

**Exploring Student, Teacher, and Administrator Perspectives on Physical and
Health Education in the K-12 School Setting**

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts in
Physical Education, Sport, and Physical Literacy

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Dr. Kate Piper



Declaration Form

Master's Degrees by Examination and Dissertation Declaration Form

1. This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

Signed: Brittany Dobbin

Date: 30/04/2026

2. This dissertation is being submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of MA in Physical Education, Sport, and Physical Literacy.

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3. This dissertation is the result of my own independent work / investigation, except where otherwise stated. Other sources are acknowledged by explicit references. A reference list is appended.

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Abstract

Despite a rise in sedentary behaviour and chronic disease, physical and health education (PHE) remains a low status subject in schools. This dissertation explored the perspectives of students, teachers, and administrators on PHE in a K-12 school in British Columbia, Canada. Situated within an interpretivist paradigm, the study collected data through six semi-structured group interviews with 17 participants, including eight students, six teachers, and three administrators. The interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis.

Three themes emerged from the analysis: the perceived purpose and value of PHE, pedagogical approaches and student experience in PHE, and systemic and structural factors influencing PHE. These themes show that participants viewed PHE as supporting holistic development, well-being, and lifelong health habits, while also providing opportunities for inclusion, confidence, and engagement. At the same time, participants identified tensions around sport-centric programming, the integration of health content, assessment practices, scheduling, academic priorities, and limited resources, all of which shape how PHE is experienced and valued in schools.

The study concludes that PHE is most effective when it is inclusive, intentional, and supported by structural and systemic frameworks. Recommendations include intentional health instruction, a shift toward inclusive and holistic models, proficiency-based assessment, protected instructional time, improved resources, stronger teacher preparation, and greater policy-practice accountability.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Debates and curricular controversies in physical education as a subject in school programs date back over a century. In an ever-evolving landscape with cultural shifts from farm life, war, urban growth, the industrial era, and the age of the internet, physical education has grown into the multi-faceted discipline it is today. However, controversy in physical education remains a pain point for educators and scholars in its execution and perceived value in schools. Within the context of Canadian physical and health education (PHE), this dissertation explores perspectives of PHE in the K-12 school system. The following sections discuss the background and context of the study, provide a rationale for choosing the research topic, state the research aims and objectives, and outline the chapters included in this dissertation.

1.1 Background and Rationale

With scattered appearances in schools starting in the early 19th century, by the 1920s, physical education in North America was developing under three main ideas: health and hygiene, recreation, and education (Ennis, 2006). In the last one hundred years, several shifts of focus have taken place in physical education; sports and games, fitness and conditioning, physical literacy, and lifelong physical activity have all been at the forefront of physical education at different points in time (Walton-Fisette & Sutherland, 2020; Centeio & Brusseau, 2024). In recent decades, health experts have called for action to address public health concerns regarding the rise of inactivity, obesity, and chronic diseases, which has evolved the current focus in physical education to one that promotes lifelong active living (Centeio & Brusseau, 2024). Scholars have also discussed the development of standards in PE that focus on motor skills, social/emotional learning, physical activity promotion, and social justice (Centeio & Brusseau, 2024). Calls for reformation in teacher education and the delivery of PE happen frequently but are met with challenges such as competing priorities and the allocation of resources.

It is well known that education systems today place high value on test scores and “core courses” such as literacy and numeracy. While many argue for and know the value that courses in the arts, humanities, and physical education contribute to the holistic upbringing and health of children, these domains are frequently, if not always, undervalued and given less importance in schools.

Cultural shifts in the United States over the last 50 years have placed a strong emphasis on numeracy and literacy in schools. Most of a student's day is focused on these areas, putting other subjects on the sidelines to fight for allocated time in the school week (Ennis, 2006). Canadian issues and policies in education are often closely linked with those of their southern neighbour and typically follow suit. In a recent analysis of PE curricula in Canada, Sulz et al. (2025) found that allocated time for physical and health education vary from province to province and are more of a suggestion than a mandate. For example, time afforded for physical education ranges from 60 to 150 minutes per week for elementary and middle school levels, but each district can decide how that time is scheduled and what activities and courses are included (Sulz et al., 2025). With less time and resources for PE in schools, the value of physical education is questioned. Ennis (2006) argues that few teachers or administrators would question the importance of physical education for students' well-being, but most would agree that teaching literacy and numeracy is the highest priority for schools. Ennis (2006) poses an important question:

While most would agree that physical activity and physical education is greatly needed, the relative value of physical activity compared with the unquestioned value of literacy and mathematics relegates physical education to a low status, low demand subject. Can respect for a low demand subject, such as physical education, ever be earned in an academic environment? (p. 53).

