

Student Perspectives of Choice in High School Physical Education

by

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## **Abstract**

There has been a decline in physical activity levels of youth in Canada. This researcher used a phenomenological approach for exploring and investigating students' perspectives about and lived experiences with physical education (PE) and physical activity (PA) programs that provide choice. The study took place in an urban school in the Province of Manitoba, Canada. Participants in this study were 10 students in Grade 12 who have experienced this type of Physical Education program. I conducted 10 in-depth interviews in order to answer the following research questions:

- How do students experience PE programs that provide choice?
- What are students' perspectives about PE/PA at school and outside of school?

Data considered and analyzed supported the following conclusions. Many students experienced positive relationships in PE with their peers and PE teachers, which resulted in a sense of belonging and community for many students. The findings also revealed the importance of student voice in PE, which converged on the idea that students appreciate authentic and meaningful choice over teacher-generated activities and limited choice. In addition, students' suggested that they are motivated to participate in physical activities because of the mental and physical wellness benefits. Yet, students also shared that there were external and internal barriers they experienced that prevented their engagement in physical activities.

Listening to the voices of students and gaining a greater understanding of what they experienced in a PE program that provides choice can impact educators' future decisions pertaining to curriculum and inform them how best to support students in PE programs to live healthy and active lifestyles.

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## **Dedication**

To my parents, Luka and Marie Janzic who gave me encouragement every time I needed it and were there every step of the way. You have been there for me not only on this journey, but also throughout my life. I love you both very much. I am so proud to have you as my parents. Lastly, to my Gidget (Gigi), I will always keep in my heart the love and joy you have brought into my life.

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## **Chapter I Introduction and Overview**

### **Introduction to the Study**

There are numerous studies that have indicated a decline of physical activity levels in youth over the past decade. The decline of physical activity (PA) levels in youth can lead to serious health problems such as depression and high blood pressure (Colley, Wong, Garriguet, Janssen, Gorber, & Tremblay, 2012). One way to encourage and support PA levels in youth was found to be through choices in physical education (PE). Researchers such as Batia (2013) and How, Whipp, Dimmock, and Jackson (2013) examined the approach of choices in PE to aid the problem of declining PA levels of youth. Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth (2009) developed a Grade 11 and 12 provincial PE curriculum that provided choice in delivery of this curriculum to support students in developing healthy and physically active lives. I used a qualitative research methodology and more specifically, a phenomenological approach, to listen to students' voices and perspectives on a PE program that provided choice through in-depth interviewing. I conducted this study because, to my knowledge, few studies had examined this topic in schools located within the prairie provinces of Canada. I collected data pertaining to the topic and research questions from student participants in Grade 12 physical education classes in an urban school in the province of Manitoba.

### **The Provincial Curriculum Context**

An overview of the Grade 11 and 12 Manitoba PE curriculum frameworks is presented to provide a context for this study. The format of the *Grade 12 Active Healthy Lifestyles: Manitoba Physical Education/Health Education Curriculum Framework of Outcomes and A Foundation for Implementation* (Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth, 2009) is a combined Framework and Implementation document. "The purpose of this document is to provide Manitoba school administrators and teachers with the basis for curriculum planning, teaching,

learning, and assessment” (Manitoba Education, Citizenship, and Youth, 2009, p. 1). In this document, there are a variety of delivery models for implementation. These delivery models provide, “Schools and/or students to choose different combinations of IN-class and OUT-of-class time to achieve credits” (Manitoba, Citizenship, and Youth, 2009, p. 2).

In Canada, one province implemented choice in the PE programs at the Grade 11 and 12 levels through a provincial PE curriculum document. In this PE curriculum, high schools in the province have the following options of how they will implement this provincial curriculum for students to obtain the mandatory Grade 11 and 12 PE credit in order to meet the requirements of the provincial government and graduate with a high school diploma: 25% in class and 75% outside of class, 50% in class and 50% outside of class, 75% in class and 25% outside of class and lastly, 100% inside of class. The particular site/school of this research study had opted to implement the 50% in class and 50% out of class option with the Grade 11 and 12 PE curriculum classes. In this option, in order to earn the PE credit at these grade levels, this means:

Eligible physical activities for the physical activity practicum, particularly for the student-directed OUT-of-class time, must contain a minimum of 55 hours of moderate to vigorous physical activity that contributes to cardiorespiratory endurance (heart, lungs, circulatory system) plus one or more of the other health-related fitness components (muscular strength, muscular endurance, and flexibility). (Manitoba Education, Citizenship, and Youth, 2009, p. 23)

In other provinces of Canada and countries, PE at the high school is not always mandatory. Therefore, providing mandatory PE to all students in high school is very unique to the province of Manitoba, Canada. This strategy suggests the province of Manitoba believes and finds great value in supporting students in learning what it means to be active and healthy. As well as providing a way for students to practice this approach, mandatory PE throughout high

school. By providing mandatory PE to students, the students can actively learn and practice active and healthy lifestyles. Furthermore, choice is more important in these mandatory contexts because students are actively engaged and encouraged to participate in activities of their choice inside and outside of school. This strategy empowers students to make decisions and choices that will benefit their health and increase their likelihood of developing and maintaining a healthy and active lifestyle after high school.

### **Area of Focus**

Several themes evolved from reviewing the research on the topic of student choice in physical education. These themes included: adolescence and the importance of being physically active; importance of PE classes/programs; autonomy and autonomy supportive environments for students; choices in PE programs and physical activities; benefits of providing choices to students in PE; students' voices and needs; and instruments for understanding students' interests and motivation. When examining and looking at the motivation of an individual, self-determination theory provides a useful framework. Researchers such as Batia (2013) and How and others (2013) found choices in physical education to positively impact PA. The literature review, however, showed that no research had been conducted on what students in Manitoba had to say on this topic of choice in PE programs. This area of focus contributed to filling the gap in the literature by using a phenomenological approach for exploring and investigating students' perspectives about and lived experiences with PE programs and what factors impact students' participation in PA.

### **Interest in Research Topic**

There are an alarming number of children and youth who are overweight or obese in Canada and physical fitness levels have declined (Colley et al., 2011). There are health risks and problems that may arise with being overweight and obese such as heart disease, type 2 diabetes,

stroke, and several types of cancer, which can impact an individual's life (Snelling, 2013). These diseases, in turn, will have a negative impact on the healthcare system currently in place in Canada (Ward, Wilkinson, Graser, & Prusak, 2008). The research presented by Jaakkola, Washington, and Yli-Piipari (2013) found that childhood patterns of physical activity track into adulthood suggesting that active adolescents tend to be active adults. As well, the research by Hill and Hannon (2008) stated that there was a decrease in moderate-to-vigorous PA from grades one to twelve and the youth's engagement in physical activities became less, as they get older.

Furthermore, I am a learning support teacher in a high school. I often had students come and share with me that they disliked PE classes and they weren't passing their PE courses. I wanted to know how I could better support them. Exploring further in-depth into what they were experiencing in a PE program that provides choice provided me with the necessary information to better support them.

### **The Researcher's Perspective**

As an educator, I wanted to support students in developing and maintaining their PA participation. I strongly believed in students having the opportunity for choice in what activities they would like to participate in. I believed in this because I strongly felt that choice in PE and PA leads to developing and maintaining one's PA levels which contributes to living healthy and active lives in the future. I have had positive and negative personal experiences with PA. I grew up being involved in PA and I enjoyed deciding what physical activities I wanted to participate in. I enjoyed activities like volleyball, badminton, and gymnastics, but I did not enjoy basketball and handball. Yet, I was told I needed to participate in those activities if I wanted to pass the course. This left me feeling unmotivated to participate in those activities because I did not enjoy them and I felt I had little autonomy. I have wondered and reflected on whether others often

heard this message and felt the same as I did in terms of wanting to participate in physical activities that we had choice in. Personal experience is what led my interest in this area of focus. There was a need to understand more about students' perspectives about and experiences with PE programs that provided choice. Gaining a greater understanding of this topic through reflecting upon what students had to say about it may lead to improving PE practices in school programs that have the potential to increase student participation in physical activities as they move into adulthood; hence leading healthy and active lives.

### **Research Purpose and Research Questions**

It was important to listen and hear students because they experienced, first hand, this approach and provided valuable feedback and information regarding PE programs providing choice. Understanding their lived experiences in this area helped physical educators make decisions and implement necessary strategies or approaches that incorporated choice if needed in PE to possibly prevent health risks in our students. Gathering such information had the potential to inform students, parents, and educators, and promote change in physical education programming to support youth in participating in higher levels of physical activity. My purpose as an educator was to gain a deeper understanding of what students' really had to say about this research topic and provide others in the physical education field with information they may use to support their students with PE programs and classes that provided choice. Specifically, the purpose of this study was to increase understanding of how students in a high school setting experienced PE programs and the variables that impacted their involvement in PA. The following research questions were investigated:

- How do students experience PE programs that provide choice?
- What are students' perspectives about PE/PA at school and outside of school?

## **Importance of the Study**

This study was worth doing because of the need to gain a greater understanding of what students' experienced with PE programs that provided choice in this province. The decline of physical activity levels in youth in the province of Manitoba is concerning and there is a need to understand how we can support students in maintaining their physical activity levels as recommended by the Canadian and World Health Organization (WHO). Much research had examined the importance of student autonomy and autonomy-supported environments and its relation to the idea of choices in PE (Erwin et al., 2013; Prusak et al., 2004; Xiang et al., 2011). Studies had found when students were provided with the opportunity for choice, they had greater autonomous motivation and an increase in PA levels than students with no choices (Batia, 2013; Davies et al., 2015; Lonsdale, 2013; Smith et al., 2009; Tannehill, Macphail, Walsh & Woods (2015). It was important to hear from the students themselves so that they could share their perspectives and experiences in order to better understand the impact of PE programs that provided choice.

## **Definitions of Terms**

The following terms used throughout this thesis were defined for readers: autonomy, autonomy-supportive environments, competence, intrinsically motivated behaviors, relatedness, self-determination, and self-determination theory. *Autonomy* refers to a sense of feeling free from pressures and having the possibility to make choices (How et al., 2013). *Autonomy-supportive environments* is a setting in which students are provided with choices and opportunities for self-direction as well as minimal amount of pressure, imposed goals, and demands as stated by Erwin et al. (2013). *Competence* refers to the ability to effectively carry out certain planned behaviors (How et al., 2013, p. 132). *Intrinsically motivated behaviors* “are those that are engaged in for their own sake, in other words, for pleasure and satisfaction derived

from performing them.” (Guay et al., 2000, p. 176). *Relatedness* is a term that refers to an individual’s need for interpersonal security and connectedness (How et al., 2013, p. 132). *Self-determination* is defined as, “A true sense of choice, a sense of feeling free in doing what one has chosen to do.” (Guay, Vallerand, & Blanchard, p. 176). *Self-determination theory* (Deci & Ryan, 2000) explains intrinsic motivation and the psychological needs of individuals and how it is applicable to fields such as sport and exercise.

### **Structure of the Thesis**

The first chapter of this thesis provided an introduction and overview of the study. The second chapter discussed the literature related to the topic of choice in high school physical education. It is organized around a number of themes such as: choice in PE, autonomy, and students’ voices and needs. Chapter three outlined the design of the study, the procedures, and justified the methodology employed. Information about the study participants and recruitment strategies, ethical considerations, and limitations and strengths of this study were also detailed. In chapter four, I presented and discussed the findings of students’ experiences in a PE program that provided choice, which emerged from the data collected and analyzed. Lastly, chapter five provided answers to the research questions, drew conclusions, and identified implications for practice and future research.

### **Chapter Summary**

I had identified the focus area and purpose of this research thesis, what are students’ experiencing in PE classes and programs that provided choice and a rationale for my interest in this topic. It was argued that this research topic is an area worth researching and examining as we have declining fitness levels among children and youth of Canada (Colley et al., 2011). Investigating and examining students’ experiences in PE programs that provided choice was believed to hold potential to provide educators with greater insights and understandings of what



students were experiencing first hand. In turn, this information could inform changes to the high school PE curriculum. A qualitative methodology using a phenomenological approach supported the investigation of these thesis questions. I will now turn to a discussion of the related literature.

## **Chapter 2 Review of Literature**

This chapter focused on the literature pertaining to this study on PE programs and classes that provided choice to students. The literature is discussed around the following themes: role of PA in health, Self-determination Theory (SDT), adolescents and PA, the importance of PE programs, autonomy in PE, choices in PE programs and PA, benefits of student choice in PE, students' voices and needs, and instruments for understanding students' interests and motivation. The chapter concludes with a brief summary of the works reviewed.

### **The Role of Physical Activity in Health**

Living a healthy life is a goal many people aspire to live and want for their children and children of our world. A healthy life may include happiness, love, good health, and motivation to engage in maintaining and increasing one's health. One of the key aspects of increasing one's health and living a healthy life is to be involved in physical activities. Many people actively engage in physical activities for a variety of reasons, but many also do not engage in physical activities. Davies, Nambiar, Hemphill, Devietti, Massengale, and McCredie, (2015) stated, "Students who want to do physical activity are more likely to be healthy later in life than those who are told to do physical activity." (p. 9). In order to have good health, one of the key things individuals need to do, is to participate in physical activities.

The Canadian and World Health Organization (WHO) recommend sixty minutes of moderate-to-vigorous daily physical activity (MVPA) at least six days a week (Colley et al., 2011). Yet the 2007 to 2009 Canadian Health Measures Survey (CHMS) had found many children and youth were not meeting the daily recommended physical activity levels. Specifically in Canada, there was growing evidence indicating that the health of Canadian children had deteriorated in the past few decades and childhood obesity had risen drastically

(Colley, Garriguet, Janssen, Craig, Clarke, & Tremblay, 2011). Colley et al. (2011) clearly stated, “A quarter of children and youth are now overweight or obese and physical fitness has declined.” (p. 1). These alarming statistics had contributed to further research of the question and topic area of how intrinsic motivation effectively influenced student choice of physical education programs/activities to promote youth participation in physical activities.

The need to investigate deeper into the question above came from the concern of obesity in our youth today. Being overweight and obese in youth can lead to a multitude of health problems in the future such as increasing the likelihood of heart disease, type 2 diabetes, stroke, several types of cancer, and osteoarthritis, which can impact an individual’s life (Snelling, 2013). Likewise, lack of physical activity can also lead to high blood pressure, depression, stress and anxiety (Colley, Wong, Garriguet, Janssen, Gorber, & Tremblay, 2012). That in turn will have a great impact on the healthcare system currently in place in Canada (Ward, Wilkinson, Graser, & Prusak, 2008). The childhood obesity epidemic is one of the most significant health challenges of this decade (Snelling, 2013).

### **Self-determination Theory (SDT)**

The self-determination theory was the guiding theoretical framework for this study. Colley and colleagues’ (2011) research study demonstrated that low levels of physical activity and participation had led to an examination of why youth had low participation levels in physical activities and in PE classes. To answer this question, several researchers such as Prusak et al. (2004) and Corder et al. (2013) had looked into the concept of intrinsic motivation as the essential element when examining low participation levels in physical activity. The self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) looked at intrinsic motivation and the psychological needs of individuals and how it was applicable to fields such as sport and exercise. As well,

Deci and Ryan (2000) found that the impact of intrinsic motivation affected the level of participation in physical activity. The self-determination theory provided a framework for the research in determining what motivates young adults to participate (or not) in physical activities and why they chose to participate. This theory provided valuable information in terms of promoting choices in physical education programs to provide encouragement for young adults to participate in physical activities and maintain this participation in their future after they left school.

Deci and Ryan (2008) defined the self-determination theory (SDT) as the following:

Self-determination theory (SDT) is an empirically based theory of human motivation, development, and wellness. The theory focuses on types, rather than just amount, of motivation, paying particular attention to autonomous motivation, controlled motivation, and amotivation as predictors of performance, relational and well-being outcomes. (p. 182)

According to Perlman and Webster (2011), “Self-determination is a viewpoint of motivation among individuals who possess a desire to improve themselves by engaging in behaviors that they deem important or meaningful for personal development” (p. 46). These scholars described a self-determined student as being motivated to learn because they had an internalized desire to do so and not because they experienced external pressures such as tangible rewards or incentives.

In the self-determination theory, autonomous motivation referred to both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2008). Intrinsic motivation related to the engagement in an activity for its own sake, out of interest, and enjoyment. Whereas, extrinsic motivation related to the engagement in an activity to attain an outcome separable from the activity itself (Haerens, Kirk, Cardon, De Bourdeaudhuij, & Vansteenkiste, 2010, p. 119). Controlled motivation had two forms: introjected and external motivation (Haerens et al., 2010, p. 120). Introjected

motivation referred to times when individuals feel pressured to engage in an activity, but the pressure originated from within themselves (Haerens et al., 2010, p. 120). External motivation referred to an individual participating in an activity to avoid punishments, to obtain rewards, or meet external expectations (Haerens et al., 2010, p. 120). An example of external motivation is a student puts effort into a badminton activity to receive a good grade. Amotivation related to the lack of motivation characterized by a belief that success is not possible and that the activity is not valuable (How, Whipp, Dimmock, & Jackson, 2013, p. 132).

Further, Deci and Ryan (2008) stated how SDT examined the degree to which basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness were relevant to the type and strength of motivation. Further, Mouratidis, Barkoukis, and Tsorbatzoudis (2015) stated, “A student needs to satisfy these three needs to equal degree to become (or remain) intrinsically motivated.” (p. 428). Autonomy referred to a sense of feeling free from pressures and having the possibility to make choices (How et al., 2013). Competence referred to the ability to effectively carry out certain planned behaviors, and relatedness looked at an individual’s need for interpersonal security and connectedness (How et al., 2013, p. 132). This part of the SDT was crucial when examining students’ motivation and the need for choices in PE to support increased physical activity participation in PE.

### **Adolescents and Physical Activity**

Understanding SDT and intrinsic motivation was seen as a key factor in understanding why adults chose to participate in physical activity; this idea was also true for adolescents. Jaakkola, Washington, and Yli-Piipari (2013) found that childhood patterns of physical activity tracked into adulthood suggesting that active adolescents tend to be active adults. Prusak, Treasure, Darst, and Pangrazi (2004) had similar findings suggesting that behaviors like inactivity or negative early experiences tracked into adulthood. Further, Hagger, Chratzisarantis,

Hein, Soos, Karsai, Lintunen, and Leemans, (2009) found, “Autonomous motivation in a leisure-time context was significantly related to autonomous motivation in PE.” (p. 706). It was also suggested that as we increase in age, the number of people accumulating sixty minutes of daily MVPA declines (Colley et al., 2011). As well, Hill and Hannon (2008) stated that there was a decrease in moderate-to-vigorous physical activity from grades one to twelve and the youth’s engagement in physical activities became less, as they got older. If we were able to understand why students were intrinsically motivated to participate in certain activities, this could lead to increased and maintained participation in physical activities as they tracked into adulthood and assisted in students leading healthy and active lives. Therefore, adolescence was a period of time where it was crucial to promote choices in PE.

The above findings made it clear how physical activity levels decreased as we increased in age and that physical activeness of youth tended to continue into adulthood. Therefore, adolescence was a significant period to promote physical activity participation (Corder et al., 2013; Jaakkola et al., 2013). The research provided had demonstrated how physical activity was seen as an important aspect in maintaining a healthy and active lifestyle for children and youth. In research conducted by Renfrow, Caputo, Otto, Farley, and Eveland-Sayers, (2011) it was found that an increase in sports participation was related to an increase in health-related physical fitness in middle and high school males, but not females. They suggested this result could be due to differences in sport choice among genders. How can we support all children and youth in receiving the WHO and Canadian recommendations levels of physical activity and continue to maintain a healthy and active lifestyle? One way to promote physical activity in adolescence and a healthy lifestyle was through our school physical education (PE) programs.

### **The Importance of Physical Education Programs**

Physical education (PE) classes and programs were identified as a vital element in supporting and promoting students' participation in physical activity in order to decrease obesity in youth (Xiang, Gao, & McBride, 2011). PE was seen as central to equipping students with the necessary knowledge and skills to participate in a healthy and physically active lifestyle (How, et al., 2013). Many PE programs have goals that aimed to facilitate student physical activity and the promotion of an active lifestyle (Erwin, Stellino, Beets, Beighle, & Johnson, 2013; Haerens, et al., 2010). In addition, Nihiser, Merlo, and Lee (2013) suggested schools could create an environment where youth could practice healthy behaviors through PE classes. Within these PE classes, the PE teachers had a prime opportunity to encourage youth to participate in regular physical activity (Ward et al., 2008). PE teachers also had the opportunity to implement different instructional strategies and methods to best support and meet the needs of their students. Some of these instructional strategies should consist of providing choices for students in PE by understanding students' need for autonomy. Haerens et al. (2010) stated students with more autonomous motivation were more active. The concept of choice and students' needs for autonomy in PE has led to recent research in this area.

