoid alienating contexts in PE and build contexts of membership. The suggestion of shared control (Kovar et al., 2009; Stork & Sanders, 2000) to support choice and promote engagement in PE has the potential to contribute to shared meaning. When children share in the control of the learning process, they may become engaged both physically and emotionally (Kovar et al., 2009). Teachers can deliver meaningful quality PE programs by providing some of the control over decisions and options to the children, thereby gaining more control over the outcomes for their students. Environments of shared control could potentially have an affect on reducing the likelihood of feeling no control (powerlessness), experiencing lack of meaning (meaninglessness) and enduring negative social interactions (social isolation).

As the majority of studies that have been conducted about alienation were carried out with adolescents, little is known about younger children regarding the subject. One of the distinctive features of this study is that grade 6 children were intentionally chosen in an attempt to explore perceptions of alienation at an earlier

age. Many of the studies conducted have indicated that alienation in the PE setting is likely to begin in elementary school (Fenton, Frisby & Luke, 1999; Gibbons, 2008; Gibbons & Humbert, 2008; Trusty-Dooley-Dickey, 1993). Although alienation may not be identified until adolescence in many of these studies, the factors leading to it such as those represented in the main themes of this study appear to originate in the impressionable elementary years. Early recognition or awareness by teachers may enable some level of prevention to avoid the path of alienation. This highlights the importance of the exploratory nature of this study with younger children. It may also be beneficial to conduct longitudinal studies about alienation as it is about the accumulation of experiences over time.

Unique to this study, was the instrumental case study methodology (Stake, 1995) through which the participants became known to the researcher over a lengthy time period in their own school context through observations and in-depth interviews. According to Stake (2005) the case is 'embraceable' when the researcher "…can become experientially acquainted with the case…and personally come to perceive the nature of the case" (p. 455). For a complex phenomenon such as alienation, it was a strength of this study that alienation was explored by embracing the case, (i.e. getting to know the participants), rather than inquiring about the topic through questionnaires or surveys. Future studies about alienation in PE may provide increased depth of understanding through the voices of children by way of case study methodology, as a researcher's intimate knowledge of the case participants is an asset in data collection and interpretation.

According to Merriam (1998) "Insight gleaned from case studies can directly influence policy, practice, and future research" (p. 19).

The general exploration of the alienation constructs in this study contributed to an understanding of powerlessness, meaninglessness and social isolation through the themes of degree of control, meaning, and social factors. While each theme appears to influence children's perceptions of PE, how these constructs interact to contribute to alienation as a whole is less clear. Alienation as defined by Carlson (1995a) is an enduring and severe phenomenon which results from persistent aversive experiences in gym. While the idea of persistence was explored for the case participants by asking specifically for their thoughts about it, persistence of aversive situations were examined separately for the three constructs. The concept of persistence appears to be a key aspect of alienation worthy of further exploration.

In closing, it should be of interest to teachers who want to align their pedagogical intentions with their actions to consider how students perceive the gymnasium climate. In an effort to raise awareness of the phenomenon of alienation the practicing teacher could benefit from the information provided by children through studies such as this one that emphasize what children think and feel. Understanding what occurs in PE according to the perceptions of children may allow teachers to program with increased insight, ultimately benefiting children who may be at risk of alienation in PE.

Closing Vignette

It was a beautiful day for gym outdoors. "I hope we won't have to run laps around this field," pleaded one of the students. As we waited for the teacher, clusters of children socializing filled half the field and a few began a spontaneous game of tag, chasing and fleeing. The children seemed to enjoy the wide open space and the opportunity to interact with each other for the brief moments before the teacher arrived. "Get into groups of three," requested the teacher. Students quickly called each others names, ran toward each other, or waved their friends over. Group division happened rapidly, except for Alice. She stepped back and stood at the perimeter, waiting and watching the action, as if expecting to be the 'left over'. Tessa was also without a group, and looked around anxiously. Within a minute all the groups were formed leaving Alice, Tessa and me. A few awkward glances followed by the shrugging of shoulders in unison. Although the effects were obvious, the children expected it and accepted it, not chosen again.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Summary

The purpose of this exploratory research study was to gain an understanding of the phenomenon of alienation in the PE setting from the perspectives of grade 6 children. An instrumental case study methodology (Stake, 1995) was employed to gain insight into the alienation phenomenon. Specifically, the three constructs within the definition of alienation were explored: powerlessness, meaninglessness, and social isolation (Carlson, 1995a).

The case participants were 14 grade six children (9 girls and 5 boys) in a classroom of 23 children at a school located outside a major Canadian city. Data collection was triangulated to capture childrens' perceptions of alienation through observations, field notes, participants' drawings, and semi-structured interviews. An interview guide (see Appendix A) was utilized to conduct the interviews. Children were asked about the three constructs of alienation, using child friendly language. Inductive and deductive reasoning along a continuum (Patton, 2002) were used in data analysis to arrive at an understanding of the participants perspectives of alienation. Three main themes were identified in the data: a. degree of control, b. meaning, and c. social factors.