The research problem of this study emerged from the researcher's personal experiences as a PHE teacher in a K-12 school. Time and resource constraints, participation barriers, and the perceived low status of PHE as a subject led to curiosity about how PHE is perceived and valued in schools. To gain a fuller understanding of these perceptions, the viewpoints of various stakeholders within the school, including students, teachers, and administrators, were explored.

1.2 Context of the Study

The study investigated in this dissertation took place in British Columbia, Canada, within the context of physical education in the K-12 school system and the BC physical and health education curriculum. Within Canada, K-12 education is under the jurisdiction of individual

provinces and territories, where curricula, assessments, and graduation requirements differ across the country (Sulz et al., 2025). While physical education is mandated in all Canadian schools, like all subjects, it is decentralized and developed based on local resources and education goals (Hickson et al., 2012; Sulz et al., 2025). In response to national and global health crises, British Columbia (BC) and other Canadian provinces have upgraded the Physical and Health Education (PHE) curricula across K-12 grade levels in the recent decade. Studies have well documented the benefits of active living, regular exercise, and healthy eating, which shows that careful planning is an ongoing requirement for schools and communities to combat trends in sedentary lifestyles (Hickson et al., 2012). Furthermore, shifts towards holistic health have been included in physical education, with an emphasis on cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains and model-based practices (Baker, 2016).

Recent changes in Canadian curricula are seeing “key learning outcomes addressing identity, equity, engagement, and well-being” (Fletcher et al., 2018, p. 135). In BC specifically, the province has updated the provincial school curriculum to what is known as the “new curriculum.” Changes in the curriculum were necessary to prepare today’s students for the rapidly changing world, where communication and information are instant (Province of British Columbia, 2024). While the new curriculum still maintains a focus on literacy and numeracy, it aims for a more holistic development of citizens with an emphasis on the core competencies of critical thinking, communication, and personal and social responsibility (Province of British Columbia, 2024). Among the changes, the Physical Education curriculum has been combined with the Health Education curriculum to form Physical and Health Education (PHE) as one course that is required from kindergarten to grade 10 and offered as PHE electives for grades 11 and 12, such as Active Living, Outdoor Education, and Strength and Conditioning. For clarity, it should be noted that ‘PE’ and ‘PHE’ are often used interchangeably, with PE being the more common term. The BC Curriculum highlights several points about the importance of PHE and the connections between physical, mental, and social health, as well as the benefits for society of equipping students with the knowledge and understanding of PHE concepts and skills. The rationale continues to say that “The importance of personal well-being, where students develop healthy habits, is clearly identified as one of the principles of British Columbia’s educational

transformation. This establishes PHE as essential to a complete education for BC students” (Province of British Columbia, 2024).

1.3 Aims, Objectives, and Research Question

The aim of this study was to explore the attitudes and perspectives of Physical and Health Education in the K-12 school curriculum. This aim was guided by the following objectives:

1. To examine personal experiences of students, teachers, and administrators in PHE
2. To identify the perceived role and value of PHE in the curriculum
3. To investigate the challenges presented in the school setting for executing a meaningful PHE program

The research questions that guided this qualitative study are: 1) What are the perspectives of students, teachers, and administrators on Physical and Health Education? 2) What is the perceived value of PHE in school?

1.4 Outline of Study

This dissertation is organized into six chapters, each with its own purpose in describing and explaining the study.

Chapter 1: Introduction – introduces the background, context, rationale, and aim of the study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review – examines existing literature and research on PHE in the school setting and the perspectives of various groups.

Chapter 3: Methodology – describes the research design and frameworks that guided the study. This section details the data collection and analysis processes and addresses the ethical considerations.

Chapter 4: Findings – presents the results of the study and introduces the main themes that emerged from the data.

Chapter 5: Discussion – discusses the main themes from the findings, connecting them to the study’s findings and the literature in the broader context of PHE.

Chapter 6: Conclusion – summarizes the findings of the study, acknowledges the limitations, and offers recommendations for application and future research.