### **Autonomy in Physical Education**

Research has been conducted by Deci and Ryan (2000; 2008) and Prusak et al. (2004) on what motivated youth to participate in physical activities using the self-determination theory framework (Deci & Ryan, 2000; 2008). It was evident that intrinsic motivation played a key role when examining the motivation of individuals to participate in activities and specifically, physical activity. Similarly, Haerens et al. (2010) stated students with more autonomous motivation were more active at the secondary school level. More importantly, recent research by Corder et al. (2013), Xiang et al. (2011), and Enright and O'Sullivan (2010) had examined choice in physical activity in PE. There were key themes that emerged in the research findings

by Corder et al. (2013), Xiang et al. (2011), Enright and O'Sullivan (2010), and Hill and Cleven (2005; 2006); students' need for autonomy and autonomy supported environments, the need and importance of choices, benefits of offering choice to students, student voice and opinion on the topic and instruments for understanding students' interests and motivation. The research findings of Erwin et al. (2013), Xiang et al. (2011), and Prusak et al. (2004) had suggested that an individual's need for autonomy and autonomy-supported environments related closely to the idea of choices in PE.

Individual's needs for autonomy in PE was made evident by the studies and works of Rees, Kavanagh, Harden, Shepherd, Brunton, Oliver, & Oakly, 2006; Erwin et al., 2013; Xiang et al., 2011; Prusak et al., 2004. Davies et al. (2015) found significance in this notion of providing students with autonomy to boost their motivation to stay involved in physical activity. Therefore, a way to provide autonomy to students in PE classes was through the approach or strategy of an autonomy-supportive environment. An autonomy-supportive environment was a setting in which students were provided with choices and opportunities for self-direction as well as minimal amount of pressure, imposed goals, and demands as stated by Erwin et al. (2013). Autonomy-supportive environments were closely associated with three basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Standage, Duba, & Ntoumanis, 2003). Perlman (2013) and Perlman and Webster (2011) stated autonomy support was significant as a tool in student motivation because it facilitated self-determination. Perlman (2013) found, "Levels of self-determination motivation are strongly associated with applied student benefits such as engagement, in-class participation, and affective learning." (p. 2).

Perlman and Webster (2011) continued in their research to explain the importance of the role of teachers in appreciating self-determination, "It is essential for teachers to understand self-determined motivation and to explore pedagogical strategies for enhancing autonomous



learning.” (p. 46). As well, Perlman (2013) stated the importance of the teacher as a pivotal role to creating an autonomy-supportive environment for students. Xiang et al. (2011) strengthened this notion when they found that providing instructional choice was an integral part of a teacher’s repertoire of an autonomy-supportive practice. Perlman (2013) found that students engaged in a highly autonomy-supportive learning environment changed students’ overall motivation. Within the self-determination theory, Perlman and Webster (2011) stated many studies had found classes that supported autonomous learning had influenced student motivation. Liu and Chepyator-Thomson (2009) found field independent students were more autonomous in decision-making and behaviors and had higher levels of participation in sport, which contributed to higher physical activity levels as when compared to field dependent students.

Furthermore, researchers had stated the importance of students’ perceptions of autonomy and choice on the impact of students’ physical activity levels (How et al., 2013; Stuntz & Weiss, 2009). Ward et al. (2008) found autonomy-supportive environments appealed to students’ desires to become independent, resulting in increased intrinsic motivation and self-determination. Similarly, Lonsdale, Sabiston, Raedeke, Ha, and Sum, (2009) examined the relationship between students’ self-determined motivation and their physical activity behaviors in free choice classes and teacher-led classes and found self-determination motivation and PE settings where students were allowed to make choices had greater physical activity. As well, Standage, Duba, and Ntoumanis (2003) found students’ perceptions of autonomy-supportive environments were positively linked with self-determination motivation of physical activity intentions and students felt more autonomy, competence, and relatedness in this environment.

Prusak et al. (2004) strengthened the argument for autonomy-supportive environments by finding that increased autonomy affects the motivation of adolescents wanting to participate in PE. Similarly, How et al. (2013) found that adolescents, who reported high perceptions of

autonomy-support in PE, were more likely to be physically active in their leisure-time and during their PE classes. Other researchers echoed these ideas. Patall, Cooper, and Robinson (2008) reviewed how students when presented with a sense of autonomy through choices experienced heightened intrinsic motivation and effort. Wallhead, Garn, and Vidoni (2014) also found positive affective outcomes for students when facilitated by more autonomous forms of motivation. A noteworthy statement made earlier by Erwin et al. (2013) was that autonomy-supportive environments could be described as a setting in which students were provided with choices and opportunities for self-direction. Fortunately, there were ways to create an autonomy-supportive environment. Perlman and Webster (2011) offered sound advice: “Provide opportunities for choices, initiatives, problem solving and other experiences that support students’ autonomy and can foster self-determination motivation” (p. 47).

Autonomy-supportive environments were characterized by teachers offering choices, but these choices should be meaningful to students so as to encourage the students to dedicate effort to tasks and achieve their personal goals, as well as allowing for some degree of freedom in the choice of tasks and assessments (Katz & Assor, 2007). After listening to girls and offering those involved meaningful choices in physical education, Mitchell, Gray, and Inchley (2015) found this approach enhanced girls’ sense of autonomy, competence, and increased participation. Similarly, Davies et al. (2015) concluded offering choices to students may increase their motivation to stay involved in physical activity.

### **Choices in Physical Education Programs and Motivation**

Research by Batia (2013) and How et al. (2013) found that choices fostered autonomy-supportive environments and lack of choices decreased perceptions of autonomy-supportive environments among students. Since autonomy-supportive environments included choices for students, it was necessary to now look at the research pertaining to the role that choices played

for adolescents' motivation to participate in physical activity and PE. When students were presented with the opportunity for choices, they had greater autonomous motivation and an increase in PA levels than students with no choices (Batia, 2013; Davies et al., 2015; Lonsdale, 2013; Smith et al., 2009; Tannehill, Macphail, Walsh & Woods (2015). Similarly, Mitchell et al. (2015) reported when girls were given choice of activity, it resulted in an increase in participation and a sense of autonomy. On the other hand, Erwin et al. (2013) found, "Variations in elementary PE lessons can relate to children's physical activity levels, but their level of motivation was not changed as a result of lesson content (team sport vs. individual sport) or teaching style (student choice vs. teacher-directed)" (p. 328). Whereas Prusak et al. (2004) and Ward et al. (2008) found providing choice lead to greater self-determination and intrinsic motivation, though it may not automatically cause increased activity levels within a PE setting. Corder et al. (2013) found youth wanted to do more types of physical activity more often in PE. They wanted choice incorporated into their PE classes. Hill and Hannon (2008) stated incorporating more student choice through an elective program, perhaps starting in grade nine, might maintain students' engagement in physical activity. Xiang et al. (2011) suggested the choices provided by the teachers, when meaningful and relevant to the students, were beneficial to the students' motivation and engagement. In addition, Katz and Assor (2007) clearly stated choices should meet the student's needs and interests and if so, choice would enhance motivation, learning, and well-being. These findings supported the significance of providing autonomy-supportive environments and choice to students in their PE programs.

Research studies conducted by Prusak et al. (2004), Xiang et al. (2011), and Corder et al. (2013) all concluded that students wanted choice in PE. Xiang et al. (2011) worked with student teachers. Pre-service teachers in this study suggested that choices were well received by the students in their classes and they believed that choice increased student engagement,

participation, and performance. The student teachers also noted that students felt a sense of freedom and independence. These study results suggested that students wanted a say in the activity choices offered, and they then felt a sense of responsibility for their own learning (Xiang et al., 2011). Therefore, research evidence pointed to the idea that having random and irrelevant choices for students was not beneficial to students' motivation and engagement in physical activities during PE. Thus, these research findings provided support for the implementation of choice into PE classes.

### **Benefits of Student Choice in Physical Education**

There were positive benefits when allowing students to choose from a variety of activities in the physical education program. By allowing students to choose from a range of activities that suits them best, student motivation in a PE setting was increased (Prusak et al., 2004). Providing choices in PE for participation was a powerful tool to increase levels of motivation. Stuntz and Weiss (2009) stated, "A strong sense of autonomy, choice, or decision making is another strong predictor of motivation for physical activity" (p. 436). Xiang et al. (2011) found when adolescents were given opportunities to choose activities that matched their interests; there was a higher level of motivation and engagement in the PE classes. How et al. (2013) found, "In some choice formats, students exhibited significantly higher physical activity levels than students who undertook normal PE" (p. 131). Likewise, Smith, Green, and Thurston (2009) found benefits such as greater enjoyment and value of participating in physical activities when increasing choices of sporting and physical activity options for adolescents were provided. Similarly, Rikard and Banville (2006) found students wanted more variety in sport and fitness activities and there was an increase in student motivation for participating in activities outside of school. Research findings from Enright and O'Sullivan (2010) suggested student choice allowed students to actually imagine doing the chosen activity outside of school. For example, a student

found herself wanting to join up at a fitness centre in her community for exercise because she was given that choice while she was participating in her PE program at school. To support this, Corder et al. (2013) found that when adolescents were introduced and allowed to try these new activities, they were more likely to want to do more of them. Further, How et al. (2013) stated, “To develop sustained and lifelong PA habits, it is important to establish positive attitudes toward activity when young” (p. 132). Establishing positive attitudes in adolescents could occur through providing the approach and strategy of choices to students in PE.

When adolescents were provided with choice in PE, they benefited by becoming more self-directed (Prusak et al., 2004). Prusak et al. (2004) found that the students were allowed to examine their own motives for participating in their choice of physical activity. This in turn led to students taking more responsibility for a positive experience. Further, Prusak et al. (2004) concluded that when allowing students’ choice, it provided them with an opportunity to learn which activities suited their needs and were relevant to their interests. This feature also allowed for favorable attitudes to develop towards choosing a physically active lifestyle as students began to exercise self-determined behaviors in the PE setting (Prusak et al., 2004; Ward et al., 2008).

Lastly, in terms of the benefits of choices in PE, Erwin et al. (2013) found when a student elected to freely engage in an activity of choice, it had positive benefits and related positively to behavioral, cognitive, and affective experiences. Students may be more likely to participate in physical activity because of their experiences in what they had chosen. This likelihood had significant potential for students to continue with their participation in physical activity. Prusak et al. (2004) found when students were given choice; the benefits included more intrinsic motivation and less amotivation for students. This finding was confirmed by Xiang et al. (2011) who also concluded students were more intrinsically motivated and less amotivated when provided with opportunities for choosing their own activity such as walking and or cycling.

Similarly, Lonsdale et al. (2013) found when choices were provided during students' physical education lessons, students' perceived autonomy increased and their sedentary behaviors during PE lessons decreased. As well, when students were given activity choice, there was a positive impact on self-esteem and self-confidence (Smith et al., 2009).

### **Students' Voices and Needs**

Students' voices and needs were evident in the research findings of Smith et al. (2009), Rikard and Banville, (2006), Prusak et al. (2004), and El-Sherfi (2014). Students clearly wanted choice when participating in physical activities. Rikard and Banville (2006) found from interviewing students that they expressed a preference for a variety of activities in sport and fitness, as well as activities that were interesting and fun with a form of game play. Smith et al. (2009) found that when students' choice was restricted with little room to negotiate the activities, students felt frustrated. Students expressed displeasure at what they perceived as unnecessary and undesirable limitations on the number and range of activities made available to them (Smith et al., 2009). Findings from El-Sherfi (2014) explained students felt the choices provided were still teacher-generated and they wanted to have input into activities offered, resulting in more student-generated options. Enright and O'Sullivan (2010) found that students voiced how the importance of being involved in the curriculum decision-making process led them to feel a sense of participation, investment, learning, and accountability. Similarly, Tannehill et al. (2015) found students wanted a variety of activities and student input into the decision-making process, as well as finding out about their needs and desires, helped influence their participation in physical activity and PE. Students participating in Enright and O'Sullivan's (2010) study also wanted to be a part of the decision-making process that would impact their participation of physical activities. They wanted to try new things in PE that would help them be more active. Similarly, Ward et al. (2013) suggested the importance of giving adolescents control of their

learning activities to enhance their motivation to participation in physical activity. This input could aid students in continuing physical activity participation after leaving school.

In addition, student voices suggested there was a great deal of importance placed on the ways in which activities provided them with the opportunity to engage in activities within PE that they also did in their leisure time and which they were likely to do in the future after high school (Smith et al., 2009). Students also indicated that having these opportunities to choose activities associated with what they did in their leisure time would help with the transition to adulthood, growing up, and getting older (Smith et al., 2009). Students also shared that they liked to choose activities that were more informal in context when looking at participating in activities (Smith et al., 2009). The students also felt when the activities were more informal; they could choose who they wanted to participate with in terms of friends and how participating with their friends would be more fun and enjoyable (Smith et al., 2009).

### **Research Instruments for Understanding Students' Interests and Motivation**

One way to investigate students' needs and desires in PE was through surveys. Surveying students about their interests helped teachers identify activities that they may have found more attractive in PE classes (Hill & Clevon, 2006). Addressing and meeting students' needs through responding to the results of student surveys in PE helped promote student engagement and motivation to increase their participation levels (Hill & Clevon, 2006). Hill and Clevon (2006) suggested implementing surveys to students prior to the start of the yearly activities for the PE curriculum to address student needs and interests. Hill and Clevon's (2005) student participants felt they had input when they were surveyed for their interests and were able to identify activities they wanted for PE. Further, when students were surveyed for their activity preferences and participate in these activities, they were more likely to reach their target heart rate zone (Hill & Clevon, 2005).

In order to examine students' motivation, there was a validated instrument known as the Situational Motivation Scale (SIMS). SIMS was created by Guay, Vallerand, and Blanchard (2000) as a tool to evaluate intrinsic motivation, identified regulation, external regulation, and amotivation. SIMS allowed for students to self-report on the above concepts and was considered to be a valid instrument when examining motivation of students (Guay, Vallerand, & Blanchard, 2000). Researchers such as Johnson, Prusak, Pennington, and Wilkinson (2011) used SIMS to assess situational motivation when they examined skill test types, choices, and gender on the situational motivation profiles of students. Guay, Vallerand, and Blanchard (2000) found this tool to be supported by correlations with theories such as the self-determination theory by Deci and Ryan.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, Corder et al. (2013) states, "Adolescence is an important period for physical activity promotion and aiming to attenuate the age-related decline in physical activity" (p. 1). The research findings of Prusak et al. (2004) and Corder et al. (2013) make it very clear that we need to focus on supporting and working with teenagers in their participation of physical activities. There is great importance in considering and examining the question of how intrinsic motivation influences student choice of physical education programs/activities in effective and healthy ways. Researching and finding relevant information and answers regarding this question provided me and potentially other readers with valuable tools when supporting students and increasing their motivation to participate in physical activity throughout their life. The next chapter outlines the research process used to investigate this topic further.



### Chapter 3 Research Methodology and Design

This chapter focuses on several elements of the research methodology and design of this study. I begin by justifying and defining the research methodology used, specifically looking at qualitative and phenomenological approaches. I then identify the research purpose and questions, as well as the data sources and data collection procedures that were used to answer those questions. The setting in which the study took place as well as its duration are described. The participants and recruitment strategies are then discussed in detail. Given that this study involved human subjects, the ethical issues relevant to this study are identified and addressed. Procedures for data analyses techniques are explained, as well as the criteria I aimed to meet for ensuring research quality. The chapter concludes with a delineation of both the limitations and strengths of the methodology.

#### Justifying and Defining the Research Methodology

**Qualitative research.** The aim of this study was to gain a better understanding of students' perspectives and experiences of choice in physical education. There is a specific methodology researchers use to investigate and describe what students are experiencing at school—qualitative research. Qualitative research is a necessary paradigm to use when exploring and understanding people in complex social contexts such as educational programs.

Bogdan and Biklen (2007) confirmed this idea in the following passage:

We use qualitative research as an umbrella term to refer to several research strategies that share certain characteristics. The data collected have been termed **soft**, that is, rich in description of people, places, and conversations, and not easily handled by statistical procedures. Research questions are not framed by operationalizing variables; rather, they are formulated to investigate topics in all their complexity, in context. (p. 2)

Bogdan and Biklen (2007) also stated that qualitative research in education could take a variety of forms and could be applied in a variety of situations with data collection techniques such as in-depth interviewing. This methodological reference supported the application of the in-depth interviewing technique I used to investigate students' perspectives and experiences in a PE context.

Using a qualitative research approach was also important because it was more open-ended. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) made that point clearly: "The open-ended nature of the approach allows the informants to answer from their own frame of reference" (p. 2). This aspect of qualitative research was what I wanted to explore, students' experiences from their frame of reference in a PE context, in this study. Bogdan and Biklen emphasized context in their work by saying that "qualitative researchers go to the particular setting under study because they are concerned with *context*" (p. 4). I conducted my study at a school site where students had experiences within a particular PE context, one that included choice. Furthermore, in this qualitative method design study, I applied a phenomenological approach which specifically aimed to explore and understand the experiences of participants in a particular context.

### **Phenomenology**

Creswell (2007) offers a good overview of phenomenology as a more specific approach to qualitative research and states that phenomenology looks at "describing the meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon" (p. 57). Creswell suggests that phenomenologists "focus on describing what all participants have in common as they experience a phenomenon" (p. 58). Other researchers such as Groenewald (2004) state, "Realities are thus treated as pure "phenomena" and the only absolute data from where to begin" (p. 43). In the case of this research study, the phenomenon studied was the student experience of choice in physical education. Groenewald (2004) states simply that phenomena "have something

to say to us.” (p. 44). If we collect information from individuals who may have experienced the phenomenon being researched, we are able to describe the core of the experience for all of the participants (Creswell, 2007). Phenomenology has been found to be prevalent in the fields of health sciences and education, and therefore was an appropriate choice for this study (Creswell, 2007). Therefore, the research questions below demanded a qualitative design method with a phenomenological approach.

### **Research Purpose and Questions**

What impact did PE programs that offer choice have on participating students’ dispositions towards physical activity, interests, and levels of physical activity? This question kept coming up for me and as already established with my literature review, there was very little research that had been conducted regarding the perspectives and experiences of the students involved in a PE program with choice and one that is a mandatory PE curriculum until the end of Grade 12 which was the case in this particular province on the Canadian prairies. In order to explore and gain greater insight into understanding what students think and more about their experiences, I used a qualitative paradigm with a phenomenological approach to investigate the research questions that guided this study.

The purpose of this phenomenologically-oriented qualitative study was to gain a deeper meaning and better understanding of students’ experiences with, perspectives of, and feelings about PE programs that provided choice. Specifically, two questions were investigated:

1. How do students experience PE programs that provide choice?
2. What are students’ perspectives about PE/PA at school and outside of school?

### **Setting and Participants**

**Setting for the study.** The high school chosen for this study was located in a suburban setting in a major city in the province of Manitoba. The school site allowed students to choose

among a variety of activities within its physical education programming for the Grade 12 course level. Furthermore, this site had opted to implement the 50% in class and 50% out of class option with the Grade 12 PE curriculum classes. I chose to examine the 50% in class and 50% out of class option of implementation over the 100% in class, 75% in class and 25% outside of class, and the 25% in class and 75% outside options outside of class for this study because I believed students needed support and guidance from teachers. I believed students still needed to be assisted and guided in making positive choices when learning to make choices in terms of PA in and out of PE. I also thought if students had any questions, the teacher would be there to answer their questions and concerns. Furthermore, the PE teacher could be there to help remind students of the importance of participating in the 55 hours outside of class time and contact with parents where applicable. This school in which the study took place had approximately 1600 students and offered approximately eight Grade 12 physical education classes each semester for students. This high school was a good site for the study for the following reasons:

- The high school is one of the largest in the province of Manitoba and has a very high student population;
- Physical educators offer student choices in Grade 11 and 12 physical education courses;
- The student population is multicultural and diverse; and
- I work at the school and therefore, it offered convenient access
- I am and continue to be a learning support teacher at the school site and have students who need support in passing the compulsory grade 11 and 12 PE courses.