Degree of control based on the alienation construct of powerlessness was representative of two subthemes: skill and choice. Participants recognized the skill levels of classmates and when perceived low skill was a factor for either themselves or their classmates, they referred to instances of peer judgment, embarrassment, ridicule, not being picked for a team or unjust situations where

PE was used as a punishment or privilege. Participants also expressed a desire for choice in PE in relation to types of activities and team selection. Situations of no choice led to the feeling of having no control resulting in nonparticipation and frustration.

The second theme, meaning, revealed children's perspectives of PE as both meaningless and meaningful represented by the two subthemes: lack of meaning and future relevance. Lack of meaning was tied to boredom, not learning anything, and no future job use. To combat lack of meaning, participants also reported what they thought could be changed about PE to make it more meaningful. The participants in this study also saw meaningful aspects to PE referred to as 'future relevance' in terms of future professional sporting opportunities, future job use and the health benefits associated with exercise and activity.

As a third theme, 'social factors' was characterized by dichotomous subthemes: 'having friends' and 'feeling rejected'. Participants spoke about how participating with friends in PE made it more enjoyable and provided examples of increased enjoyment when they were on the same team with their friends. The importance of friends was also noted in the researcher's observation field notes. The opposite feeling of rejection was also salient for participants in regard to feeling left out due to low skill, not being selected for a team and ridicule or bullying.

The research findings of this exploratory study enhanced the understanding of the phenomenon of alienation in PE as seen through the eyes of

children. Researchers have noted the importance of accessing children's

perspectives and the resultant credibility for issues involving decisions which

affect children (Oberg & Ellis, 2006; Scott, 2000). This case study expanded the

understanding of issues surrounding alienation as they pertain to the children who

may be at risk. The key constructs of powerlessness, meaninglessness and social

isolation are further understood by the valuable perceptions shared by the

participants in this study.

<div align="center">Personal Reflections</div>

In reflection of the research process, I consider the personal growth

acquired through a process that was both challenging and enriching. Although the

rewards of this process far out weighed the challenges, there were a few aspects

that were delicate to negotiate. The greatest challenge during the practical data

collection phase of the study was managing the connotations associated with the

word *alienation*. Although my study was entitled 'Children's Perceptions of Gym

Class,' the central question of exploration was alienation. While I do not believe it

was a limitation, from the onset it was challenging to set a positive and non-

threatening tone with the main gatekeepers (teacher and principal). This was

something I had to continually be aware of throughout my time at the research site

during my interactions with the principal and teacher. There were many formal

and informal conversations to address this challenge, in order to maintain good

rapport.

Interviewing children about a sensitive topic also had its challenges. After

the first few interviews it occurred to me that I may not be acquiring salient

information about the topic of alienation. I needed to remind myself of the exploratory nature of this study and the complex nature of the phenomenon of alienation. Every effort was made to adhere to ethical responsibilities and a delicate balance was maintained between my research interests and the comfort level of the children. There were occasions while interviewing when I felt I could have probed further, but as I listened to the digital audio recordings, I realized that my sensitivity to the children regarding how much they wished to share, was appropriate. Although challenging, the interviews were personally rewarding as they provided an avenue to getting to know the children.

Spending time with the children during the 9 weeks at the research site was a highlight of the research process. As "Qualitative case study is highly personal research" (Stake, 1995, p.135), the opportunity to get to know the children was realized. The nature of this methodology, where I was able to get to know the participants in their context, was particularly rewarding and matched my own personal interests as a way of researching. The children shared parts of themselves as they spoke about their perceptions of PE and I appreciated the many stories they had to share. The exchange was mutual as I shared some of my stories, building relationships with the children that stand out in my memory as precious experiences. It was a joy to see the varied personalities of the children and learn from them.

Equally rewarding, was my own learning experience throughout the process. With experience in teaching elementary aged children I have often been in the PE setting, but not formally as a researcher. Being able to explore the

perceptions of children in depth was an experience I am not normally privileged to. The familiar PE setting took on a different hue, viewed through a somewhat wider lens. I was able to gain insight into the issues of alienation in PE through the eyes of children as well as gain knowledge toward a deeper understanding of an issue that will impact my own teaching.

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APPENDIX A: CHILD INTERVIEW GUIDE

Child Interview Guide
Project Title: Children's perceptions of gym class

Brief:
There is no right or wrong answer. You are the expert here because it's about what you think. This interview is confidential. That means that no body else will know your answers except me.

1. Can you tell me a little about the drawings you have done? (Ask about specific features in each picture) What's happening here? Are you in this picture?

2. What sort of things do you like about gym? Favorites?

3. What sort of things do you not like about gym? Not so favorites. Do you think there are kids that don't really enjoy gym? Probe.

4. Do you remember what gym was like in grade 2 or 3 or 4? (Probe)
What is different about gym now that you are in grade 6?

5. Did you ever have a year in gym that you didn't like? If yes, can you describe what it was like? (Probe)
What about your favorite year?