1.5 Chapter Summary

This introductory chapter provided the background, context, research aims, and dissertation outline for this study. By exploring the context of PHE, particularly where it sits in Canadian and BC school settings, this chapter highlights the values and challenges of PHE that inspired this research. The following chapter discusses the literature that explores the value and barriers of PHE in school settings and society.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The aim of this chapter is to review the literature that is relevant to the topics and themes in this study. It will examine the role of physical and health education in the curriculum and the perceived importance and value of the subject by stakeholders and the broader community. Pedagogy, program design, and student engagement are discussed, and the chapter concludes with a look at marginalization, barriers, and suggestions for the future of PE.

2.1 Relevance of PHE in the Public Health Context

When investigating the literature, studies frequently linked the value of PHE to combatting societal health trends, including increasing sedentary behaviour and the rise in obesity. In Canada, it was found that only 7% of children and youth meet daily moderate-to-vigorous physical activity guidelines, with over a quarter of students being overweight (Hickson et al., 2012). Similarly, in the U.S., obesity in children has increased by staggering numbers over the last three decades (Geisler, 2017). Results from a 2018 study showed that 24% of American youth meet the 60 minutes per day guideline for physical activity; however, many authors note a significant increase in sedentary behaviours since the COVID-19 pandemic (Katzmarzyk et al., 2018; Centeo & Brusseau, 2024). Studies also show a decline in physical activity with age, particularly in high school-aged girls and low-income populations (Bailey et al., 2008; Martins et al., 2016). Zalech (2021) reports that this trend has been observed in countries like Canada, Lithuania, Poland, and the United States. Globally, it is estimated that 80% of 13-15 year old students and 30% of youth over the age of 15 do not meet current World Health Organization recommendations on physical activity, pointing to the key role that PE programs play in promoting physical activity and active lifestyles (Zalech, 2021; Green, 2019).

2.2 Stakeholder Perspectives

The research questions in this study led to an exploration of stakeholder perspectives on the value of PHE. Fan and McMullen (2025) found that all stakeholder groups in their study, including students, teachers, administrators, and parents, viewed the primary purpose of PE as a driver of overall personal health and promotion of an active lifestyle. Student focus in PHE was on personal engagement and social connections, whereas educators and parents emphasized

academic performance, behaviour, and building physical literacy (Fan & McMullen, 2025). Ni Chroinin et al. (2019) found a similar consensus in their review of 95 qualitative studies on the purpose of PE to develop social, emotional, and physical skills. However, it was noted that stakeholders such as administrators, parents, and policymakers are underrepresented in the literature (Ni Chroinin et al., 2019).

In an Oklahoma study on teachers' attitudes towards elementary physical education, 95% of classroom teachers placed high value on PE, with 84% agreeing that it contributes significantly to overall education; however, over half of the teachers in the study reported lacking confidence to teach PHE (Barney & Ehrlich, 2010). This research suggests a need for improved teacher training programs, as insufficient training can lead to lower-quality PE instruction (Irmansyah et al., 2025; France et al., 2011). Furthermore, Lawson (2018) and Fletcher et al. (2018) advocate for the use of specialist teachers specifically trained in PHE to teach and lead programs in schools. These authors emphasize that PE programs can suffer when teachers with limited knowledge or confidence in PE content are assigned to teach the subject; rather, specialist PE teachers are necessary to support effective instruction and reinforce the value of PE (Fletcher et al., 2018; Lawson, 2018). In the same notion, Zalech (2021) describes the requirements of successful PE programs, including intense involvement of stakeholders such as principals and parents and calls for improvement in teacher competencies. While specialist PHE teachers may not be feasible in all school contexts, this literature highlights the importance of prioritizing expertise in staffing decisions and professional development. Overall, stakeholder perspectives directly influence PE programming, including resource allocation and advocacy (Fan & McMullen, 2025).

2.3 Scrutinizing the Evidence

Although research provides many claims regarding the value of PHE, the literature scrutinizes the measurement of PE outcomes and the delivery of curriculum and assessment practices. While movement skills and competence from PE are well supported, evidence for PE's impact on broader health outcomes is inconsistent; rather, it is argued that holistic health benefits are not automatic outcomes from PHE but are often facilitated by pedagogy and school leadership (Bailey et al., 2008; Kirk, 2013). Similarly, Geisler's (2017) study notes that PE outcomes

depend on the school context, including leadership practices, suggesting that benefits do not occur solely by participating in physical activity. The benefits of PHE in the affective and cognitive domains are particularly difficult to measure and require further research (Bailey et al., 2008).