**Participants of the study.** Participants for this research study were Grade 12 students recruited from a suburban high school located in a large city in Manitoba, Canada. In a phenomenological study, it is important that all participants have experienced the phenomena

being investigated (Creswell, 2007). In this study, each student interviewed had experience with PE classes and programs that provide choice at the time of the phenomenological study as suggested by Creswell (2007). The explanation for having Grade 12 students for this research study was due to the fact that these students were exiting the high school years education and may have felt more comfortable sharing and contributing their thoughts, experiences, insights, and perspectives with a sense of no repercussions because they were leaving the public school system within the year.

### **Purposive Sample**

In this study, I implemented a purposeful sampling strategy. Purposeful sampling occurs when a researcher intentionally uses a particular individual or group of individuals for their study to investigate their research question(s) (Creswell, 2007). I interviewed 10 Grade 12 students at this particular site because the participants all had experienced participating in a Grade 12 PE program that provided choice. Creswell (2007) confirmed this by stating, “The important point is to describe the meaning of the phenomenon for a small number of individuals who have experienced it” (p. 131).

I conducted in-depth interviews with each of the 10 participants purposively recruited from a Grade 12 PE class to be a part of this study. Each student had self-identified which of the three categories they saw themselves fitting in. These categories consisted of students who demonstrated a high level of active participation and interest in PE, the second category of students were more typical, displaying an average level of participation and interest in PE, and the third category of students were reluctant PE learners or those who display lower levels of interest and active levels of participation in PE. This type of sampling strategy whereby, it sets out the criterion that a participant needed to have met is recommended by Creswell (2007) for a

phenomenological study. Creswell (2007) explained how the sampling strategy of criterion had a purpose of, “All cases that meet some criterion; useful for quality assurance” (p. 127).

The source of data for this study was Grade 12 high school students who had experience in a physical education course. In-depth interviews were conducted to explore students’ experiences and perspectives in PE classes and programs that provided choice. In a phenomenological study, it was common for researchers to have used in-depth interviews as a form of data collection (Creswell, 2007). I aimed to conduct 10 in-depth interviews with Grade 12 students in a high school located in suburban area of a major city.

### **Recruitment Strategies**

I recruited 10 participants for this study. Incorporating 10 participants for a phenomenological study was found in Creswell’s (2007) work where he referenced McCracken with the number of participants required for a phenomenological study. I recruited participants for this study by employing the strategy of asking the Student Support Services Director of the school division (SSSD) to read a recruitment script during the Grade 12 PE classes (see Appendix B) and distribute the letter of informed consent for Parents/Guardians and Son/Daughter (Appendix E) to students in the PE classes. In the recruitment letter, students were asked to hand in their signed informed consent and pledge of confidentiality letters directly to me if they were interested in participating in my study. This recruitment strategy ensured that the PE teachers did not know who had volunteered or not, to participate in my study. Furthermore, I did not know which students in the PE classes did not want to participate in my study. Once I had received the signed parent/guardian and son/daughter informed consent letter, I had set up a time to meet at their convenience. At the interview, I had the student self-identify where they felt their levels of involvement with PA fitted within the three categories.

### **Interview Protocol**

I developed an interview protocol for recording the information from the in-depth interviews (See Appendix A). Developing an interview protocol for a qualitative research study was a necessary step in the data collection process (Creswell, 2007). Each interview session consisted of two sections of questions, which evolved from the two primary research questions (See Appendix A). Each question was asked of every participant during the in-depth interview process. The first section of questions focused on how students experienced PE programs that provided choice. The second section of interview questions focused on students' perspectives about PE/PA at school and outside of school. The participant responses from this section of questions helped the researcher compare these two contexts for similarities and differences. This line of questioning held a potential to provide insight into the types of PA that engages students most and if those interests were addressed in school programs or not. Acquiring this information potentially impacted PE program curriculum policy and teaching practice in Canada and abroad.

A final step in developing this interview protocol was to pilot the interview questions and procedures, as recommended by Mills (2007). Therefore, the interview questions were trialed with a few Grade 11 and/or 12 students that were not participants in this research study to see if the interview questions were generating the kind of responses necessary for answering the primary research questions. After piloting the interview questions, I revised the protocol as necessary for use in the research study.

### **Interview with Self**

In this process, I answered the in-depth interview questions from my own experiences and perspectives. I completed the in-depth interview questions before I interviewed the voluntary grade 12 students. I answered the in-depth interview questions twice. The first time I focused on my experiences with choices in PE in my high school. The second time focused on my experiences of choices in my university PE classes. I completed a phenomenological

interpretation of my answers from the in-depth interview questions for both of my experiences. I interpreted how I had perceived choices in PE in high school and in university. I interpreted the significance and meaning of my perception of choice and how it related to my sense of self as a physically active adult and why I had participated in those physical activities.

### **Data Sources and Collection**

As already stated, in keeping with a phenomenological approach to a qualitative research, I used in-depth interviewing as my primary method of collecting data. Creswell (2007) supported this data collection technique by stating, “The process of collecting information involves primarily in-depth interviews (See, e.g., the discussion about the long interview in McCracken, 1988) with as many as 10 individuals” (p. 131). I conducted 10 in-depth interviews to collect data from a diverse group of Grade 12 students. The in-depth interviews were conducted with each individual participant before or after school in the resource office or conference room to ensure privacy, anonymity, and quiet. The interviews were scheduled at a time convenient for the student participant during the spring of 2017. One hour was scheduled for each interview. The time, date, and duration of each interview was documented.

The in-depth interview sessions were audio-taped using a high quality Sony IC Recorder ICD-PX820 which was used later for verbatim transcribing and analysis. During the interviews, to confirm I accurately understood the meaning of the participants’ responses and comments, I conducted meaning checks. I transcribed all 10 in-depth interviews in the privacy of my home office so that students’ voices couldn’t be overheard by anyone in the school. If and when transcribing was done outside of my home office, earphones were used to protect participants’ identities and comments.

### **Data Analyses**



I used the template suggested by Creswell (2007) for analysis and representation of a phenomenological study. Firstly, I provided a description of my personal experiences with the phenomenon that was investigated in this study. Second, from the transcribed interview transcripts, I created a list of significant statements pertaining to participants' experiences on the research topic. Each significant statement was listed (horizontalization of the data) and treated as having had equal worth (Creswell, 2007). Next, I took the significant statements and group them into themes. At that point, I wrote a description of *what* the participants experienced pertaining to the phenomenon which Creswell (2007) stated is known as "textual description". After that step, I wrote a "structural description". Creswell (2007) explained the structural description as *how* the experience happened within the setting and context. The final step in the data analyses involved writing a final section about the phenomenon that integrates the textual and structural descriptions. Creswell (2007) stated this section is the "essence" of the participants' experience of the phenomenon.

In addition to the above data analyses steps, while I was examining and looking for themes from the data, I wrote an analytical memo for reflection when interpreting the data collected. I went through the data numerous times for significant statements and themes to determine any pertinent patterns or trends that may have arised from the data. When the themes were identified, I used color-coded index cards to organize the data into thematic categories. Based on what I had learned from the data analysis, I asked what the themes identified contributed to the literature on the topic of students' experiences and perspectives of a PE class and program that provided choice. Lastly, how did this data support teachers when making decisions regarding PE curriculum, teaching and learning processes to promote choices in physical education in other communities? In other words, what were the implications of the findings for practice? As well, I asked how the data might aid in understanding the importance of

students' experiences and opinions regarding choice in PE classes and programs and how that may have contribute to students' physical health and well-being. Asking such questions was a way of interrogating the data during analysis as I moved to interpretation and theorizing about the findings.

### **Ethical Considerations**

**Informed consent.** For this research study, the ethical considerations were taken into account prior to the start of the research study and during the research to ensure the protection and respect of persons, to respect the autonomy of people, and to protect those with diminished autonomy (Tisdale, 2004). The first step was to secure informed consent from the superintendent of the school division, and then the school principal and secure permission to conduct the study and recruit participants. Then recruitment began and informed consent was sought from parents and son/daughter (Appendix E). I used the recruitment strategy of the Student Support Services Director (SSSD) to hand out my recruitment letters to the students to reduce my power-over relationship with students as a teacher in the school research site.

**Volunteerism, anonymity, and confidentiality.** Researchers must ensure that participating in the research was a voluntary process and participants must know that they may withdraw from the study at any time without consequence. Informing the participants of these matters throughout the research study process guaranteed that students had complete control over whether they would like to participate and/or continue in this study (Stinger, 2008). Creswell (2007) suggested when the interview was to commence; the researcher should do the following, "Go over the purpose of the study, the amount of time that will be needed to complete the interview, and plans for using the results from the interview" (p. 134). As well, I used pseudonyms in place of students' real names to protect students' anonymity, identity, and

confidentiality at all times during and after the research study had been completed (McNiff & Whitehead, 2011).

**Storing data and confidentiality.** I stored all paper and audio-recording files of in-depth interview data and analytical memos in a locked cabinet in my home office to ensure safety and security of the data. I created backup copies of the transcription files and saved them on a password protected computer as well as on a memory stick. The memory stick was kept locked in the filing cabinet as well. I stored all identifiable data such as a list of participants' real names, false names, and contact information in a separate file and in a different drawer of my locked filing cabinet, separate from non-identifiable data. In a qualitative study, storing and handling data in this manner was highly recommended by Creswell (2007). Once the research study was completed, I ensured disposition of data by putting paper copies through a shredder and deleting all electronic and audio-files from my laptop, memory stick, and audio-recorder.

**Position of power.** Lastly, I took into account my position of power over the student participants in this study. Creswell (2007) spoke to the power relationship that may exist between researchers and the individuals that were participating in the research study in a qualitative research study. I was and continue to be a learning support teacher in the school site and all teachers hold a power-over position in relationship to students. To minimize this power relationship between the student participants, and me, I implemented the following strategies. I declared my power-over relationship in the recruitment materials and informed consent letters, expressed my awareness of it, and how I aimed to address it. I informed participants in the consent form that they had the right to not participate and they could withdraw their information from the study at any time without any repercussions or consequences. I reminded them, that there were authorities that they could contact if there were concerns they wished to report. I used an impartial tone the recruitment and consent forms to eliminate pressure on the potential

participants to participate (no communication of how important this study is to me). I used a third-party recruitment strategy to reduce the pressure that students might have felt to participate if I did the recruiting myself. The third-party was the Student Services Coordinator of the school division, a professional who did not work in the school site or teach these students. Lastly, to mitigate my power-over I recruited students that were not in my grade level caseload or that I was not the case manager for in the school. In addition, I recruited students for whom I did not assign grades; therefore, no grades were assigned by me to any of the participants of this study. This strategy ensured that I did not work directly with any of the potential participants.

### **Criteria for Ensuring Research Quality**

To ensure research quality in this phenomenological study, I implemented the standards identified by Creswell (2007):

- Does the author convey an understanding of the philosophical tenets of phenomenology?
- Does the author have a clear “phenomenon” to study that is articulated in a concise way?
- Does the author use procedures of data analysis in phenomenology, such as the procedures recommended by Moustakas (1994)?
- Does the author convey the overall essence of the experience of the participants? Does this essence include a description of the experience and the context in which it occurred?
- Is the author reflexive throughout the study?

Furthermore, to ensure quality, I incorporated the concept of bracketing of my past experiences in PE throughout this process. Bracketing refers to “the investigator setting aside their experiences” (Creswell, 2007, p. 59). Researchers use this technique because setting aside their experiences provides an opportunity for the researcher to take a firsthand outlook of the phenomena being investigated (Creswell, 2007).

### **Limitations and Strengths of the Study**

First, this study and data collection was limited to one high school site in a suburban setting in one large city in the province of Manitoba, Canada. The sample of participants was a small group drawn from Grade 12 physical education classes at this one school, which may not be like other Grade 12 students in other high school contexts in the province or the country. This Grade 12 sample of population had the opportunity to choose which type of physical education class and or program they would like to participate in before they started the course, which was an approach that may not have existed for other high school populations. In addition, this sample of participants had to take a mandatory Grade 12 physical education course in order to complete the necessary requirements to graduate from high school with their Manitoba High School Diploma. Grade 12 physical education courses may be optional for students in other locations and results of the data generated by those students may be quite different.

Second, in terms of the in-depth interviews, there was only one layer of data interpretation and analysis and the conclusions drawn from the data were all completed by me alone. There was not a second analyst reviewing the data, which if used would have enhanced the validity of the findings.

Strengths of this study included the demographics of the sample population. The sample population was multicultural and diverse with respect to socio-economic status. Another strength of the study design was that the school had implemented the provincial curriculum document for the mandatory Grades 11 and 12 Physical Education program, which provided students with the opportunity to choose their own physical activities. This school provided students with choice of physical education classes such as healthy living and basketball-advanced courses. In addition, I used a qualitative approach to focus upon and listen to what students had to say about this research topic. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) explain how qualitative research allows teachers to

understand what is going on in the classroom from the point of view of the students and how students see themselves. The procedures I used allowed students to share their perspectives, opinions, and experiences on the topic. Student voice was key and necessary if I really wanted to understand and examine the impact of choice in physical education on intrinsic motivation. Furthermore, qualitative research not only benefits students, but qualitative research also helps teachers become more reflective and improve their teaching effectiveness (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

Last in this study, I used a phenomenological approach which provided the following strengths. Phenomenology allows for the researcher to really understand what a person's experience is in a specific phenomenon, and in this case it honored students' voices. Bevan (2014) extends this point by stating, "A phenomenological researcher is interested in describing a person's experience in the way he or she experiences it, and not from some theoretical standpoint." (p. 136). This phenomenological study then created a venue for me to describe what and how students experienced a certain phenomenon (Creswell, 2007; Starks, 2007). Randles (2012) strengthened this point by explaining the importance phenomenology has in educational research, that of unearthing the meaning of certain phenomena.

### **Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, I overview the qualitative, phenomenological approach that was used in this research study to examine students' experience and perspectives of a PE program that provided choice. The research questions developed and based on a literature review of the topic were:

- How do students experience PE programs that provide choice?
- What are students' perspectives about PE/PA at school and outside of school?

In-depth interviews were the main data collection technique employed in this study; interviewing was suggested by Creswell (2007) for a phenomenological study to gain greater insight into the experiences and perspectives of students. Furthermore, ethical considerations as well as the limitations and strengths of this study were identified and outlined. The next chapter offers a discussion of the findings resulting from the data collection, analysis, and interpretation processes.

## Chapter 4 Results

This chapter focuses on the findings resulting from an analysis of the data gathered during my research study. I will share the analysis of 10 in-depth interviews conducted with grade 12 students who had the experience of participating in a Physical Education (PE) course that provided choice. The in-depth interviews with students took place over a two-week period. The average length of the in-depth interviews was thirty-two minutes and fifteen seconds. Each participant shared their experiences and perspectives about a PE program and or class that provided choice. The interview protocol used for the in-depth interview sessions appears in Appendix A.

Each in-depth interview was analyzed separately and followed the procedures put forth by Creswell (2007) for a phenomenological study. I provided a description of my personal experiences with the phenomenon investigated in this study. From all the transcribed interview transcripts, I have created a list of significant statements pertaining to participants' experiences with the research topic. Each significant statement was seen as having equal worth (Creswell, 2007). I then took the significant statements and grouped them into the following major themes: social inclusion, authentic choice in PE, general wellness, and barriers to physical activity for youth. I then wrote a "textual description" and a "structural description". After these steps, I wrote a final section about the phenomenon, which integrates the textual and structural descriptions to get at the "essence" of the participants' experience of the phenomenon as suggested by Creswell (2007).

In addition to these analytical steps, I wrote analytical memos of my reflections while I examined the themes and interpreted the results emerging from the data collected. I reviewed the data several times to identify significant statements and themes and searched for relevant patterns that surfaced from the data. I then used color-coded index cards to organize the data into



thematic categories. Based on what I learned from the data analysis, I asked what these themes contributed to the literature on the topic of students' experiences with and perspectives about participating in a PE program that provides choice.

In addition, I asked about the implications of this data in terms of supporting teachers when making decisions regarding the PE curriculum and the promotion of choices in physical education in other communities.

Lastly, I addressed how this data assists educators in understanding the importance of students' experiences regarding choice in PE classes and programs and the contribution of such programs to students' physical health and well-being.

### **Personal Experiences with Physical Education**

**High school physical education.** In high school, I self-identified as a student who was highly active and interested in PE. I loved to participate all the time in high school PE classes and physical activity was very important to me, I valued it greatly. I was not only highly physically active in high school PE classes but also outside of school in various physical activities. I was a part of my school's volleyball, badminton, and track and field teams every school year. Outside of school I was involved in water polo, gymnastics, and badminton clubs in the community-based programs.

In my high school PE classes, I often enjoyed participating. I enjoyed participating because I genuinely liked some of the sports or activities that we were doing. I fed on the competition or I just felt good while and after participating in physical activity. There were times when there were physical activities and sports included in PE that I did not enjoy such as basketball, floor hockey, and soccer. During those PE classes, I did not participate to my fullest. If I was given a choice in every PE class to participate in what I liked and enjoyed most, I would have been more motivated to fully participate.

Sometimes in my high school PE classes, we (students) were provided with choice. Choice was presented by the PE teacher by asking us to write down our top three choices for physical activities that we would want to participate in during classes for the next few units. The PE teacher would plan our activities based upon the three activities that the majority of the students in the class had written down. This approach was wonderful if I enjoyed the physical activities but often the top physical activities were basketball and soccer, which I did not enjoy or like. This kind of outcome resulted in my lack of participation during those PE classes that focused on basketball and soccer. I was bothered because I felt like I did not actually have choice in my PE class. Overall, though, I immensely enjoyed participating in my high school PE classes and often enjoyed them, which led me to have a positive PE experience and success.

**University physical education.** In my own university PE classes, I self-identified as a highly physically active student generally interested in PE classes and programs. Throughout my time at university, I continued to enjoy and participate in physical activities in a variety of university PE courses. Physical activity continued to be very important to me and I loved taking PE courses and classes at the university level. During this time, I also participated in physical activities outside of university such as badminton and volleyball recreation leagues.

In my university PE courses, I enjoyed participating in the physical activities that were presented by the instructors and professors. Some of these included cricket, kanga ball, and ultimate Frisbee. I enjoyed these types of university PE courses because they allowed me to engage in physical activities as I learned new physical activities. At times I did not enjoy some of the university PE courses because I perceived the courses as not providing choice. Previously, the university implemented requirements for students enrolled in the PE program, therefore, if I wanted to graduate from the university with a background in PE, I was required to take PE courses that I did not enjoy or want to take (no choice). This made me feel like I was only

participating in these PE courses because they were a requirement to move onto the next level in my university education. In each course, a course syllabus was provided by the professor or instructor outlining the units pertaining to the particular physical activities. In each course, we followed the syllabus accurately. I felt like there was no choice for me when I experienced this type of PE program/class structure. Overall, I did enjoy some aspects of university PE courses; specifically participating in new physical activities presented by the professors, but at times, felt I had little choice or no choice.

### **Phenomenological Interpretation of Interview with Self**

Completing two in-depth interviews of my own experiences as a student in a high school PE class and a university PE class have been eye opening. Going through my own data several times, I will now be able to provide a phenomenological interpretation of my answers from the in-depth interview questions. The information arising from my own answers has allowed me to come up with the following two categories of data: (1) my value of and perception of choices in PE and (2) the importance of my interpretation of the significance and meaning of my perception of choice and how it relates to my sense of self as a physically active adult.

Answering the in-depth interview questions has revealed how much I valued choices in PE while I was a high school student and also as a university student. Going through my data I found I really wanted to have choice in my PE classes. For example, I stated, "I enjoy playing volleyball and badminton and would very much pick these choices every time I was in PE, if I could." This statement indicated how much I valued choice and how I wanted to have the choice to participate in physical activities that I was both good at and enjoyed. My data also revealed more information regarding my perception of choice in high school and university PE classes. In my data, I identified that my experience with choice in high school PE classes was limited. I experienced limited choice in high school PE classes, as the PE teacher choose the top three

physical activities that the majority of the class had indicated on our sheets of paper. This is illustrated by my following comment on choice in high school PE:

Choice was given to us by one teacher asking us to write down our top three picks for physical activities we would like to participate in during our PE classes this semester. It turned out that only one of my choices was picked and then the others weren't because most of the other students choose another physical activity. I disliked this because basketball and soccer seemed to be the sports that students always picked to play in PE class.

It appeared my perception of choice at a high school level was limited and this bothered me as I enjoyed playing and participating in other physical activities that were not picked by my classmates.

My perception of choice in a university PE class was similar. In my data, I found that university offered choice in selecting some PE classes, but there were requirements set by the university in order to graduate with a physical education degree that limited other choices. For example, I explained this in my comment:

The university puts requirements on what I can and cannot take. I feel my choices are extremely limited and at times I felt like I did not even have choice and if I wanted to graduate from university with a degree, then I needed to take the required PE classes set out by the university.