6. Do you think that kids would say gym is useful for later in their life? How would it be useful or how would it be useless?
Do you think you have learned useful things in gym in the past?
Could you see yourself using some of the activities later in your life?
(Probe for additional ideas that might arise from answers)

7. Do kids get to make choices in gym? In what way? Do kids like to decide?
What do kids like to make decisions about in gym? In gym have you ever been encouraged to decide about activities or partners or anything else? Probe.
What would happen if kids never got to decide about anything that happens in gym?

8. Do you think kids sometimes feel left out in gym? Can you think of a time that you or your friends have been left out in gym? Can you describe that time for me? (Probe).
What would be some other reasons for kids feeling separate or not participating? (Probe)

9. How would you change gym if you could? Why would you change it?

Debrief: Is there anything else you want to add? (Reassure confidentiality, thank participant).

APPENDIX B: PARENT/GUARDIAN INFORMATION LETTER

Title of Project: Children's Perceptions of Gym Class

Principal Investigator: **Graduate Supervisor:**
Mary Ann Rintoul   Dr. Nancy Spencer-Cavaliere
Graduate Student   Assistant Professor
Faculty of Physical Education   Faculty of Physical Education
and Recreation   and Recreation
University of Alberta   University of Alberta
Phone: (780) 439-5391   Phone: (780) 492-9615

Dear Parent or Guardian,

My name is Mary Ann Rintoul and I am a graduate student at the University of Alberta. I am doing a research project titled "Children's perceptions of gym class" as part of my Master's thesis. I invite your child to take part in this study. The purpose of the study is to learn what children think about gym. I am interested in what they think about it and what they like or do not like about it.

As part of this study I will observe and take part in classroom activities and gym at your child's school. I hope this will help me get to know the children better and also for them to get to know me. I will not be teaching any of your child's classes. Under the supervision of the teacher, I will explain my research to the children and why I am there. I plan to spend a total of about 7 weeks at the school.

As a classroom activity the children in this study will draw a few pictures of times they remember in gym class, followed by an interview. The interviews will held in a quiet place at school. I will ask your child to share his/her thoughts and perceptions about gym class. The interview will be about 30-45 minutes long. The interview will be audio taped and later typed. Some children may be interviewed a second time (about 20 minutes) if needed. All interviews will be scheduled with your child's teacher. There are no negative consequences if your child does not want to take part and it will not affect school grades.

The main benefit of taking part in this study is the chance for your child to share his/her thoughts about gym. The information gathered may inform teachers, researchers and parents about what children think of gym class. As this study will report the perceptions of children (in their own words) it may help teachers to create positive gym classes and encourage lifelong physical activity.

Possible risks involved with participation revolve around the disclosure of personal or sensitive information. Your child does not have to answer any of the questions that he/she does not want to. Information from the interview can be removed from the typed copy upon the request of the child.

All information will be kept private. Audio recordings, children's drawings and written text will be kept in a locked cabinet in a locked office at the University of Alberta. Only the research team will have access to the information. Your child's real name will not be used. Information from this study will only be kept for 5 years and then destroyed.

Taking part in this study is totally up to you. If you and your child agree to take part, you can withdraw at any time without consequence. Your child's information will be removed from the study upon request. Your child can tell the teacher or the researcher at any time that they no longer wish to take part. If you would like more information or have any questions, please contact Mary Ann Rintoul at (780) 439-5391 (mrintoul@ualberta.ca) or Dr. Nancy Spencer-Cavaliere at (780) 492-9615 (ncavalie@ualberta.ca).

Please indicate permission for your child to be involved in this research study by filling out and signing the attached consent form. Please return it to your child's teacher as soon as possible.

If you have concerns about this study, you may contact Dr. Wendy Rodgers, Chair of the PER-ALES Research Ethics Board, at (780) 492-8126. Dr. Rodgers has no direct involvement with this project.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Mary Ann Rintoul
Graduate Student

Dr. Nancy Spencer-Cavaliere
Assistant Professor

APPENDIX C: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Title of Project: Children's perceptions of gym class

Principal Investigator: Mary Ann Rintoul, Graduate Student, Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation, University of Alberta. (780) 439-5391

Graduate Supervisor: Dr. Nancy Spencer-Cavaliere, Assistant Professor, Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation, University of Alberta. (780) 492-9615

To be completed by the parent/guardian of the participant:

Do you understand that your child has been asked to be in a research study?	Yes	No
Have you and your child read and received a copy of the attached Information Letter?	Yes	No
Do you understand the benefits and risks involved in taking part in this research study?	Yes	No
Have you and your child had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study?	Yes	No
Do you understand that your child is free to refuse to participate, or to withdraw from the study at any time, without consequence, and that the information will be withdrawn at your request?	Yes	No
Do you understand the issue of confidentiality and who will have access to your child's information?	Yes	No

This study was explained to me by: _____

I give permission for my child _____ to take part in this study.
                                            Child's Name

_____   _____
Signature of Parent/Guardian   Date

_____   _____
Printed Name   Phone Number

To be completed by the child:

Is it okay for the researcher to keep your pictures?	Yes	No
Is it okay for the researcher to keep a copy of your pictures?	Yes	No
Can the interview be audio-recorded?	Yes	No

Your child also has the opportunity to sign:

_____
Signature of Child