Canadian K-12 PHE curricula have been scrutinized for significant inconsistencies in delivery and alignment. With educational jurisdiction remaining at the provincial level, instructional time for PHE across the country ranges from 60-150 per week and is criticized for lacking alignment to PHE competencies (Sulz et al., 2025). Furthermore, Hickson et al. (2012) cited that 60-150 minutes per week is what is prescribed by government mandates but not necessarily what is delivered. The lack of alignment between PHE competencies and actual delivery of PHE may be due, in part, to the limited allocation of time and an absence of training in pre-service teacher programs (Sulz et al., 2025).

Researchers and stakeholders have criticized the assessment of PE. Teachers in Indonesia viewed PE assessment as an administrative burden and struggled to meaningfully assess intangibles like attitudes, knowledge, effort, and skill (Irmansyah et al., 2025). Many schools have increased their emphasis on the assessment of learning outcomes without providing training or understanding of subject-specific assessment practices; this has left some PHE teachers feeling unsupported by their administrations (Ni Chroinin et al., 2019). Researchers have also observed confusion surrounding the assessment of physical literacy, particularly lacking trustworthiness and accuracy to Whitehead's definition and intention (Robinson & Randall, 2017). Additionally, Liu and Chen (2021) found persistent challenges among educators in feasibly assessing physical literacy across cognitive, affective, and physical domains. Overall, researchers and educators call for improved methods of measurement and assessment in PHE to reflect its perceived value.

2.4 Models-Based Practice

Several researchers discuss the value of models-based practice in PE programs. With a global increase in the focus on emotional and mental health, models have emerged that go beyond physical fitness in PE (Luke et al., 2019). Kirk (2013) argues that the traditional, one-size-fits-all approach in PE lacks the ability to meet diverse educational goals; rather, the use of

models-based practice, such as Sport Education or Physical Literacy models, aligns learning outcomes and delivery and is praised for its ability to promote lifelong movement (Kirk, 2013). Models like these can assist teachers in implementing holistic learning across social, psychomotor, and affective domains (Ni Chroinin et al., 2019). However, models-based practice does not guarantee the seamless execution of holistic learning. For example, Irmansyah et al. (2025) found that teachers reported using the Cooperative Learning model in PE but, in practice, struggled to implement teaching and learning in domains outside physical fitness. In Baker's (2016) review of Canadian PE practices, an over-reliance and over-simplification of the Teaching Games for Understanding model was found, with little evidence for the use of other models like Cooperative Learning, Sport Education, or Teaching Personal and Social Responsibility. Again, the literature demonstrates the need for improved pre-service teacher training to ensure that professionals have the knowledge and confidence to deliver effective PHE programs (Fletcher et al., 2018).

2.5 Student Engagement

Student engagement in PE is a critical component of continued program success and developing healthy students. In a meta-analysis, Vasconcellos et al. (2020) confirmed a positive relationship between autonomy, motivation, and student engagement in PE. Similarly, Ennis (2017) and Standage et al. (2003) used the lens of Self-Determination Theory to describe the framework of autonomy, competence, and relatedness that is central to student motivation. Domville et al. (2019) found that children tend to have a more positive outlook towards PE when they are given autonomy and a voice in choosing activities.

Fun and enjoyment are frequent characteristics of PE when described by students. Primary influences on PE enjoyment include individual preferences, peer behaviour, and teacher behaviour (Domville et al., 2019). Alternatively, enjoyment in PE is limited by boredom, controlling language, low effort, and a repetitive curriculum (Domville et al., 2019). Findings show that female students report more negative PE attitudes (33.5%) than male students (19.8%) (Zalech, 2021), with girls describing disengagement in PE due to activity design, logistics, and boredom (Martins et al., 2018).

While a child's concept of fun evolves from hedonic play to skill mastery as they age (Dismore & Bailey, 2010), teachers have a direct influence on student enjoyment in PE (Zalech, 2021; Vasconcellos et al., 2020). Characteristics of PE teachers, including perceived competence in sport skills and course content, communication skills, cooperation, and openness, all contribute to student engagement, motivation, and behaviour (Zalech, 2021; Domville et al., 2019). Additionally, Faulkner and Reeves (2000) found that self-perceived sport and skill competence impacts attitudes toward teaching PE. Although Ennis (2017) argues that effective teaching is essential, instilling lifelong physical activity in students requires integrating mindfulness and personal meaning in PE to shift learners from extrinsic to intrinsic motivation.