This comment reveals how much I valued choice and how choice was limited for me once again. Once I was in a university PE class, I enjoyed participating in some of the activities, but similarly, my perception was that I did not have choice, as there was a course syllabus and the units for the PE class was already mapped out by the instructor.

After reviewing my in-depth interview data, the significance and meaning of my perception of choice surfaced and has been insightful for me. Completing the in-depth interview questions have lead me to the realization that choice is something I value in my participation of physical activity. I have a greater understanding of how I want choice when I participate in physical activity to maintain my physical health and well-being.

I have come to understand that as an adult, I value and need to make my own choices in order to be physically active and maintain my health and well-being. My phenomenological interpretation of my data has led to a deeper understanding and meaning that suggested, in order to be a physically active adult, I must have the opportunity to choose the physical activities that I want to participate in. If I want to swim daily or participate in Zumba, then I want to make that choice on my own and not have anyone else making the choices for me. This is very important to me and I enjoy making these types of decisions for myself when it comes to my life and being physically active and healthy. I feel that having choice gives me a sense of control over what happens to me: I know when I make a choice to participate in the physical activity I have chosen, I am motivated and will put all my effort into the participation of that physical activity because I want to be a healthy and active adult. Furthermore, as stated within my interview, “I am committed to participating in this physical activity because I have chosen it.” This indicates that I feel I have a stronger commitment level to myself to maintain my physical activity levels as an adult to reach my goal of being healthy. Lastly, I found some reasons why I enjoy participating in physical activities.

### **In-depth Interviews Results**

Data analysis of the in-depth interviews with students revealed four major themes and several sub themes, which are listed in Table 1 and 2 below. In this section, I discuss each major theme in more detail. The order in which I present the findings reflects the emphasis that

students' placed on particular ideas during our conversations. The ideas that were most dominant are presented first and are followed by those that were least dominant.

**Table 1**

*Emergent Themes and Sub-Themes for Research Question #1 (How do students experience PE programs that provide choice?)*

Emergent Themes	Sub-Themes
1. Social Inclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i) Reciprocity</li> <li>ii) Importance of relationships</li> <li>iii) Involvement in sports and physical activities provides a sense of belonging</li> <li>iv) Competition enhances performance</li> </ul>
2. Authentic Choice in Physical Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i) Teacher-generated and directed physical activities</li> <li>ii) Choices increase levels of participation</li> <li>iii) Difficulty in decision making when choice was offered to students</li> <li>iv) Decision making and small class size</li> <li>v) Lack of student recognition of choice in PE</li> <li>vi) Limited choice</li> </ul>

**Table 2**

*Emergent Themes and Sub-Themes for Research Question #2 (What are students' perspectives about PE/PA in and outside of school?)*

3. General Wellness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i) Mental wellness</li> <li>ii) Physical wellness</li> </ul>
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4. Barriers to Physical Activity for Youth	i) External barriers  ii) Internal barriers
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### **Social Inclusion**

The major theme of social inclusion focuses on students sharing the need to have a sense of belonging and a sense of being a part of a community. Many students specified that they were involved in sports or physical activities because it allowed for a connection to others, helped them to develop relationships with peers, and because they had a general love of the sport in which they were participating (which was present in students taking a basketball focus physical education class in grade 12). As well, being with others was viewed as having both a positive and negative impact on students' performance and engagement in physical activities.

Additionally, some students indicated being with others was important because they could be competitive and that the relationships developed while participating in sport helped with the improvement of one's self, both physically and mentally.

**Reciprocity.** Overall, the students' responses indicated they wanted to contribute to their PE experience by being heard, listened to, and valued, thus, the subtheme of reciprocity emerged. Students wanted to be included in terms of sharing their ideas and thoughts regarding their PE classes and make decisions for themselves on the physical activities that want to engage in. Beatrice explained her thoughts, "You're not supposed to be told like what to do but like you should be asked for it and then you should decide what you need to do in the beginning of the course." Similarly, Barry shared, "I think teachers need to consider...the opinions and choices of people that are not engaging, more than the people that are." And Becky shared, "I really do think they should be open as to what us students want to do and what are some of the choices we

would like to see.” Becky further explained that some people are from other countries and may have different physical activities they could share with their peers. Becky explained, “So we know games that are out of this country that would be interesting. So if teachers could be like open to what other students have to say.”

From the researcher’s perspective, students wanted to be heard and share their opinions and thoughts with their PE teachers regarding physical activities in their PE classes. In comparison, Hill and Cleven (2005) found PE teachers should consider student input when selecting activities for PE programs. They thought this was important because it can assist in meeting students’ needs. Interesting to note, one student felt teachers should ask students who are not engaged in PE to hear what they had to say. Barry explained, “It’s the kids that like to just stand in the corner and not do things, those are the people that you want actually engage. That’s the people you want to effect. So you know, try to ask them.” Asking and hearing all student voice is important for PE teachers in order to best support all students in their classes.

Furthermore, students wanted their voices heard in terms of how they felt peers interacted with one another and making sure students were comfortable. A student indicated it was important for PE teachers to know how everyone interacts with each other. Betty explained:

I guess they gotta know how everyone in the class interacts with each other. In the change room, when you’re playing games, everything. When you guys are running in the field. They gotta make sure that everyone’s comfortable with each other.

Betty stated when students were comfortable with their peers, it brings the best out of them.

Betty shared, “That’s how you bring out the best in your students in gym class. You gotta make sure they’re comfortable.” Feeling comfortable in PE and with others is identified by students as being significant to bring out the best in students. In comparison, the work of Davies et al. (2015)



indicated the importance of creating a safe setting for students to feel comfortable in PE because it can help with their participation in physical activity and achievement.

Reciprocity continued further with students stating they wanted their voices heard in school about the physical activities that were not offered. The following is a list of the physical activities students identified as wanting in their PE programs: basketball, hockey, acrobats, floor hockey, dance, football, swimming, boxing, and skydiving. Students indicated they not only wanted their voices heard in school but they also wanted their voices heard outside the school in the larger community. Students shared they wanted different physical activities to be offered in their communities. Football, basketball, swimming, dance, netball, badminton, running, soccer, and ice hockey were identified as the physical activities students wanted to in their communities. Similarly, the research conducted by Rikard and Banville (2006) resulted in students indicating they wanted a wider range of physical activities. Furthermore, El-Sherfi (2014) found students wanted to have input on the physical activities offered to them in PE. Allowing students a voice will result in a more interest in the physical activity than a teacher-generated physical activity.

Furthermore, students shared they wanted a voice and input in their PE classes when it came to authentic choice. Students responded with a variety of reasons why they wanted their voices heard in PE class. Betty shared, "It felt great, it felt like I actually have a say in class, that I'm not being bossed around." Similarly, Brodie mentioned, "It feels good because it's like, it gives you a voice so you can actually have input in what you're gonna be doing." Lastly, Brittany confirmed what the other participants stated, "It feels like you are getting some input in your gym class." These students identified the significance of student voice and choice in PE classes and the importance of this was founded in other studies. Researchers such as Tannehill et al. (2015) found students wanted their input in the decision-making process as well. Similarly, Enright and O'Sullivan (2010), identified in their work the significance of student voice and

student involvement in the decision-making process with the curriculum and how this lead to a sense of investment for the students. In addition, Enright and O' Sullivan (2010) found this to be significant because students' input in PE curriculum can encourage students' participation in PE and physical activity.

**Importance of relationships.** This subtheme related to students indicating the significance of having friends, teachers, and family in and outside of class. I found that five of the ten participants indicated having friends was important to them, and they had fun when they were with their friends. For example, Bradley stated, "I'm glad that my class is with...bunch of friends and I got to have a good time with them." Bethany shared, "It was fun...because I had friends." In addition, a student indicated when their friends were in their PE classes they felt supported. Bradley also shared, "Phys. Ed class is the people I'm with. If I...have the people that will support me...that'll make it easier for me." Betty demonstrated how her classes felt like a community because of her peers: "there's a sense of community inside of the class. If you're comfortable with the people around you, you're gonna have an easy and fun time." From the researcher's perspective of the students' comments, students feeling emotionally safe in their PE settings can lead to students wanting to participate more so in physical activities. This idea was also found to be significant in the research conducted by Davies et al. (2015) in terms of creating an emotionally safe PE environment for students to feel comfortable and confident to assist in students' motivation to engage in physical activities.

Furthermore, being in PE classes with their friends made participation in PE class easier for students. Bradley confirmed this as well by commenting, "I won't have as good of a time. Cause then...I'll have...no drive, I'll just be going there, I'll just be doing whatever and just aww...getting the...passing grade." Betty shared having friends is important because it is more fun to be active with someone, "it's boring just doing everything alone. I think it's more fun if

you do it with someone.” Having friends in a PE class is viewed as positive...for students to participate in PE and made it easier to participate in physical activities. Similarly, to the work of Corder et al. (2013), in which they found students wanted more physical activities with their friends, students interviewed for this study spoke often about their desire to have friends in their PE classes. Lastly, some of the students’ responses specified how being in PE helped them communicate with others that they did not often see and talk with, as shared by Brittany, “it was good because you got to maybe communicate with some of the kids you didn’t ever talk to cause they were in different classes.” Being in a class with others created the opportunity for students to feel a sense of community and belonging because of the communication, conversations, and time with their peers.

Having friends in PE class was not only important because of the positivity and fun times that students enjoyed, but because of the effect friends have on participation levels. This notion was confirmed by Brodie, “I feel that if you have friends in your Phys. Ed. class, it has a huge effect on how you’re gonna participate in the class.” It was also noted, however, that friends in PE class can either have a positive or negative effect on students, depending on the group of friends. As hinted at by Bethany, “well it depends like with the people I’m surrounded by where, cause some people are just like, naaa and I’m like okay.” Brodie similarly stated, “So, depends on the type of friend too.” He continued by explaining the impact friends have on student participation in PE, “so if you have a friend who...is not gonna run...its gonna influence you not to run.”

Other participants, however, indicated that friends in PE class were motivating for students to participate in physical activities. This notion was supported and valued by three of the student participants in this research study. For example, Bethany shared, “Motivation I guess. ‘Cause I don’t wanna be the last person to be left out. And everyone’s cheering.” Brodie also

indicated, “but if you have friends like, pushing their limits and actually running, it’s like, oh I don’t wanna stand out, I’m gonna run too.” Students’ friends in PE classes were very significant to them and this had both a positive and negative impact on students’ participation levels.

Furthermore, three out of the ten students in this study identified the importance of their peer relationships when they participate in physical activities outside of school. Some of the students shared they enjoyed playing certain physical activities with their peers outside of school because of the interactions these activities allowed for. This was articulated by Billy, “Oh ya, basketball because there’s a lot of people who play here. I like playing basketball too as well as I get to see them a lot and we usually play outside.” Similarly, Bradley explained being connected with his friends as being significant to him, “My friends are there with me.” Betty concurred, stating, “My friends ‘cause they’re always like asking me if I wanna workout and that makes you wanna go with them.” The importance of relationships with their peers was extremely meaningful for students when participating in physical activities.

Family was identified by student participants as being extremely important to students in relation to their participation of physical activity outside of school. Eighty percent of participants indicated family members, such as a parent, sibling, or cousin, were influential on their participation in physical activities. Brodie shared the influence of his father: “when I grew up my dad was very athletic. So then that kinda just rubbed off on me.” Bobby had a similar response, saying, “My dad started out at a young age. Dad taught me everything.” Billy explained how he witnessed his father participating in physical activity, “I really grew up with my dad playing basketball a lot and gets physically active.” Similarly, Brittany demonstrated the influence her parents’ physical activeness had on her when she said, “obviously my parents. I guess my parents were always active so, I wanted to be active with them too.” Family members played a

vital role for students by influencing them to participate in physical activity through their own role modeling and engagement in physical activity.

Other students expressed the influence of their siblings and extended family members on their engagement in physical activities. Forty percent of the students in this study indicated their siblings or extended family members motivated them to participate in physical activity. Betty communicated, “My brother. When he runs outside, especially now that the weather is nice, he makes sure that I come with him.” Beatrice conveyed, “oh my brother because he is older than me and he’s telling me like, good things about it.” And Bethany expressed, “specially my brother. He taught me how to do badminton.” Similarly, Barry described the influence of his cousins regarding his interest in cricket, “I got into cricket. From one of my cousins. Like older cousins and then from that I got into track and field.” Many of the students shared how important it was to them to participate with their family members in physical activities outside of school. The influence of family is reflected in the work of Corder et al. (2013), where it was found students wanted to participate with their families in physical activities. From the comments above, the researcher determined that, for many of the students, seeing their family members being physically active was motivation to be physically active themselves. Family influence is significant when looking at youth engagement in physical activity. This is important to note because youth participation in physical activity lessens as they get older, as indicated by the research conducted by Hill and Hannon (2008).

Not only were friends and family members important to students, but the researcher found that building relationships with PE teachers is also significant. PE teachers were viewed as caring and being concerned for the wellbeing of the students. This caring can be demonstrated by comments such as Bobby’s, when he said, “when you’re doing activities they’re just looking out for us.” Similarly, Becky indicated PE teachers cared about students: “there are great teachers in

PE and they care about our needs.” Betty agreed by stating, “My teacher is really nice and understanding.” Interesting to note, one student identified feeling comfortable with her PE teacher. Betty shared, “I’m comfortable with my teacher.” Furthermore, PE teachers were identified as being fun because of their participation in the physical activities with their students. This was evident in Brodie’s comment, “the teacher was actually...pretty fun because he would go around and be like oh, I bet I can beat you and then you’d be like alright, let’s play.” PE teachers inspiring students to participate in physical activities is also found to have significance in the work of Ward et al. (2008) in which it was found PE teachers have the opportunity to encourage youth to engage in regular physical activities. Participating with the PE teacher and having fun made Brodie feel like he was on a one to one level with his teacher and that the teacher was real as he explained, “that was pretty...outstanding to me ‘cause it’s like you get on to a one to one level with your teacher so you’re like...he’s actually a person.” Furthermore, Brodie explained that PE teachers can be portrayed as a stern individual but yet they are not, they are nice: “they’re portrayed as like hard by the book like, military kinda style but they’re really not, they’re really nice.” Interacting with the PE teacher in PE classes helped students view the PE teachers as being authentic people. Students valued their interactions with their PE teachers in PE classes.

Lastly, students really appreciated how some PE teachers were also their coaches for after-school sports activities, which lead students to be even more motivated to try hard in in-school PE classes. For example, Brodie shared this by stating, “I liked it especially because aww...my teacher was my coach at the time.” Brodie continued to explain how having the PE teacher as a coach was also motivating, “I had to try because I’d be like oh, that’s my coach, I gotta impress my coach. So then I’d try even harder. So that was a big motivator for me.” Having the PE teacher as a coach was identified as being significant because of the strong relationship it

created. Brodie shared this impact of having his PE teacher for a coach by commenting the following, “I can...I trust you as a coach more. So it builds...a bond.” From the researcher’s perspective of the student’s responses, PE teachers have a significant impact in the lives of students in high school PE and the relationship that is built with the student and teacher is a key element in students having fun and engaging in physical activities.

**Involvement in sports and physical activities provides a sense of belonging.** Some students indicated the importance of participating in a basketball focus PE course in grade 12 in which they had a choice of picking for their PE class. Students enjoyed participating in the basketball focus PE course because it provided an opportunity to feel connected and a sense of belonging in the school. Billy elaborated on this by stating, “I have a basketball focus umm...I like to aww...really compete and like compete with all the best basketball players in the school, the varsity guys,” Billy’s need to be competent and compete with others in his school was important to him. Billy also shared how the basketball focus course was a choice for students, “We had an option, it’s either Phys.Ed or like basketball focus.” He chose it because he was very interested in basketball compared to other sports and having the opportunity to choose his PE class gave him a sense of autonomy. Furthermore, Billy explained, “I was like okay then, I’ll just take the basketball focus one...since I’m more interested in basketball than any other sports.” Billy’s need to relate and connect to the sport of basketball, in which he enjoys, helped him feel more motivated, connected to a sport and a sense of belonging in his school. The need to feel competence, autonomy, and relatedness can be found in the SDT by researchers, Deci and Ryan (2008). Deci and Ryan (2008) stated people have psychological needs for autonomy, relatedness, and competence, which have an impact on the strength of motivation.

**Competition enhances performance.** Involvement in physical activities not only provided students with a sense of belonging, but also the opportunity to be competitive with their

peers and self-improvement. Students identified throughout their in-depth interviews the importance of having a competitive aspect to their PE classes and activities with their peers. 30% of the participants in this research study indicated how they wanted to compete with their peers in gym class. For instance, Billy stated, “I took it seriously, play as best as I can, compete with the varsity guys.” Bobby shared his love for competition, “Whatever sports, most people are most like competitive people would play cause that’s, I love playing competitive.” And finally, Brittany’s words focus upon self-improvement, “Maybe the competitive level that there with and actually got to do things and try to improve yourself.” Students indicated they wanted to have a competitive aspect to their PE classes because it helped them improve their performance and for the pure enjoyment of competing with others in their PE classes.

Competing with their friends in PE class was related to students feeling good and not giving up as demonstrated by Billy’s comment, “It made me feel great and think about like all those times...thinking about giving up and but not.” Billy further commented how fun it was to compete with his friends in PE class, “It was pretty fun because it was really competitive.” Other participants really enjoyed the competitive aspect of PE and would choose to play the more competitive games. Bobby was one of the participants who enjoyed the competitive games by stating, “I played more of the competitive games.” Lastly, competing with friends in PE class was motivating for some students because they would work hard to be able to compete. Billy expressed this a few times. For example, Billy stated, “Cause I work hard to like to compete with them.” and then he shared, “By like pushing myself, knowing that I can do this, I can compete with them.” Bobby also expressed that he was motivated to play because it was competitive games, “I still played like it was a champion’s game to me because that’s how I am.” Students’ responses indicated they enjoyed competing with others in PE class because it felt good, it was fun, and it was motivating.



Students not only indicated that they enjoyed the competitive aspect of a PE class but they also identified the aspect of being able to improve their physical activity. Six of the ten participants stated that they were able to improve themselves in PE. Bobby, Billy, and Becky talked about getting better at a skill or learning a sport. Bobby illustrated this, “Just to get better at some like, how to position my shot.” Similarly, Billy stated he learned a great deal in PE, “I learned really a lot. I learned like moves or like how this play works.” And Becky also expressed this, “I learn how to play these games.” Other participants indicated they enjoyed improving overall, as a human being. For example, Bradley felt PE class helped to make him an overall “better person.” Brittany had a similar response about becoming a better person through physical activity and felt strongly about it by stating, “I think improving yourself is good, and I think we should all strive for it.” Furthermore, Beatrice communicated that PE provided an opportunity for students to reach different levels in fitness by, “Slowly you can get up to the higher level. And then improve yourself.” Improving ones’ self by learning in PE class was specified by many of the participants as being significant to them. From the researcher’s point of view, this is significant because the students’ felt they were contributing to their PE experience.

### **Authentic Choice in Physical Education**

The second major theme of this research study is authentic choice in PE. This province in Canada, where this study took place, implemented choice in the PE programs at the Grade 11 and 12 levels through a provincial PE curriculum document in 2009. In this PE curriculum, high schools in the province had the following options as to how they will implement this provincial curriculum for students: 25% in class and 75% outside of class, 50% in class and 50% outside of class, 75% in class and 25% outside of class, and lastly, 100% inside of class. The school participating in this research study has opted to implement the 50% in class and 50% out of class option with the Grade 11 and 12 PE curriculum classes. Therefore, choice of how students

engage in physical activity was given to students in the 50% of out of class option of the course. Encompassed by this second major theme, subthemes were identified as follows: teacher-generated and directed physical activities, choices increase levels of participation, difficulty in decision making when choice was offered to students, decision making and small class size, lack of student recognition of choice in PE, and limited choice. A discussion of each sub-theme follows.

**Teacher-generated and directed physical activities.** A small portion of the students (3 of 10 or 30%) interviewed discussed their positive responses to physical activities that were teacher-generated and directed. For example, Bobby stated his enjoyment, “most of the time I do enjoy it because it involves activities...I like” Brittany and Barry both agreed with Bobby’s comments. In comparison, El-Sherfi (2014) found students identified the choices provided to them were teacher-generated. In contrast, in El-Sherfi’s (2014) findings, the students in that study indicated wanting more student-generated activities but in this study, students did not indicate they wanted more student-generated activities.

Students in this research study indicated they liked the teacher-generated and directed physical activities for a variety of reasons, such as enjoyment and trying physical activities they may not have engaged in before or on their own. For example, Barry liked the teacher-generated activities because they were fun and he was able to participate in physical activities he would not normally have chosen himself, “It’s fun. Especially things that I don’t usually do. So like Frisbee, archery, things like that.” Barry further explained the significance of teacher-generated and directed activities by stating, “I probably wouldn’t have tried if it wasn’t for phys.ed. which is pretty cool.” Brittany commented on teacher-generated and directed physical activities stating she had the opportunity to participate in activities that may not typically be played on one’s own: “I’m doing activities maybe I wouldn’t do on my own.” Bobby indicated he would participate in

teacher-generated and directed physical activities in PE because he enjoys physical activity: “I’m a guy that likes to, like participate.” He elaborated further by stating, “Most of the time I do enjoy it because it involves activities.” Students indicated they appreciated teacher-generated and directed physical activities because of the instruction provided by the PE teachers and the development of their skills.

In this study, students were asked to “tell me about your experience in PE this year and describe a typical class.” From the comments of the students, the researcher found the PE classes, when teacher-directed, were more traditional in nature with small elements of choice within this structure. PE classes were described as having more of a traditional structure in nature (teacher-directed) by 80% of the students in this research study. The traditional nature in structure included a warm-up, followed by stretching, and then the teacher-generated or directed physical activities. Five student participants shared their thoughts on the traditional nature of their experience in PE classes. Beatrice expressed, “like begin with the exercises to warm up right and then you begin with your options or like your teacher decides what you want to do.” Bethany demonstrated her experience with the traditional nature in PE: “at first we do like...a two minute jog or eight minutes. Then right after we do like...a short work out like sprinting or the little routines. Then right after we decide what kinds of activities we want to do like options.” Another student shared her perspective. Brittany explained, “You would start off with a warm up run and then some stretching and then probably a little running.” Similarly, Bobby stated, “it consists of a five or six minute run and...whatever activity the teacher picks or an open activity.” And Barry articulated, “We run a solid six minutes or eight minutes very...like beginning of class and then we do like a 10 minute stretching.” This traditional nature of PE class in which the PE teacher structured the classes and provided teacher-generated activities was in contrast to other researchers’ findings. For example, Corder et al. (2013), Xiang et al. (2011), Enright and

O'Sullivan (2010), and Hill and Cleven (2005; 2006) found students need autonomy and autonomy-supported environments, as well as the need for choices, which can promote and increase students' physical activity levels. Students in this study did not indicate a strong need for autonomy and autonomy-supportive environments. Also, they did not indicate they disliked the traditional nature of PE class.

Furthermore, at the site of the research, the traditional nature of the structure of the PE class can also be seen in how the class activities are set up. Barry explained that a typical class would be "set up for different activities." He further classified the activities: "two of them are usually physical team based games, the other two are usually lifestyle, yoga, fitness." According to these students, the PE teachers tended to organize participants into "different teams" (Becky) and/or "assign the teams" (Barry). Once the PE teachers created the teams for the activities, the students would then participate in the learning experiences within these teams. "You just play, so like, there's two teams playing and then after three minutes they switch teams," (Barry). This demonstrates that the traditional nature of these courses was not only in the structure of the class but also in the physical activities that students participated within the PE lessons. Additionally, when asked, "what kinds of physical activity have you been involved in during PE this year," they responded: track and field, basketball, volleyball, football, weight room, table tennis, floor hockey, dodge ball, badminton, soccer, archery, health classes, yoga, Frisbee, handball, cricket, baseball, and running. For many years, these physical activities have been frequently implemented as a part of a traditional physical education program. Furthermore, many of these activities that students are participating in are team-based physical activities and perhaps not always focused on individual physical activities students can participate in on their own after high school. Students identifying the traditional nature of the structure of their class at this school, and the teacher-generated physical activities within their PE courses, are in contrast to

Perlman and Webster's (2011) findings of the role of the teacher in appreciating self-determination skills and the importance of teachers exploring strategies to heighten autonomous learning in students. Students in a traditional PE environment in which the PE teacher implements teacher-generated activities may not have the opportunity to practice self-determination skills and have the opportunity to have autonomous learning as suggested by Perlman and Webster (2011). This could result in students finding it difficult to make their own decisions regarding physical activity after high school because of the lack of opportunity.

On the other hand, some students interviewed indicated they did not like teacher-generated and directed physical activities. A variety of reasons were identified by students for their dislike, such as finding some of the activities "redundant" (Barry). At times, the physical activities directed by teachers exposed the weaknesses of students, health classes eliminated active, hands-on experiences, and instructions were both time-consuming and repetitive. The voices of the students in this study serve to illustrate these points. Bethany explained how some physical activities such as basketball exposed her weaknesses: "the activity I don't like is basketball because that's my weakness because of my height." Brittany addressed the teacher-generated health education sessions: "I guess the health classes. Because I would rather just, I just think of gym as more hands on." Bobby too, did not enjoy health classes, "I didn't like which was health because all you gotta do is just sit down and listen." Brittany suggested that, "the instructions can take a while and the drills were kind of, were repetitive." When students participated in teacher-generated and directed activities, they felt disappointed when the PE teacher assigned them an activity. For example, Bobby shared, "its like, and it just felt disappointing at times, because you want to play something else but you got something assigned to you that you're not too fond of." One student wanted a voice in PE class because it would increase her motivation in PE classes. Beatrice explained, "I think we should be asked like what

kind of things we need to do in gym because like that way you can get more interest in gym.” Comparably, Patall et al. (2008) found students that were presented with a sense of autonomy through choices experienced heightened intrinsic motivation and effort. Similarly, Davies et al. (2015) found offering choices to students can increase their motivation to stay involved in physical activity. This is important to assist students in staying physically active and fit. In this study, some of the students indicated they wanted to have a sense of autonomy and not always teacher-generated activities because it would help increase motivation to participate in PE.

Related to students’ somewhat negative responses to teacher-led physical education, they were also asked, “What do you value the least about participating in PE this year?” The range of responses included: theory, being forced to participate in a unit you don’t like, running before classes and fitness tests. Becky explicitly stated, “I don’t like theory.” Brodie expressed being forced to participate in an activity because the physical activity could have little physicality, “When you’re forced to do a unit you really don’t want to do or like, has very little physical activity.” Bobby responded with sharing how the warm-up run in PE classes was least enjoyable because it takes away from the time to do the physical activities that he loves: “the run before class because it just drops, it drops less time for us to do stuff that we love.” The fitness testing was also identified as a teacher-generated activity that 30% of the students least valued in PE. The reasons for why the students disliked it varied. Betty disliked it because the fitness test makes her feel bad about herself, “Sometimes it makes me feel so bad about myself.” And Betty further explained how the fitness test made her feel like she wasn’t good enough, “I just don’t feel like I’m good enough.” Barry commented on how there was not a choice with fitness testing, they had to participate in it, “You don’t really have a choice, you have to do it.” Bethany concurred with Barry’s statement. In comparison to the work of Smith et al. (2009), they found students felt frustrated when their choice was controlled and there was no room for negotiations

of the physical activities. The students in this research study indicated they do not always enjoy or feel good about teacher-generated physical activities for various reasons and least value this aspect in their PE programs. Furthermore, students indicated the physical activities that were teacher-generated and not student-generated activities were not meaningful and purposeful for students. For example, Bradley shared:

Like dodge ball and stuff that's not like options, like basketball and stuff, it's more like kind of lazy in my sense, in like in my eyes. Like if you don't want ...if...if aww... the teachers don't want to do that much work, then we could just do dodge ball or something like that.

Bradley identified how teacher-generated and directed physical activities in PE lack meaning and purpose for him at that time because it wasn't well planned by the teachers. Another student Beatrice, shared she would rather participate in an activity that was meaningful to her as well than teacher-generated. Brodie was in agreement as well. Students clearly wanted to have physical activities offered to them that were meaningful. Interesting to note, one student shared when choices were provided, it seemed as if there was no specific reason to the choices provided by the teachers for the student. Beatrice explained, "We were offered options right and then our teachers just gave us like options you know, that's really, there was no specific reason for it." This suggested how important it might be for students to have meaningful and purposeful choices in their PE program. Similarly, Katz and Assor (2007) indicated in their research the importance of teachers offering choices that are meaningful to students to enhance motivation. The notion of options was significant in Katz and Assor's work (2007) because a motivating factor for students was when choices provided met the basic psychological needs of competence, autonomy, and relatedness.

Consequently, students in this study sought authentic and meaningful activities in PE. When asked what physical activities they wanted but were not offered to them, students shared a variety of physical activities they desired to have in their PE classes this year. Students shared they wanted to have activities such as, swimming, floor hockey, baseball, rugby, boxing, netball, soccer, and outdoor activities offered to them. Corder et al. (2013) generated similar findings of students wanting to do more types of physical activities in PE. Furthermore, students communicated a variety of reasons why they wanted authentic choice in their PE class. One student expressed it was her favorite activity to do. Brittany stated, “They’re my favorite sports and I just, I love them.” Bethany concurred with Brittany on the love to do a certain activity. Bobby indicated, he grew up with the activity, “I grew up boxing or stuff like that. So it's a big passion for me.” One student voiced he wanted authentic choice because he did not participate a lot in the physical activity he liked in PE. Brodie explained, “I wished it was offered more. Oh, dodge ball because we didn’t do much of that and I really like that.” The responses from students indicated some of the reasons students wanted authentic choice in PE and how important it was to them to have choices of physical activities offered to them. In comparison to the research of Prusak et al. (2004), Xiang et al. (2011), and Corder et al. (2013), all scholars identified students wanting choices in their PE classes and when choice was offered to students, this was found to motivate them. One student indicated when he did not have authentic and meaningful choice of the physical activities he wanted to participate in, for example, lacrosse, he had to push aside what he really wanted to do and his interests of physical activities for that class. Bradley shared, “It’s not just my interest, and it’s everyone’s interests.” Bradley further suggested when there are a lot of people; his physical activity of choice is not an option because of others’ interests. He explained in detail, “So that’s why...it’s not really there, because not a lot of people...want it.”



When students are not offered authentic choice in their PE classes, they often do not get to participate in the physical activities that interest them which resulted in doing what others want.

**Choice increase levels of participation.** From the in-depth interviews I learned 80% of participants wanted choice in their PE classes. Similarly, students' needs for autonomy in their PE classes was indicated in the works of Rees et al., 2006; Erwin et al., 2013; Xiang et al., 2011; and Prusak et al., 2004. Many of the participants in those studies indicated that having choice in PE would contribute to their level of participation in physical activities. One student shared having choice was important because it helped with being more active. Barry explained, "A choice is good because that way more people would want to do what they're doing and be more active." This idea was supported in the research conducted by Davies et al. (2015) in which students that were provided with autonomy boosted their motivation to engage in physical activity. Similarly, Betty conveyed having choice mattered when being active, "Yes it did. Because I don't know, I feel like gym class is really like, it's supposed to be fun right and you're supposed to be having fun while being active and staying fit." Another student communicated choice in PE increased her engagement because she could do what interested her. Bethany shared, "Do what you love or more passion to. Or you're interested at and you just want to try." According to Bobby, choice mattered because he could do what he wanted and enjoyed. Bobby remarked, "A hundred percent it matter to me. You're more free and open to do what you wanted to do. It felt like you can do what you want to do and you enjoy." Other participants indicated having choice in PE would prevent them from missing their PE class and attend more in PE because of choice. For example, Beatrice said, "It...gives me more opportunity to go to gym rather than skipping class." and this was also confirmed by Bradley, "If there weren't too many options, right, I kind of like not want to go to gym." When choice was provided to students, they identified they had more motivation to be active and participate in physical activities. This

finding was similar to the research conducted by Haerens et al. (2010) in which students with more autonomous motivation were more active at the secondary level.

Other students commented how having choice in PE would provide an opportunity for students to continue to participate in a physical activity they're really interested in and enjoyed. This was demonstrated in Billy's statement, "It's your choice...if you want to play football, if you want to play volleyball, if you want to play basketball, everyone has a choice to which sport they want to continue." Brodie suggested having choice would allow students to decide and do what they want for physical activity, "I...Your choice. So like for me, I would just decide oh, I'm going to... I'll run it. So then you do your thing." Lastly, a couple of students preferred to have choice because it was refreshing and they could do what they wanted for physical activities. Brodie explained, "I prefer having a choice then people just telling me what to do and having like a... like different, like unique choices was a...was refreshing. It was like a breath of fresh air." and Becky responded with, "I wouldn't want to be somewhere, or with someone, where choices are not offered and we have to do what others want us to do." Students' voices indicated the significance of having choice in PE to help with their participation in physical activities and many of them indicated choice mattered to them and it made the physical activities more enjoyable.

**Difficulty in decision making when choice was offered to students.** In the data presented earlier, students indicated the importance of having a sense of belonging and being in a community with their friends. This subtheme emerged when students indicated the need to be socially included to feel a sense of belonging and community. Students experienced difficulty in making a decision when choice was offered because of their friends. 50% of the participants found it difficult to make a decision between wanting to be with their friends in the PE class and wanting to do something they liked. For example, Barry voiced, "Sometimes it's like do I choose

my friends or do I choose something I like to do. So I just choose my friends I guess.” Betty had similar feelings when she shared, “Your friends are going to want different things than you and you’re going to be torn, should I go do this or should I go do that.” Furthermore, Betty expressed the difficulty she experienced with decision making in PE, “Sometimes you end up like, doing things that you don’t really want to do because you know, everyone’s doing that so you might as well go there. So it’s like you’re being swayed into making...that decision even though you don’t want to do it.” Therefore, when choices were offered to students, this resulted in students making decisions to participate in physical activities that their friends would be in or had chosen to participate in over what they really wanted to choose because they wanted to be with their friends in PE classes.

Other students found it difficult to make a decision when it came to their personal weaknesses and strengths of a physical activity. Bethany commented on this when she needed to make a choice between two physical activities in her PE class, “Example, basketball versus badminton. I would go for badminton not basketball because I can’t really do basketball at all.” Bethany explained further how her decision would also be based on her strength and passion for a physical activity, “So sometimes it depends on my weakness and strength or like my passion for it.” Furthermore, another student shared how a passion for a physical activity can make decisions difficult when choice was offered. Bobby explained, “It was just so difficult because I see the two sports that I mainly loved.” To strengthen his point, Bobby concluded by saying, “And it was so hard for me.” These results reiterate how difficult it is to make a decision when the choices offered involve students examining their weaknesses and passions for the physical activities involved.

**Decision making and small class size.** From the researcher’s perspective, the responses from some of the students focused towards students being able to make their decisions more

easily when choices were offered in PE. 20% of the students indicated when they were in a smaller class size in PE; it was easier to make decisions on which physical activities to choose, when options were offered. Brodie responded with, “It was easier to figure out what the entire class wanted to do instead of having over twenty students and you...can’t decide and then you have to split up.” Correspondingly, Betty shared, “I think the smaller class the better because it’s really easy to decide what you guys want and you get to talk to people, you actually get to interact with them.” Having smaller class settings helped students make their decisions more easily when choices were provided in PE.

**Lack of student recognition of choice in PE.** In the grade 12 PE curriculum at this particular school site, students were given an opportunity for autonomous decision making by choosing their own independent physical activities to engage in outside of school to earn the grade 12 PE credit. The students at this school had a requirement of 55 hours of their choice of independent physical activities outside of school. Some students did not like this opportunity of autonomy to choose their own activities outside of school and others were fine with it or wanted more hours to complete outside of school physical activity.

Some of the students valued having the opportunity for autonomous decision making to choose physical activities they wanted to participate in to become physically active. Brodie indicated, “I think it’s good for what the intentions are.” Beatrice liked this idea of choosing her own physical activity by sharing, “We can do anything!” Beatrice continued with, “Like even dance right, like if you dance for some time you can record that down. Or you can...gym, like, Good Life Fitness.” Becky explained the importance of having this opportunity because it helped with staying active outside of school. She stated, “Keeping track of my logs...shows me that...it’s important that I’ll stay active outside of school.” Brodie agreed with this comment, “To show you that you can have physical activity when you’re not in high school.”

Lastly, one of the students commented on the benefit of having this opportunity. Brodie suggested that it helped with being healthy, “It’s to keep you healthy basically.” Students found value in having an autonomous-supportive environment and having the ability to implement self-determination skills when engaging in physical activities outside of school. Other researchers supported this finding such as Standage, Duba, and Ntoumanis (2003) who found students’ perceptions of autonomy-supportive environments are positively linked with self-determination motivation of physical activity intentions and students felt more autonomy and relatedness in this environment. This finding is important because students may be more willing to engage in physical activity outside of PE.

On the other hand, when students were asked about requirements imposed on them in PE, the fifty-five hours was identified by 40% of the students. Beatrice explained, “We have to complete those fifty-five hours of being active.” Brodie confirmed this in his statement, “. . .that was the main requirement.” From the students’ comments, I found there was a lack of recognition by students that the fifty-five hours of outside independent physical activities this autonomy-supportive setting opportunity, was a choice for them, instead it was viewed as a requirement and did not appeal to some students. My research findings differed as compared to Ward et al. (2008) in which they found autonomy-supportive environments to appeal to students’ desires to become independent and help promote students’ participation in physical activity outside of school.

Furthermore, other students did not enjoy having to participate in 55 hours of independent physical activity outside of school. Betty, Bethany, and Brodie shared reasons why students did not like the 55 hours of physical activity outside of school. Betty stated, “No one really likes doing it.” Bethany explained it was too much work, “It was like too much, I guess. Too much work.” Similarly, Brodie commented, “I just think like fifty, fifty-two hours or

whatever it is, that's kind of excessive." Brodie further explained how these hours of independent physical activities outside of school could affect someone passing the grade 12 PE course and graduating high school and may result in students cheating the hours. Brodie stated, "That usually is what...makes or breaks someone's graduation or them passing the course because they'll be like aw whatever I'll do it and then they end up...cheating their hours." As indicated by the students' responses, being provided with the opportunity to have autonomy and make their own choices about what physical activities they would like to engage in outside of school did not necessarily increase students' motivation to participate in physical activities.

**Limited choice.** I found students were given a democratic voting process with choice in PE classes. The democratic voting process often consisted of the students voting on a list of choices of physical activities generated by the PE teachers. The majority of votes for a specific physical activity would be the chosen activity for students to participate in. Bethany shared, "Like majority of the people who vote." And Bradley shared a similar response, "It was a majority pick." One student explained she would go with majority of what the class was voting on. Betty communicated, "So whatever...majority of class wants to do, I just kind of like go for it." Betty's comment indicated she would vote on the physical activity that everyone else was instead of what she really wanted to do. Therefore, if the physical activity that a student wanted to participate in was not offered, the student would still have to choose a physical activity from the teacher-generated activities. Similarly, in a study conducted by El-Sherfi (2014) it was found that students felt the choices offered were teacher-generated and they had to choose from the teacher's interests. Though, the democratic voting process was sporadic in PE because of the students sharing how choice was offered occasionally to them in PE class. This idea was discussed by 40% of the participants in this study. Brittany explained when choice was occasionally offered, "There were a couple of classes where we got to vote, like a free class."

This observation was confirmed by Betty, “Sometimes he lets us pick what he wants us to do or like what we want to do in class.” And similarly, Bobby shared, “We got a whole week of picking what we liked.” This suggested choice was limited for students in PE class and quite often occasional for students.

When choices were offered to students in PE, the physical activities were often limited and teacher-generated. Six out of 10 participants indicated this idea in their responses when asked about choices offered in their PE classes this year. Beatrice responded, “Like we were...asked, for like, if there was two options, basketball and badminton.” Brittany shared the limited teacher-generated choices, “So it was like would you rather go to the workout room or maybe it was like floor hockey or soccer.” Similarly, Bradley shared his experience, “My options umm...just like volleyball, basketball.” And Becky expressed, “We had choices like to go to the fitness room or just to play like inside gym game.” Lastly, Barry indicated, “Some of the choices that were offered to me...were things like again...do you want to play this game, do you guys want to go outside today.” Even though students were offered choice in PE, it was limited to teacher-generated physical activities and not authentic choice for students.

From the researcher’s perspective, some students identified liking or enjoying limited choice and autonomy in PE. Brittany explained, “I think it is good that we had some free classes. Cause if we don’t and if you tell us all the time it would start to get repetitive and kind of suck.” Similarly, Bradley stated, “I kind of like not want to go to gym cause like sometimes you have to have some variety or it gets uninteresting.” Students liked choice and autonomy even if it was limited because it provided variety in PE and provided motivation to go to PE classes. Furthermore, students did not view PE as uninteresting and repetitive because of the implementation of limited choice. One student shared he felt everything was a choice for students and it was viewed as a positive aspect of PE. Barry shared, “Everything is honestly a

choice.” He further explained, “But at the end of the day it was our choice.” This demonstrated how autonomy and choice was viewed as positive and students valued and appreciated having choice, even if it was limited in PE classes.

On the other hand, students indicated limited choice and autonomy as being negative. When presented with limited choice, three students indicated they often do not get the physical activity they really wanted to participate in. Some students specified not having their choice of physical activity as “not good.” For example, Brittany explained, “Not everyone’s doing what they wanted. So some kids got really into it, but others were like, not really...but, I think it was good if you got the choice you wanted. But it sucked if you didn’t.” Becky agreed and stated similarly that she did not get the physical activity she wanted. Another student identified having to “make an exception” to participate in what others want instead of what he wanted. Brodie illustrated, “You try and convince your friends and they’d be like...no, I want to do badminton and I’m like okay, I was going to do badminton as my second choice.” These students indicated how limited choice in PE negatively affected their participation in PE. This finding was similar to the work of Smith et al. (2009) in which they found that students’ choices were restricted with little negotiation of the activities and students felt frustrated. In this study, experiencing limited choice was a challenge for some students because they did not get to pick the choice of physical activity that was meaningful to them.

### **General Wellness**

In this research study, from the students’ responses, general wellness was seen as a benefit to participating in physical activities in school. General wellness was divided into two sections, mental wellness and physical wellness. Many students identified the importance of general wellness in and outside of school and valued having PE classes to promote their mental and physical wellness. Students were motivated to participate in physical activities because it



improves mental and physical wellness. Students in their grade 12 PE program valued and indicated general wellness as an important element. Barry noted this as he expressed his thoughts about participating in physical activities in the PE program, “You’re doing it because you know it’s good for you.” The following takes a closer look at the significance of mental and physical wellness for students.

**Mental wellness.** Students indicated an improvement in mental wellness as a motivation to participate in physical activity and the development of a positive attitude towards physical activity. Six of the student participants identified benefits of mental wellness from participating in physical activity such as a reduction in stress, good mood, increase in relaxation, and increase in confidence, thus, the development of a positive attitude towards physical activity. Bethany shared, “It keeps away the stress.” And Beatrice demonstrated how stress was reduced and her focus increased, “Every time I’m stressed out like if I do something like being active right, I lose that stress and I can focus on my studies better.” Similarly, Betty identified participation in physical activity, “keeps me relaxed.” One student indicated it felt good to exercise. Brittany communicated, “You just get there, run around, blow off some steam, it was good to get exercise.” And Barry explained it was an opportunity to exercise, “This is where you can let go and actually move around.” Participating in physical activities was highly valued by students because of the benefits towards their mental wellness and the establishment of a positive attitude towards physical activity. Earlier research conducted by How et al. (2013) also indicated the significance of youth developing positive attitudes towards physical activity for lifelong habits of activeness outside of school.

Furthermore, the benefits of participating in physical activities helped motivate students to continue their engagement as specified by Betty, “It is because it keeps you motivated.” Engagement in physical activities helped students with their confidence and feeling a sense of

accomplishment as expressed by Betty, Brittany, and Brodie. For example, Betty mentioned, “It makes you feel good about yourself.” And Brittany communicated she felt a sense of accomplishment from her engagement in physical activity, “You feel really good when you finish but because you’re glad. Cause you’re like I just had an accomplishment and I did this.” Correspondingly, Brodie stated, “I find... confidence really changes your mood... something boosts your confidence.” Similarly, Biddle and Asare (2011) pointed out how physical activity can be linked to increasing in self-esteem in students. Furthermore, Brodie indicated that not only is your confidence is increased, but this confidence helps your mood. Similarly, a few students revealed how participation in physical activity helps with being in a good mood. Bethany conveyed, “So it really helps and it gives me like a good mood in class.” And Bobby confirmed this, “I like, love being in gym so, and I’m always happy and good vibes when I’m there.” Comparably, Brymer and Davids (2016) shared the benefits of a positive mood from engagement in physical activities in their research. For both these students, their mood and enthusiasm was affected positively by engagement in physical activity and perhaps this will continue their participation in physical activity. These results were similar to the findings of Biddle and Asare (2011) in which they stated the correlation between physical activity and mental wellness for adolescents. Furthermore, from both these students’ perspectives about physical activity in and outside of school, there was a connection for them between physical activity and mental wellness benefits.

**Physical wellness.** I found from the students’ answers regarding participation in physical activities, that students wanted to be healthy and fit. Eight of the ten students in this study valued physical wellness in terms of being fit and healthy and felt it was a priority for them. For example, Barry shared, “It matters to me...I like to be fit and...it's a priority of mine.” Similarly, Billy expressed, “To stay fit. Like, it’s like stay in shape.” Betty felt the same about being fit.

Beatrice conveyed that physical activity aids her in being active and healthy, “It keeps you active and healthy.” Bobby agreed with her statement. Betty had similar feelings, “It just keeps you fit. And it’s easy to do things I guess if you’re fit.” And Bobby agreed, “Healthier.” In comparison to the work of Loprinzi, Cardinal, Loprinzi, and Lee (2012), they indicated youth participation in physical activities has fitness benefits and is essential for good health. Students pointed out the benefits of physical activity on their physical wellness are significant because these healthy habits can potentially support the continuation of physically active and health in their futures after high school. This perspective is supported by the work of Davies et al. (2015) where they stated students who want to participate in physical activity as opposed to students who do not, are more likely to be healthier later on in their life.

Two students indicated participation in physical activity helped maintain weight and a fit body. Becky stated, “I want to sustain a great body.” And similarly, Bethany shared, “I guess sustainability. Like my weight.” Other students mentioned it supported development of strength for them. Brodie indicated this, “Just like physical strength.” And correspondingly Bethany said, “It just helps me to...improve my strengths.” One student noted, physical wellness helped with rehabilitation. Brittany explained this, “Recovery, trying to get better.” Engagement in physical activity also helped with improvement of flexibility, as shared by Beatrice, “If I’m more active I can do things more flexibly.” Lastly, engagement in physical activities aids with prevention of getting ill. Billy expressed participating in physical activities helped him become less sick in the following statement, “Ever since that, I’ve been physically active, all I get is like sniffles and that’s pretty much it. I don’t get like any sickness.” Overall, it is important to note that many students presented self-determination because they identified and valued how physical activity and wellness supported them in being healthy, in shape, and improved their strength and immune system. Likewise, these students wanted to engage in physical activity because they found

meaningfulness and motivation for their personal growth and not because of an external reward. These notions are supported by Perlman and Webster (2011) who indicated in the self-determination theory, “Self-determination is a viewpoint of motivation among individuals who possess a desire to improve themselves by engaging in behaviors that they deem important or meaningful for personal development” (p. 46). Some of the students in this study found motivation and meaning for physical activity because of the benefits towards their personal physical wellness.

Furthermore, I found 50 percent of the participants shared their perspectives about the importance of physical activity and wanting to be healthy and fit after high school. Becky and Brodie identified the PE program as a preparation for them to continue to stay fit and healthy when they left high school. Becky expressed her opinion about this by commenting, “Physical Education is...to me it’s something that I want to do like when I leave school so starting here is like a starting point so that I know that when I’m older I should get healthy and fit.” Brodie felt PE helps with becoming an adult and capable, “I think it makes me feel like an adult. More...than a child because you’re like your self-efficient now.” Similarly, research by Smith et al. (2009) found students in their study voiced the importance of engagement in physical activities within PE that they can also do outside of school and after high school. Some students felt continuing to be physically active after high school was positive. Similarly stated by Bobby, “If you continue doing that after high school.... it’s...benefiting yourself because you’re getting healthier and stronger.” Billy also stated, “After high school.... I want to stay in shape throughout my life.” As well, Barry noted the positives of participating in physical activities after high school, focusing on decreasing health problems. Bobby agreed in his comment, “I feel in the long run it’s going to help a lot.” Smith et al. (2009) suggested students associated what they

did in their leisure time would help them transition and prepare them for adulthood and getting older.

Students identified numerous physical activities they engage in outside of school as well to contribute to their physical wellness. The physical activities consist of the following: running on a treadmill, swimming, biking, weights, and working out. Students also included in their responses clubs and camps available in the larger community. Billy illustrated this:

There's a lot of club sports teams out there or like umm...camps for kids. Trying like...get the kids getting engaged already in the sports or like other types of sports. I know there's like...I know there's a soccer team, there's like a hockey teams.

Similarly, Bradley discussed the variety of physical activities in his community to support physical wellness:

The MYAC program, it offered...a bunch of trips to different places. Like swimming...and...baseball games and a bunch of things that you could go out and have a good time. So, ya, we offer a bunch of good things also soccer teams and...basketball teams. We have a bunch of those. So if I really wanted to join, I could have...I could join. Also...Tai Kwon Doe, we have a good place here.

As stated by these students, there are numerous things they do or can do in their larger community to support their physical wellness to maintain general wellness after high school.

### **Barriers to Physical Activity for Youth**

In this research study, there were several barriers students indicated that hampered their involvement in physical activity outside of school. In this major theme, two subthemes emerged: external barriers and internal barriers. The first subtheme of external barriers focused on barriers which were out of students' control. The second subtheme of internal barriers centered on barriers that were within students' control and personal to them.

**External barriers.** There were numerous external barriers students pointed out that hindered their involvement in physical activity. The external barriers identified were as follows: lack of control in their PE class environment, people's words, family influence, financial costs, PE teachers' lack of interest in student input, lack of relationship with other grade levels, and the PE equipment. One student explained her frustration with a lack of control in her PE environments specifically with her peers not participating and not helping with class set up. For example, Bethany shared, "The people who don't really participate or like contribute with the class. Just being lazy, not doing anything or just with their phones all day." This appeared to be a drawback of teacher-directed physical activities, as students do not have control in their PE classes, which bothered them immensely.

Students shared others' words and communication as a barrier to students' involvement in physical activities. Three out of ten students explained others' words had a negative effect on their engagement. Bobby responded with, "After hearing what he said about like us as single players kind of like hurt me so I stopped the sport for a long time." Similarly, Brittany shared how comments by others about her playing on a certain team were negative. Brittany stated, "So like, you shouldn't be playing here." Furthermore, one student felt PE teachers should communicate and say things to students who are not engaging in physical activity to help support and encourage them to participate. Billy explained, "Some of the students who aren't like physical active don't really like push them or motivate them to get engaged in...the activity."

Students pointed out families as a barrier to physical activities at times. Of the ten student participants, three of them discussed how their parents hindered their engagement in physical activities. Students shared their parents would limit outdoor activities, parents were not physically active, and parents are concerned for their child's well-being. Bradley demonstrated this in his comment, "My mom. She doesn't let me go outside that much. It's more about the

winter. Like...winter sports.” Similarly, Beatrice shared her experience, “My parents, they think I might get hurt by something, so I’d rather not do it.” Another student stated the inactivity of her mother hindered her participation in physical activity. Betty explained, “My mom. Like, I don’t know, she’s not really...because she’s not really active.”

Another external barrier specified by some students was financial costs. One student explained many sports teams outside of school are expensive and that made it difficult to join or participate in. Barry explained:

If I had more money, then I’d join like teams outside of school...would’ve gotten better gear and stuff like that. So that like really hampered it. Like I would have tried ice hockey but I can’t spend money on things like that.

Barry further discussed how there is a range of physical activities in his community but most of them have a requirement of a fee to join or participate in. Barry shared, “You can do things, there are a lot of things you can do. But half of them you have to pay money to do.” This financial barrier is something that negatively affects students’ engagement in physical activities outside of school. Comparably, in the work of Corder et al. (2013), they found cost to be an external barrier for students’ participation in physical activities outside of school such as gyms.

Lack of student input is viewed as an external barrier. Students explained when the PE teachers did not ask for their input, it did not motivate them to participate in physical activities. Billy indicated he wanted PE teachers to ask for his input. Billy stated, “I guess to like ask students what they want.” Billy further explained he needed teachers to motivate him, “I guess like try to motivate them, try to get them into the game of or the sport.” Similarly, Bethany identified the PE teachers’ lack of motivation techniques, “Motivate us even more. Umm, give us like a goal to do this or earn this like a...like there’s a prize or something.” Bethany’s comments

suggested the motivation from PE teachers would support student participation in physical activities but lack of it, hindered this.

Furthermore, a student identified the need to see more demonstrations of the activity presented. Lack of demonstration was viewed as a barrier to students' involvement in physical activity. For instance, Brittany wanted to have the skill of demonstrated and not just explained to her. Brittany explained, "Showing how to do an activity rather than just talking about it. It's easier too if they want a drill, or how to serve something, it's easier to see them do it." Lastly, a student indicated a barrier to their participation was the equipment in PE classes. Barry shared, "Our equipment could be better. Like our basketballs, better things like that." Having the proper equipment is valued by students' and aids their participation in physical activities.

One of the final external barriers identified by students consisted of sharing a gym with a different grade level. One student indicated sharing a gym with a younger grade was difficult because students did not know one another in the different grade levels and therefore did not interact with one another. Brittany explained, "Cause like...you don't really know the grade 10's. So it's basically the grade 10's hanging out with the grade 10's and the grade 12's hanging out with the grade 12's." Another student identified the way PE teachers have planned the gym classes which involved having to share a gym with other students. This often resulted in the students doing a physical activity they do not like. Beatrice shared:

The way they have planned things. Sometimes you have to share a gym with two classes but then...you're supposed to do something else, they're supposed to do something else but then they ask you to be together and then they end up doing the same thing and some students don't even like.



From my perspective as the researcher, the students' answers indicated the difficulty of sharing gyms with other gym classes resulting in an external barrier for the students when participating in physical activities in PE.

Furthermore, external barriers for students were acknowledged in the area of their communities. 50% of the students identified little to none for physical activities offered in their communities. Lack of physical activities in their communities is seen as an external barrier for students to participate in physical activities. Brittany shared her opinion of physical activities in her community, "Well there are no physical activities available in my community." Becky also agreed with Brittany's comment. A few communicated they are unaware of physical activities in their community because of the lack of advertising. Brodie explained, "They should do a better job of advertising that or make it easier to find out about it because I hadn't heard much of anything." And Betty stated, "I don't think we offer much here like, in our city." The students' comments regarding the lack of physical activities available in their communities are a barrier. This lack is indeed represents a limitation it places on the students' engagement in physical activity outside of school.

**Internal barriers.** In school, students indicated a variety of internal barriers they face that affects their involvement in physical activity. Brittany shared being tired and not prioritizing her involvement in physical activities, "If you're tired and you just get busy. You don't prioritize it." Brittany gave an example of not prioritizing physical activity, "I'll get this assignment done that needs to be done rather than working out." Beatrice responded similarly, "Sometimes you have homework right and then you rather just ignore being active." Similarly, Corder et al. (2013) indicated homework as a barrier to students' participation in physical activity. Furthermore, Beatrice continued by explaining she also felt lazy and that impacted her engagement in physical activities. She stated, "I just feel lazy sometimes, like not doing

exercises.” Another student shared the time of day affected his participation in physical activity. Bradley explained, “The time of day. Right in the morning. If I did it any other umm...in the afternoon or something like that, it would be much better.” Bradley indicated the time of day was an internal barrier to his participation in physical activity. Betty found she was uncomfortable being active in front of her peers she does not talk to or know. Betty explained, “Is the people. Ya, sometimes I feel so uncomfortable being active in front of people that I’m not comfortable with or I don’t talk to. Cause I feel like I’m always being watched and I’m being judged.” She expressed feeling worried about being judged by her peers. Feelings of worriedness and being judged can negatively influence participation in physical activity. In comparison, Mitchell et al. (2015) found students performing in front of more able peers, caused feelings of worry and embarrassment. This had a negative impact on students’ motivation to participate in PE and physical activity.

From the researcher’s perspective of the results, students identified certain physical activities that were least enjoyed and viewed as internal barriers for them. Students also, shared their reasons why these physical activities were internal barriers. Billy indicated he did not like sports that did not make him sweat. Billy shared, “The only thing I don’t like about it is that, those sports that doesn’t make you sweat.” Similarly, Brodie responded, “I’d say sports where you don’t do anything.” 30% of the students indicated they did not enjoy running as a physical activity. Bethany stated, “Running I get tired easily, which is like the main problem.” Similarly, Brittany replied, “I hate running. It hurts.” Bradley shared how he prefers to sprint instead of running long distances. Bradley explained, “Long distance running. Because I’m...more of a sprinter, not like a long distance guy.” Lastly, Barry shared his dislike for running as well by this statement, “I don’t like running. So being forced to run when I don’t want to, it’s, I don’t know, it’s not fun.” When a student is forced to participate in an activity that is viewed as an internal

barrier, resulted in lack of fun and lack of choice. One student indicated she did not enjoy archery because it was boring and uninteresting. Becky's response was, "Archery. It's not something I'm interested in. Umm...it seems boring so." Bobby had a similar response about being uninterested in baseball. Bobby answered, "Baseball. It's just something I was not too fond of. Like it just doesn't look interesting to me." Beatrice shared she did not enjoy walking because it could be too hot in the summer and resulted in being tired for other classes. Beatrice replied, "Going for a walk. Because in summer its way too hot and then, cause like when you come back from walk right, you're tired but you have to go to other classes after that." Lastly, Betty explained she did not like track and field. Betty stated, "I hate track. Because track is like you compete with people and I'm not really competitive." Betty furthered explained her experience, "It makes you feel so bad about yourself." Some students do not want to participate in physical activities because it involved competing with other people and resulted in feeling bad about one's self.

Furthermore, students in this study identified numerous internal barriers when it came to the physical activities in their community. Beatrice shared she did not know how to bike and therefore did not enjoy it. Beatrice explained, "Biking, because I don't know how to ride a bike." One student indicated he did not like to lift weights in a gym because others were bigger. Brodie commented, "Weight lifting in a ...in gym where everyone's like bigger than you." Brodie continued how that made him feel self-conscious, "That's an activity I like the least because it made you feel self-conscious." Students' perception of their competence has an impact on their engagement in physical activity. This was similar to research conducted by Mitchell et al. (2015) in which they found students with low perceived competence were less likely to participate in physical activity.

Another student said they did not enjoy community hockey because of the size of the participants and not understanding it. Betty shared, “I’d say hockey. I just don’t get it. And I’m scared playing with huge people.” Lastly, Barry identified chores because they were not fun and repetitive. Barry noted, “Chores I guess...because they’re not fun. You just have to do repetition.” Some students identified the food they ate as a barrier to physical activity. Brodie shared he enjoys unhealthy foods and it has an effect on his performance. Brodie answered, “I really like unhealthy foods and that’s really...that effects your performance.” Bethany indicated the students’ lifestyle has an effect on their engagement in physical activities. Bethany illustrated this, “It depends with their lifestyle and...their social involvement with people I would say. Like if...some people like to stay at home and do nothing, just play video games all day.” Lastly, one student noted it's the same people on the community teams and others don’t get a chance to join the community teams. Betty explained, “It’s always the same people. I feel like there are other people who are better than them but they just don't get a chance to because it has always been them.” Betty continued to state how that is intimidating to go and try out for those community teams, “Obviously you’re going to feel intimidated right.” Betty’s comments demonstrated the barriers that students have felt with regards to the community teams and physical activities outside of school.

### **Summary of Findings**

In this research study, the findings have provided answers for the two research questions delineated in chapter one. The first research question was how do students’ experience PE programs that provide choice?

Students’ experiences with a PE program that provided choice resulted in being a part of a community and a sense of belonging, thus, the major theme of social inclusion. Students identified the importance of experiencing relationships in PE classes. Many of the students in

this study indicated the importance of having friends in their PE classes because of experiencing fun, feeling supported, and being a part of a community. In addition, having friends in PE class motivated students to participate in the physical activities in PE and was seen as a positive experience by many. A few students explained how their involvement in sports and physical activity provided a sense of belonging. For example, one student shared his participation in a basketball-focused course created an environment of feeling connected to others and a sense belonging because of their common interest in basketball. As well, students indicated their PE teachers as being significant in their engagement in physical activity. Some students expressed how their PE teachers inspired them to engage in physical activity. Specifically, one student found great importance of having his PE teacher as a coach. This relationship motivated him to put more effort in PE classes.

In addition to students enjoying relationships with their peers, PE teachers, and feeling a sense of belonging in PE, they also shared the enjoyment of being competitive with their peers. The sub-theme of competition enhances performance was revealed when three out of the ten participants shared they liked having a competitive aspect to their PE classes. They stated they enjoyed competition with their friends and indicated this helped with self-improvement and their performance. Sixty percent of students enjoyed getting better at a skill and enjoyed learning in PE.

Furthermore, students wanted a reciprocal relationship with their teacher. They wanted to be heard and listened to by their PE teachers. Students wanted to have input into their PE experiences regarding the physical activities, peer interactions, and feeling comfortable. An overwhelming number of the students wanted to have choice and autonomy in their PE classes. They indicated they would be more active because of their interest in that particular physical activity. From the in-depth interview data, students shared they wanted to participate in physical

activities such as hockey, acrobats, floor hockey, dance, football, swimming, boxing, and skydiving.

The second major theme of authentic choice in PE emerged when student indicated the need for authentic choice of physical activities. They wanted authentic choice because of their interest and passion for a specific physical activity. From the researcher's perspective, many of the physical activities were teacher-generated and directed and PE classes were traditional in nature. Some students indicated they enjoyed teacher-generated physical activities because of the exposure to new physical activities, while others did not enjoy teacher-generated physical activities. Reasons for lack of enjoyment of teacher-generated physical activities was because these activities were seen as redundant, exposed students' weaknesses, feelings of self-consciousness, and not meaningful to students. Students placed an emphasis on the value of participating in physical activities that were meaningful to them and one way for students to participate in meaningful physical activity in PE was through choice. Choices increased levels of participation as indicated by students. An overwhelmingly 80% of the participants in this study expressed they wanted choice in PE. Students' responses indicated their participation levels would increase if they were offered choice in PE. There were various reasons provided by students such as more interested, enjoyment, and a decrease in missing of gym classes.

With choices came difficulty in making decisions for students. Five out of ten students indicated their difficulty in making decisions when choice was offered to them in PE because some students experienced having to choose an activity that they personally wanted to participate in or being with their friends. Many students shared they would rather participate in a physical activity with their friends than in their physical activity of choice. A few other students encountered difficulty in decision-making when their weaknesses in a physical activity was exposed and when there was two sport choices they had to choose between. In addition, at times,

students expressed how the decision making process was simpler when choices were provided in a smaller group setting. This was because it was easier to figure out what everyone wanted to choose with a smaller class size.

It is interesting to note students' responses when presented with opportunities for meaningful and authentic choices of physical activities in PE. They did not recognize they had authentic choice in their Grade 12 PE program. In their PE program, students had the opportunity to experience choice (an autonomy-supportive environment) through choosing independent physical activities of their choice. This was an opportunity for students to make autonomous decisions. Some students shared they did not like this experience because it had too many hours of outside independent physical activity and it would affect students' passing the Grade 12 PE course. Having this opportunity to choose their own independent physical activities did not necessarily result in increasing student motivation to participate in physical activity or develop self-determination skills. Instead, students identified this as a requirement imposed on them.

Furthermore, students were given limited choice in PE. A democratic voting process existed with the limited choice of teacher-generated physical activities. This experience consisted of students voting on which physical activity they wanted to participate in, though there were some drawbacks. A few students experienced having to make a choice between what they really wanted to participate in or not and making an exception. There was an indication by some students how choices of physical activities by the PE teachers were not meaningful to them. While others enjoyed limited choice in PE because of the opportunity for some free classes and the variety this presented in PE.

My second research question was what are students' perspectives about PE/PA at school and outside of school? Many of the students' shared their perspectives of the importance PE/PA regarding overall wellness. Students identified motivation to participate in PE/PA because of the

physical and mental wellness benefits they experienced. Benefits included stress reduction, mood improvement, being healthier and fit, and improvement in strength. Students also provided some physical activities and clubs in their larger communities they could participate in to support their general wellness.

Though, students recognized there were barriers they experienced in and outside of school that prevented their engagement in physical activities. From the students' perspectives, there were a variety of external barriers they experienced. For example, some students shared the lack of control or autonomy in their PE setting, the effect of negative words have on students, family influence and perspectives, and the financial cost to joining and participating in activities in their community. Furthermore, students pointed out some internal barriers that hampered their involvement in physical activities. A few students explained their reasons such as the lack of prioritizing physical activity in their day, the time of day PE was offered, feelings of being uncomfortable in PE with others, and individual reasons for disengagement in certain physical activities. For example, lack of interest for the student in a particular physical activity, and lack of enjoyment.

### **Chapter Summary**

In this chapter I have presented the results of this research. I identified the major themes and subthemes that emerged from the analysis of the data. The major themes included: social inclusion, authentic choice in PE, general wellness, and barriers to physical activity for youth. Conclusions were formulated for each of the research questions for this study: 1) how do students experience PE programs that provide choice; and 2) what are students' perspectives about PE/PA at school and outside of school.

In addition, I provided a description of my personal experiences with PE in both a high school and university setting. Furthermore, after completing two in-depth interviews of my own



personal experiences as a student in these two PE settings, a phenomenological interpretation of those interviews was provided. The following chapter will consist of a discussion of the research findings, the limitations of this research study, educational implications, and future research.

## **Chapter 5 Conclusions, Discussion, and Suggestions for Future Research**

This chapter focuses on a summary of the research study, discussion of the conclusions drawn, limitations of the study, implications for educational practices, and suggestions for future research.

Recently, there has been a decline of physical activity levels of youth and the risk for health problems associated is increasing. Research by Batia (2013) and How et al. (2013) suggest choices in PE help with reversing the decline of physical activity levels of youth. In Manitoba, Canada, Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth (2009) created a Grade 12 provincial curriculum that provided choice to support students in developing healthy and physically active lives. Hearing students' voices and experiences provided valuable feedback regarding PE programs that provide choice. As a Learning Support Teacher, my purpose was to gain a deeper understanding of students' experiences in a PE program that provides choice and how this can help others in the physical education field with information they may use to support their students with PE programs and classes that provide choice. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to increase my understanding of how students in a high school setting experience PE programs and the variables that impact their involvement in PA. I used a qualitative research methodology and more specifically, a phenomenological approach to listen to students' perspectives of and experiences with a PE program that provides choice through in-depth interviews. The following research questions were investigated: 1) How do students experience PE programs that provide choice; and 2) What are students' perspectives about PE/PA at school and outside of school?

### **Conclusions**

Based on my findings I concluded that students experience social inclusion in a PE program through positive relationships with peers and PE teachers. In PE classes, there was a

sense of belonging and being a part of a community for many students. These benefits were evident for students when they participated in sports or physical activities of personal interest. A sense of belonging and connectedness with others developed for many students. Also, students identified competing with their peers in PE as a positive experience. This opportunity to be competitive resulted in helping students to increase their skill performance and overall self-improvement.

Furthermore, students wanted to be heard by their PE teachers, and be provided with opportunities to share their input in PE classes. They voiced the importance of sharing their thoughts regarding choice in PE. For example, students wanted choice in the physical activities they were to engage in within the classroom setting. As well, they voiced they wanted to be interested in the physical activities they participated in PE. Additionally, some students stated that they wanted to have input with regards to who was in their PE classes in order to make them feel comfortable to participate in physical activities.

The findings also pointed to the importance of having authentic choices for students in PE. Some of the students indicated needing authentic choice because of their passion for a specific physical activity. Quite often, students commented on how the physical activities in PE were teacher-generated and not student-generated. As well, students explained that teacher-generated physical activities were redundant and not meaningful to them. If students had authentic choice in PE, they felt they would be more interested in PE and there would be a decrease in missing PE classes. Contrarily, at times, students indicated they experienced limited choice in PE. For many, when they had limited choice, they found they were faced with difficult decisions to make such as choosing between physical activities they wanted or physical activities their friends wanted to choose. Interesting to note, some students felt it was easier to make

decisions when their class size was smaller because it was simpler for everyone to agree on the limited choices offered.

Contrary to what students' stated about teacher-generated physical activities and limited choice, the Grade 12 PE curriculum provided an opportunity for students to engage in physical activities of their choice throughout the course offerings. This was in the form of students participating in independent activities outside of school. Many students expressed how these independent physical activities were viewed as a requirement imposed on them. In addition, some students indicated the amount of hours of independent physical activities was excessive. Yet other students liked this opportunity because they could participate in physical activities of their choosing, such as going to a local fitness studio not associated with the school.

Furthermore, when examining students' perspectives about PE and physical activity, the focus was on general wellness and barriers youth experienced with regards to their participation in PE and physical activities. The topic of general wellness was found to be important to students while participating in physical activities. Specifically, mental and physical wellness was found to be valued by students because of the benefits they experienced. Some of the students' comments focused on mental health benefits such as reduction in stress and positive moods. In terms of physical health benefits, some of the responses included muscular strength gain and being fit and in shape.

Lastly, from students' responses, it can be concluded that there were barriers they experienced. Students indicated internal and external barriers they faced could hinder their involvement in PE and physical activities. Some of the external barriers indicated by students consisted of negative remarks made to or about them by others, lack of autonomy in PE, and financial costs. Some internal barriers that prevented students from engaging in physical activity included the failure to prioritize physical activities in their daily routine and feelings of

discomfort or embarrassment performing certain PA in front of their peers during their PE classes.

### **Limitations of the Study**

There are various limitations to this study. First, the study sample was small. Only ten students were interviewed for this study and therefore, the findings reflect the perspectives and experiences of a small number of students about a PE program that provides choice. Second, there was only one layer of interpretation during the data analysis, that of the researcher as I worked alone. There was no other coder used for data analysis. Third, the sample was drawn from one site in a major city in the province. Results from other high schools in an urban and or rural setting may generate different results. In addition, this particular school in this study implemented the delivery model of 50% in and 50% out of school participation in PA for the provincial Grade 12 PE curriculum. Whereas, other schools in the province may have implemented a different delivery model of 25% in class and 75% outside of class, 75% in class and 25% outside of class, and or 100% inside of class. Schools that have implemented either of these delivery models may produce different findings. Lastly, the participants self-identified as either high activity level/interest in PE and or average activity level/interest in PE.

Unfortunately, in this research study, no students self-identified as reluctant/low activity level/interest in PE, so I did not hear perspectives from that student group.

### **Implications for Practice**

The findings from this study have implications for the decision makers in curriculum and programming in PE, as well as for physical education teachers. Providing choice in PE is a worthwhile consideration towards addressing the decline in physical activity levels among adolescents (How et al., 2013). The implications of the findings point towards PE teachers reviewing and reflecting on their current educational practices in relation to offering students

authentic and meaningful choice in PE. In my current position as a Learning Support Teacher in my school, hearing and listening to students' experiences in PE and physical activity will help me understand what they are experiencing and how I can support them in their PE classes and programs to be successful.

In addition, the findings provide a variety of suggestions for educational practice as well as policies in PE program development. In terms of policy making, if real and meaningful change is to occur in promoting and supporting adolescents' participation in PE and physical activity, policies need to focus on authentic choices for students in PE. The research findings suggest policy decision makers should look at and move towards a physical education curriculum that is based on the interests and choices of youth to promote lifetime physical activity. Adolescents have a desire to increase their independence from authority figures and should be considered in curricular decisions (Prusak et al., 2004).

Furthermore, policy makers should take into account both the perceived needs of adolescents and those expressed by adolescents on the basis that policy and curriculum are more likely to be effective if they are informed by the views of adolescents (Smith et al., 2009). Students identified that they wanted to have their voices heard and to have choice in PE. The purpose of such a curriculum as is followed in Manitoba is to provide meaningful goals and content for students to learn. Therefore, what a powerful curriculum it can be if the policy makers looked to the views of adolescents, especially if the curriculum is to be meaningful and beneficial to adolescents and supporting adolescents in terms of increasing their physical activity.

Students in this study identified the need for a variety of physical activities in PE. A suggestion for current educational practice is to provide yearly and/or semester surveys to involve adolescents in their preferences of activities to engage in PE classes. If PE educators are

truly dedicated to supporting adolescents in becoming physically active and developing a healthy lifestyle, their educational practices need to incorporate choice when implementing curriculum and programming (How et al., 2013). Perhaps PE teachers could look towards changing their practice and promote physical activity through lifelong activities and choices that interest their students such as walking, yoga, and swimming for longer periods of time in these activities.

This educational approach may further support and prepare adolescents for lifetime participation in physical activity after school (Haerens et al., 2010). Furthermore, PE educators should be aware of the importance and impact of students' desire to be with their friends in PE classes and how peers influence students' decision making when choice is offered to them. Also interesting is that some students did not choose to participate in certain physical activities because they did not feel comfortable within certain "communities" of their peers (e.g., competitive community sport, weight-lifting at fitness centres). Therefore, PE teachers need to be conscious of how capitalizing on friendships might help promote and support student engagement in physical activity.

Professional development for PE teachers is another way to learn and understand the significance and benefits of promoting choices for adolescents in their PE classes. Professional development needs to move beyond a course content focus. Professional development needs to look towards the idea of supporting pedagogies of possibility if PE educators are serious about engaging adolescents in meaningful ways regarding PE and physical activity (Enright & O'Sullivan, 2010). Professional development is an opportunity for PE teachers to put ideas, theories, and new concepts into practice. PE teachers can use ideas gleaned through professional development to make thoughtful changes to their pedagogical beliefs and practice regarding physical activity and PE for their students.

Lastly, students' lacked knowledge of what physical activities were available in their communities and the 55 hours was viewed as something they had to do. They did not see it as choice. PE teachers could engage students in an inquiry approach, helping their students explore and investigate what physical activities are offered in their communities to help promote student engagement in physical activities outside of school and realize the range of choices available. This approach can help support and provide students with knowledge of what they may be able to participate in within their communities to support students in meeting the criteria of 55 hours of independent physical activities outside of school in their PE program.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

To my knowledge, very little research had been conducted on students' perspectives and experiences in a PE program that provides choice. Further research in this area is needed to hear from a larger sample pool of students and their experiences with choice in PE programs across the province. Students' satisfaction with PE programs that offer different levels of choice could be compared. Such research could potentially aid educators in supporting students' engagement in physical activity to live healthy and active lives, not only in the province, but also across the country.

Further research could also examine students that self-identified as reluctant/low activity level/interest in PE, allowing them to have a say about their experiences and perspectives in a PE program that provides choice. Hearing the voices of student that self-identify as reluctant/low activity level/interest in PE may provide significant information for decision makers in curriculum and programming in supporting students' maintain a healthy and active lifestyle. Furthermore, hearing from such students may identify further barriers that hinder their involvement in PE and physical activity in and outside of school.



Students certainly felt it was important to have their voices heard in their PE classes. Students stated they wanted to be heard about whom they had to share their gym spaces with. Students voiced ideas related to wanting their PE teachers to know the needs of the specific grade level. More specifically, it is important to track how the needs of students are changing. Further research is recommended in this area to gain a deeper insight into what they are experiencing and what they want to experience.

Furthermore, research is recommended in terms of conducting a similar study but perhaps using a different theoretical framework. Future researchers may look at using a sociology theory in conducting a similar study because of the numerous participant responses that referenced the importance of their friendships and other social relationships within the physical education context.

Last of all, future research may be needed on the impacts of independent outside physical activity on students' abilities to maintain a healthy and active lifestyle after they leave high school. Also, other researchers could ask if PE programs that provide choice prepare youth for continuing and maintaining a healthy lifestyle in their adulthood. On a final note, further research on this topic will help educators' gain deeper understanding of students' experiences in PE programs that provide choice.

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## Appendix A

### In-Depth Interview Protocol

#### Introduction

Hello, my name is Michelle, and I am a graduate student at the University of Manitoba working on a Master of Education degree. I am studying students' experiences in PE programs/classes that provide choice and I am interested in knowing more about the factors that influence students' experiences with physical activity inside of school and outside. There is no right or wrong answer to any question I ask you and this interview is *not* an assessment of your performance in PE, so just be honest. Your participation in this study is confidential. All information from our conversation will be anonymous which means no one will ever know what you said. Your identity will be protected in the reporting of the results of this research project. All the information you provide to me will be private and kept in a safe, secure location away from the school. Remember that when talking with me, you may stop at any time. You can choose to answer some questions and not others, and you can withdraw from the study at any time by contacting me or my Advisor and letting me know. No one will be upset with you, and there will be no negative consequences. This interview will last no longer than 60 minutes. Remember that I am going to record our conversation. Is that still okay with you? Do you have any questions before we begin?

#### Background Information on Interviewee

False Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Start Time: \_\_\_\_\_ End Time: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Duration of Interview: \_\_\_\_\_ minutes

Which of the following three descriptions best fits your level of participation in PE and PA?

- High Activity Level/Interest in PE (I participate a lot during PE classes. I love PE and I participate in lots of physical activity in school and outside of school on a regular/daily basis. PA is an important part of my life.)
- Average Active Level /Interested in PE (I attend most PE classes and my activity level during class is about average. I participate in PE and other forms of PA inside and outside of school a few times a week. I like PE/PA, but it is not my greatest passion.)
- Reluctant/Low Activity Level/Interest PE (I go to PE as often as I need to, but I miss a lot of classes. I don't participate in any other PA in school or outside of school. I just do what I have to do and I really don't like PE or PA. PE is not one of my passions.)

Sex assigned at birth \_\_\_\_\_ Self-identify gender \_\_\_\_\_

#### Section A. How do students experience PE programs that provide choice?

1. Tell me about your experience in PE this year. Describe a typical class for me.
  - a). What happened in your last PE class?

- b). What did you do?
  - c). How did you do it?
  - d). Did that matter to you?
2. What do you value most about participating in PE this year? Explain.
- a). What does that mean to you?
3. What do you value the least about participating in PE this year? Explain.
- a). What does that mean to you?
4. What kinds of physical activity have you been involved in PE this year?
- a). How do you engage in these physical activities?
  - b). How was that for you?
  - c). What do you see as the benefits for yourself of your engagement in these physical activities?
  - d). Is that important to you?
5. What choices were offered to you, and how did you go about making your choice?
- a). Can you recall a specific time? Explain that experience for you.
  - b). How did it feel to you to be offered choices?
  - c). Did that matter to you?
6. What was difficult about making your choice?
- a). Can you tell me more about that?
  - b). Why did you think that?
7. Can you recall a time when you participated in PE that did not provide students with choice?  
Tell me about it.
- a). Describe how that physical activity was presented to you?
  - b). How was that experience for you?

- c). What did it make you think and feel?
  - b). What do you think that means to you?
8. What kinds of activities do you wish you could have been involved in this year, but were not offered?
- a). Why do you think that matters to you?
9. What were the requirements imposed on you without choice in PE?
- a). Can you give an example of this?
  - b). What do you make of that?
10. What do you make of taking a PE course that is mandatory in each grade level in high school?
- a). Can you tell me more about that experience?
  - b). What does that mean to you?
11. In comparison to other courses you are taking this year, how important is PE to you? Why? Why not?
12. How do you feel about your performance and achievement in PE this year?
- Section B. What are students' perspectives about PE/PA at school and outside of school?**
13. What types of physical activities do you enjoy most in physical education at school (PE)? Why?
14. What types of physical activities do you enjoy most outside of school, ones you participate in within the community? Why?
15. What or who has most influenced your involvement in PA? Can you explain? Please provide an example.
16. What or who has most hampered your involvement in PA? Can you explain? Please provide an example.

17. What motivates you to be involved or participate in PA in and outside of school? Explain.
18. What causes you to feel that you do not want to be involved in PA? Explain.
19. What types of physical activities do you enjoy most while you are at your home or vacation home? Why?
20. What types of physical activities do you enjoy the least in PE at school? PA? Why?
21. What types of physical activities do you enjoy the least outside of school, out in the community? Why?
22. What types of physical activities do you enjoy the least at your home or vacation home? Why?
23. What do physical education teachers need to consider to make your PE program/class experience most relevant to your needs and interests?
24. Imagine you could take part in any type of physical activities at school. What do you imagine yourself doing at school?
25. Imagine you could take part in any type of physical activities out in the larger community? What do you imagine yourself doing? What about at home?
26. Why is physical activity important (or not important) to you?
27. What contributes most to your active, healthy lifestyle? Or inactive lifestyle?
28. If you had to give the PE program at your school a grade, what would it be and why?
29. If you had to give the physical activities available in your community a grade, what would it be and why?

**Thank you for volunteering to participate in this interview.**



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## Appendix B

### *Oral Script for Student Recruitment (Divisional Student Support Services Director)*

Hello everyone,

Ms. Janzic has been working both as a teacher and as a university student this past year. She has been working on her Master of Education degree at the University of Manitoba. She told me that she wants to learn about your experiences in a physical education program that provides choice to students. For her research study, she is interested in learning and gaining an understanding about what your experiences and perspectives are regarding a physical education program and classes that provide choice, more about what physical activities interest you inside and outside of school, and what influences those interests. Ms. Janzic is only interested in your experiences and perspectives; she is not assessing you in any way. She is asking if you would like to participate in her study. This means she will conduct an interview with you at your convenience which could last up to one hour and she will use that information and the information that other students give her to understand students' experiences with PE better. You will also be given the opportunity to review your comments on a written transcript and clarify, add, or delete information. The transcript will be emailed to you within two weeks of your interview and you will be given one week to make changes and respond to Ms. Janzic. This process will take 15-30 minutes of your time. If you do not reply within one week, she will assume you do not want to make any changes and she will proceed with analyzing your comments.

Ms. Janzic does not want you to feel pressured to participate in this study in any way. She wants your participation to be completely voluntary. If you decide not to participate, your decision will not affect your grades or your relationship with her or any other teachers in the school. No one will be upset with you. You can withdraw from the study at any time by just letting her know or her Advisor. There are people you can contact if you have questions or concerns. Your participation will be confidential and there are no known risks to participation in this kind of study.

I would like you to think about this opportunity. I am giving you a letter that provides information about the study. Please take the forms home to your parents/guardians and ask them to read them carefully with you. You should talk to your parents/guardians and decide if you would like to participate in the study with Ms. Janzic. If so, you will return the forms signed by you and your parents directly to her office, within one week, and no later than April 7, 2017. You and your parent(s)/guardian(s) must sign the form if you wish to participate in this study. You

will also be given a “Pledge of Confidentiality” form to sign. Signing this form means that you agree to keep confidential that you are a participant in the study and you will not talk about it to anyone else.

If you or your parents/guardians have any other questions or concerns about the study, they can contact Ms. Janzic or her research supervisor, Dr. Francine Morin. Their phone numbers and email addresses are on the forms. The study has been approved by the University of Manitoba’s Education/Nursing Ethics Board.



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## Appendix C

### Superintendent's Permission Letter

*Research Project Title:* Student Perspectives of Choice in High School Physical Education

*Principal Investigator and Contact Information:* Michelle L. Janzic,  
umjanzim@myumanitoba.ca, (204) [REDACTED].

*Research Supervisor and Contact information:* Dr. Francine Morin,  
Francine.Morin@umanitoba.ca, (204) 474-9015.

Dear [REDACTED]:

I am seeking permission to conduct my Master of Education thesis study at [REDACTED] High school. I have received approval from ENREB at the University of Manitoba and I am now hoping to move forward with my study. The following is a copy of the Permission Letter which outlines the expectations for student participants. Although I am not asking you to be an active participant in the study, I am asking you for the following: 1) to complete this form to confirm your awareness and approval of the study; 2) to give me permission to approach [REDACTED], School Principal, via an information letter for his permission to conduct the study in our school; and 3) to give me permission to solicit the assistance of the [REDACTED], Student Support Services Director, in the Grade 12 student recruitment process (reading a recruitment script in eight physical education classes and distributing informed consent letters for parents/guardians and their sons/daughters).

**This consent form, a copy of which will be left with you for your records and reference, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.**

*Purpose of the Research.* The purpose of the study is to gain an understanding of what students' experiences and perspectives are regarding a Physical Education Program and class that provide choice among physical activity units and what factors influence students' involvement in physical activity. This study will provide information for educators in this field and may help to inform future PE program planning.

*Research Procedures for Students.* The total estimated time for the student to participate in this study is approximately 75-90 minutes, 45-60 for an in-depth interview, and 15-30 minutes to verify their transcripts.

Students who agree to participate in the study will be directly involved in the following ways.

- One in-depth interview: approximately 45-60 minute interview in length, to be completed at the convenience of the student (before or after school).
- The in-depth interview will be audio-recorded using a Sony IC Recorder ICD-PX820 and transcribed by me in the privacy of my home office. Within two weeks, students interviewed will be emailed their transcript for verification. They will have one week to review the transcript, add or delete any comments or identifying information that they chose and return it to me. The verification process should take 15-30 minutes. If students do not reply with changes within one week, I will assume they do not want to make any changes and I will proceed with analysis.

*Recruitment of Participants.* To mitigate my power-over students, I am required to use third party recruitment. In keeping with this requirement, I will ask the Student Support Services Director (SSSD) to read a recruitment script to Grade 12 students at the end of PE classes and distribute permission letters for Parent(s)/Guardian(s) and their Son/Daughter. Parents and students interested in participating will return signed letters of informed consent directly to me. I will then contact interested students to set up the interviews.

*Power-Over Students.* To address my power-over position with students while doing a study in my own school, the following strategies will be employed in addition to third party recruitment: a) declaring my power-over relationship in the recruitment materials and informed consent letters, express my awareness of it, and how I aim to address it; b) informing participants in their consent form that they have the right to not participate and they can withdraw from the study at any time without consequence; c) reminding participants that there are authorities that they can contact if they have concerns; d) using an impartial tone in the recruitment and consent forms to eliminate pressure on potential participants to participate (no communication of how important this study is to me); e) recruiting students for whom I do not assign grades; and f) recruiting students that are not in my grade level (grade 12) caseload or that I am not the case manager for in the school.

*Benefits and Risks for the Participants.* There is minimal risk to the student if they chose to participate in this study, nothing foreseeable than would be normally encountered at a typical day at school. Students may benefit from knowing that their voice matters and that their ideas may inform PE programs for students in the future. The opportunity to think about and respond to questions might also inform their decisions to try new physical activities in the future and cause them to think about its importance to healthy living.

*Confidentiality.* The following strategies will be used to ensure confidentiality.

1. All hard copies and audio-files of in-depth interview data and analytical memos will be stored in a locked cabinet in my home office.
2. The audio-recording of the students' interviews will be transcribed by me in my private home office so that they won't be overheard.
3. All audio-recordings and written transcriptions files will be saved and stored on my



password-protected computer and backed up on a memory stick that will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in my home office.

4. A list of participants' real names, false names, and contract information will be kept in a separate file and in a different drawer of my locked filing cabinet, separate from non-identifiable data.
5. All data containing students' real names will be replaced by pseudonyms. Pseudonyms will be used in all public reporting of the results.
6. Data in all forms generated from the study will be deleted or shredded once the thesis is completed, no later than December 31, 2017.
7. All participants will be required to sign a pledge of confidentiality.

*Withdrawing from the Study.* The student's consent to participate in this study is completely voluntary. They can refuse to participate or withdraw from the study any time without explanation. There will be no adverse effects on the student. To withdraw, the parent and/or student can simply contact me or my research supervisor and let one of us know their decision; any data related to the student will be deleted or shredded immediately.

*Participant Debriefing and Dissemination of Results.* First, I will debrief with student participants during the verification meetings during which time we will review their transcripts. Second, the parent and student will be offered a non-technical summary of the results via email or postal after the thesis is complete, no later than December 31, 2017. Third, the full thesis report will be publically available on the University of Manitoba Libraries MSpace. I also intend to publish one or two articles in educational journals and/or present my research results at conferences or professional development events that are relevant.

**This research has been approved by the Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you may contact any of the above-named persons or the Human Ethics Coordinator at 204-474-7122 or [humanethics@umanitoba.ca](mailto:humanethics@umanitoba.ca). A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.**

Thank-you,  
Michelle L. Janzic, M. Ed. Student, University of Manitoba

## Student Perspectives of Choice in High School Physical Education

### PERMISSION FORM FOR SUPERINTENDENT

*Please complete this form and return it to me by [February 15, 2017]. You should retain the first two pages for your information.*

I have read the above information and have had the nature of the study explained to me. All my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

By completing this permission form and returning it to the researcher of this study, I am indicating my consent for Ms. Michelle L. Janzic, graduate student at University of Manitoba, to conduct her research study in the [REDACTED] School Division at [REDACTED] Collegiate. I give my permission to approach [REDACTED], School Principal, via an information letter for his permission to conduct the study at [REDACTED] Collegiate. I give my permission to solicit the assistance of the Ms. [REDACTED], Student Support Services Director, in the Grade 12 student recruitment process (reading a recruitment script in eight physical education classes and distributing informed consent letters for parents/guardians and their sons/daughters).

---

Name of Superintendent of the  
Division

---

Signature

---

Date School

I wish to receive an electronic summary research report by email at: \_\_\_\_\_

I wish to receive a paper copy of the summary research report at the following address by post:

---

I do not want a copy of the summary research report.



**Faculty of Education**  
Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning

227 Education Building  
University of Manitoba  
Winnipeg, Manitoba  
Canada R3T 2N2  
Telephone (204) 474-9014  
Fax (204) 474-7550

## Appendix D

### School Principal's Permission Letter

*Research Project Title:* Student Perspectives of Choice in High School Physical Education

*Principal Investigator and Contact Information:* Michelle L. Janzic,  
umjanzim@myumanitoba.ca, (204) 485-1123.

*Research Supervisor and Contact information:* Dr. Francine Morin,  
Francine.Morin@umanitoba.ca, (204) 474-9015.

Dear Mr. [REDACTED]:

I am seeking permission to conduct my Master of Education thesis study at [REDACTED] Collegiate High school. I have received approval from ENREB at the University of Manitoba as well as the Assistant Superintendent, [REDACTED], and I am now hoping to move forward with my study. The following is a copy of the Letter of Informed Consent which outlines the expectations for student participants. Although I am not asking you to be an active participant in the study, I am asking your permission for the following: 1) to contact the physical education teachers for Grade 12 classes and seek permission to have Ms. [REDACTED], Student Support Services Director, come to class to read a recruitment script and distribute informed consent letters for parents/guardians and their sons/daughters; 2) to use my office or some other private conference space to conduct interviews with approximately 10 students; and 3) to complete this form to confirm your awareness and approval of the study to be conducted at [REDACTED] Collegiate. I will recruit participants for the study once your approval has been given.

**This consent form, a copy of which will be left with you for your records and reference, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.**

*Purpose of the Research.* The purpose of the study is to gain an understanding of what students' experiences and perspectives are regarding a Physical Education Program and class that provide choice among physical activity units and what factors influence students' involvement in physical activity. This study will provide information for educators in this field and may help to inform future PE program planning.

*Research Procedures for Students.* The total estimated time for the student to participate in this study is approximately 75-90 minutes, 45-60 for an in-depth interview, and 15-30 minutes to verify their transcripts.

Students who agree to participate in the study will be directly involved in the following ways.

- One in-depth interview: approximately 45-60 minute interview in length, to be completed at the convenience of the student (before or after school).
- The in-depth interview will be audio-recorded using a Sony IC Recorder ICD-PX820 and transcribed by me in the privacy of my home office. Within two weeks, students interviewed will be emailed their transcript for verification. They will have one week to review the transcript, add or delete any comments or identifying information that they chose and return it to me. The verification process should take 15-30 minutes. If students do not reply with changes within one week, I will assume they do not want to make any changes and I will proceed with analysis.

*Recruitment of Participants.* To mitigate my power-over students, I am required to use third party recruitment. In keeping with this requirement, I will ask the Student Support Services Director (SSSD) to read a recruitment script to Grade 12 students at the end of PE classes and distribute permission letters for Parent(s)/Guardian(s) and their Son/Daughter. Parents and students interested in participating will returned signed letters of informed consent directly to me. I will then contact interested students to set up the interviews.

*Power-Over Students.* To address my power-over position with students while doing a study in my own school, the following strategies will be employed in addition to third party recruitment: a) declaring my power-over relationship in the recruitment materials and informed consent letters, express my awareness of it, and how I aim to address it; b) informing participants in their consent form that they have the right to not participate and they can withdraw from the study at any time without consequence; c) reminding participants that there are authorities that they can contact if they have concerns; d) using an impartial tone in the recruitment and consent forms to eliminate pressure on potential participants to participate (no communication of how important this study is to me); e) recruiting students for whom I do not assign grades; and f) recruiting students that are not in my grade level (grade 12) caseload or that I am not the case manager for in the school.

*Benefits and Risks for the Participants.* There is minimal risk to the student if they chose to participate in this study, nothing foreseeable than would be normally encountered at school. Students may benefit from knowing that their voice matters and that their ideas may inform PE programs for students in the future. The opportunity to think about and respond to questions might also inform their decisions to try new physical activities in the future and cause them to think about its importance to healthy living.

*Confidentiality.* The following strategies will be used to ensure confidentiality.

1. All hard copies and audio-files of in-depth interview data and analytical memos will be stored in a locked cabinet in my home office.
2. The audio-recording of the child's interviews will be transcribed by me in my private home office so that they won't be overheard.
3. All audio-recordings and written transcriptions files will be saved and stored on my

password-protected computer and backed up on a memory stick that will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in my home office.

4. A list of participants' real names, false names, and contract information will be kept in a separate file and in a different drawer of my locked filing cabinet, separate from non-identifiable data.
5. All data containing students' real names will be replaced by pseudonyms. Pseudonyms will be used in all public reporting of the results.
6. Data in all forms generated from the study will be deleted or shredded once the thesis is completed, no later than December 31, 2017.
7. All participants will be required to sign a pledge of confidentiality.

*Withdrawing from the Study.* The student's consent to participate in this study is completely voluntary. They can refuse to participate or withdraw from the study any time without explanation. There will be no adverse effects on the student. To withdraw, the parent and or student can simply contact me or my research supervisor and let one of us know their decision; any data related to the student will be deleted or shredded immediately.

*Participant Debriefing and Dissemination of Results.* The parent and student will be offered a non-technical summary of the results via email or postal after the thesis is complete, no later than December 31, 2017. The full thesis report will be publically available on the University of Manitoba Libraries MSpace. I also intend to publish one or two articles in educational journals and/or present my research results at conferences or professional development events that are relevant.

**This research has been approved by the Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you may contact any of the above-named persons or the Human Ethics Coordinator at 204-474-7122 or [humanethics@umanitoba.ca](mailto:humanethics@umanitoba.ca). A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.**

Thank-you,

Michelle L. Janzic  
Master of Education Student  
University of Manitoba

## Student Perspectives of Choice in High School Physical Education

### PERMISSION FORM FOR SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

*Please complete this form and return it to me by [February 15, 2017]. You should retain the first two pages for your information.*

I have read the above information and have had the nature of the study explained to me. All my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

By completing this permission form and returning it to the researcher of this study, I am indicating my consent for Ms. Michelle L. Janzic, student at University of Manitoba, to conduct her research study at ██████████ Collegiate. I give my permission to contact the physical education teachers for Grade 12 classes and seek permission to have Ms. ██████████, Student Support Services Director, come to class to read a recruitment script and distribute informed consent letters for parents/guardians and their sons/daughters. I give my permission to use your office or the conference room to conduct interviews with approximately 10 students.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of School Principal  
██████████ Collegiate

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

I wish to receive an electronic summary research report by email at: \_\_\_\_\_

I wish to receive a paper copy of the summary research report at the following address by post:

\_\_\_\_\_

I do not want a copy of the summary research report.



UNIVERSITY  
OF MANITOBA

Faculty of Education

Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning

227 Education Building  
University of Manitoba  
Winnipeg, Manitoba  
Canada R3T 2N2  
Telephone (204) 474-  
9014  
Fax (204) 474-7550

## Appendix E

### Parent and Son/Daughter Letter of Informed Consent

*Research Project Title:* Student Perspectives of Choice in High School Physical Education

*Principal Investigator and Contact Information:* Michelle L. Janzic,  
umjanzim@myumanitoba.ca, (204) [REDACTED].

*Research Supervisor and Contact information:* Dr. Francine Morin,  
Francine.Morin@umanitoba.ca, (204) 474-9015.

Dear Parent/Legal Guardian/Participant:

**This consent form, a copy of which will be left with you for your records and reference, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.**

*Purpose of the Research.* The purpose of the study is to gain an understanding of what students' experiences and perspectives are with a Physical Education program that provides choice among physical activity units. I am also interested in learning about what factors influence your son/daughter's involvement in physical activity inside and outside of school.

*Research Procedures for Students.* The total estimated time for your son/daughter to participate in this study is approximately 75-90 minutes. Students who agree to participate in the study will be directly involved in the following ways. Your son/daughter will participate in one in-depth interview which will take approximately 45-60 minutes. I will ask your son/daughter a range of questions about their experiences of PE classes involving choice, their preferences and dislikes about physical activity, and the factors that influence their involvement in physical activity. The interview will be completed at your son/daughter's convenience before or after school. It will be audio-recorded using a Sony IC Recorder ICD-PX820 and transcribed by me in the privacy of my home office. Within two weeks, I will email your son/daughter a written transcript of their interview comments to review. Your son/daughter will be given one week to make revisions, add or delete comments or any information that could identify them. This review process should take 15-30 minutes. If I do not get a reply within one week, I will assume your son/daughter does not

want to make any changes and I will proceed with analysis.

*Declaration of Power-Over Students.* I want you to understand that all teachers are in a position of authority and power in relation to their students. I am very much aware of my position, and I would like you to ensure you that I do not want to pressure your son/daughter in any way to participate in this study. I want them to feel completely free to volunteer. If your son/daughter decides not to participate it will not affect my relationship with them or with you now or in the future. I will not be teaching your son/daughter this term, assessing them, or assigning grades, so your decision to participate will not affect your son/daughter's grades this year or in the future as they will be graduating. Also, there are authorities that you can contact if you have any questions or concerns.

*Benefits and Risks for the Participants.* There is minimal risk to your son/daughter if your son/daughter chose to participate in this study, nothing foreseeable than would be encountered during a typical day at school. Students may benefit from knowing that their voice matters and that their ideas may inform PE programs for students in the future. The opportunity to think about and respond to questions might also inform their decisions to try new physical activities in the future and cause them to think about its importance to healthy living.

*Confidentiality.* The following strategies will be used to ensure confidentiality.

1. All hard copies and audio-files of in-depth interview data and analytical memos will be stored in a locked cabinet in my home office.
2. The audio-recording of your son/daughter's interviews will be transcribed by me in my private home office so that they won't be overheard.
3. All audio-recordings and written transcriptions files will be saved and stored on my password-protected computer and backed up on a memory stick that will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in my home office.
4. A list of participants' real names, false names, and contract information will be kept in a separate file and in a different drawer of my locked filing cabinet, separate from non-identifiable data.
5. All data containing students' real names will be replaced by pseudonyms. Pseudonyms will be used in all public reporting of the results.
6. Data in all forms generated from the study will be deleted or shredded once the thesis is completed, no later than July 1, 2017.
7. All participants will be required to sign a pledge of confidentiality.

*Withdrawing from the Study.* Your and your son/daughter's consent to participate in this study is completely voluntary. You can refuse to participate or withdraw from the study any time without explanation. There will be no adverse effects on your son/daughter. To withdraw, simply contact me or my research supervisor and let one of us know your decision; any data related to your son/daughter will be deleted or shredded immediately.

*Participant Debriefing and Dissemination of Results.* You and your son/daughter will be offered a summary of the results via email or post after the thesis is complete, no later than December 31, 2017. The full thesis report will be publically available on the University of Manitoba Libraries MSpace. You should also be aware that I may publish one or two journal articles or make presentations at educational conferences about my research as well.



**Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project and agree to participate as a subject. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the researchers, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time, and /or refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.**

**The University of Manitoba may look at your research records to see that the research is being done in a safe and proper way.**

**This research has been approved by the Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you may contact any of the above-named persons or the Human Ethics Coordinator at 204-474-7122 or [humanethics@umanitoba.ca](mailto:humanethics@umanitoba.ca). A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.**

Sincerely,

Michelle L. Janzic  
Master of Education Student, University of Manitoba

## Student Perspectives of Choice in High School Physical Education

### CONSENT FORM FOR PARENT/GUARDIAN & SON/DAUGHTER

*Please complete this form and the Pledge of Confidentiality form and return it to Ms. Janzic by February 28, 2017. You should retain the first two pages for your information.*

I have read the above information and have had the nature of the study explained to me. All my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

By completing this consent form and returning it directly to Ms. Janzic at her office, Seaford Side #203, we are indicating our agreement of our son/daughter to participate in this study.

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent/guardian(s) Name: \_\_\_\_\_

#### The following section must be completed for students to participate in this study:

Student Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent/guardian Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Student's Email Address \_\_\_\_\_

#### Request for a summary of the results

If you would like to request a summary of the results from this study, please indicate below:

I want a summary of results from this study

Email address \_\_\_\_\_ OR

Postal address \_\_\_\_\_

**Please note, if you have requested a summary of results from this study, it can be expected no later than December 31, 2018.**

**Student Perspectives of Choice in High School Physical Education****PLEDGE OF CONFIDENTIALITY FORM**

I, \_\_\_\_\_, agree to keep it confidential that I am a participant in this study and I will not talk about it to anyone else.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Student Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date