2.6 Systemic Marginalization

Academic mandates in areas like numeracy and literacy have marginalized other subjects, including PE, time and time again. Public trends towards prioritizing academic rigor quickly introduce more time allocation for core subjects at the expense of PE (Luke et al., 2019; Centeio & Brusseau, 2024). Ennis (2006) describes PE as a “high need, low demand” subject, reflecting its marginalization. PE has always struggled to claim its educational value in school settings and the public (Green, 2019; Barney & Erhlich, 2010). When the current landscape becomes academically intense or economically fragile, PE is one of the first subjects to experience restrictions and is often unable to compete for resources (Ennis, 2006).

France et al. (2011) describe several failures contributing to the marginalization of PE, including: “failure of the profession to articulate program goals, failure of state and local districts to hold programs and teachers accountable... and failure of teacher education programs to prepare teachers for the real world and support them in schools” (p. 48). Fan and McMullen (2025) add that there are minimal associations between PE policies and their actual implementation, creating a key barrier to high-quality programs. In the U.S., Walton-Fisette and Sutherland (2020) observe that although SHAPE America standards have been adopted as recognized policies intended to guide curriculum design, they lack accountability and enforcement. Similarly, in Canada, professional organizations such as Physical and Health Education Canada and Sport for Life Canada serve teachers and coaches across the country as information and resource hubs (Fletcher

et al., 2018). While these organizations intend to drive policy and curriculum design, this notion falls apart in practice.

Johns and Dimmock (1999) argue that PE marginalization is not only caused by issues at the school or policy levels, but also by broader cultural beliefs about the value of school subjects. These authors use the concept of the normative domain to explain how societal views influence curriculum design and internal decisions on time and resources for subjects (Johns & Dimmock, 1999). In Hong Kong, academic subjects are given higher status for being examinable and their perceived connection to professional success (Johns & Dimmock, 1999). Fan and McMullen (2025) support this claim, stating that parents recognize the value of PE but still view it as less integral to academics than other subjects. Similarly, Barney and Ehrlich (2010) and Kirk (2013) discuss the hierarchy of PE in education as it is seen as a less academic subject by parents and other stakeholders. Together, the literature here provides explanations for the gaps between policy and practice as schools must answer to curricular expectations and societal norms that privilege high-status subjects (Johns & Dimmock, 1999; Ennis, 2006).

2.7 Barriers

Structural barriers present challenges for many schools and educators worldwide. While almost half of Canadian schools fail to meet provincial time allocations for PHE, rural schools in particular face many more barriers, including long bus commutes, multi-grade instruction, lack of personnel and equipment, outdated facilities, and limited resources for extracurricular sports and physical activities (Hickson et al., 2012). Additionally, diverse demographics sometimes present language and cultural barriers for immigrant students (Hickson et al., 2012).

Walton-Fisette and Sutherland (2020) criticize SHAPE America standards for a lack of policies that address issues in social justice, such as diversity, equity, and inclusion in PE. Lastly, modern PE faces additional challenges in navigating online classes, large class sizes, and inadequate equipment (Centeio & Brusseau, 2024). Ni Chroinin et al. (2019) calls for urgent attention from principals and administrators to mitigate challenges related to insufficient time and resources.

2.8 Pathways Forward

Many authors present suggestions for moving PE forward as a marginalized school subject. Increasing community health and the perceived value of PHE on a broader scale are at the heart of these recommendations. Several researchers suggest expanding PE beyond classroom walls by implementing community-based programs that link the curriculum to real-world challenges, use outdoor spaces, and involve opportunities for families to experience PE together (France et al., 2011; Ennis, 2006). Centeio and Brusseau (2024) suggest Comprehensive School Physical Activity Programs that integrate physical activity throughout the school day (including recess, classroom activities, and before/after school programs). Hickson et al. (2012) recommend Healthy School models that integrate curricula with community-based supports.

Combatting structural barriers also requires assistance from multiple levels of stakeholders. Sulz et al. (2025) suggest mandatory PE across all K-12 grade levels and increased instructional time to support student well-being in the current landscape of health issues. Enhanced pre-service teacher training is needed, along with increased professional development in specific areas of the PHE curriculum and reliable follow-through on the initiation and preservation of policies and standards (France et al., 2011; Geisler, 2017). Finally, physical educators must proactively advocate for their programs to overcome structural barriers and systemic marginalization (Barney & Ehrlich, 2010).

2.9 Chapter Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to review the relevant literature in physical and health education as it pertains to the context of the study. Topics in this review included the value of PHE, stakeholder perspectives, model-based practices, student engagement, barriers, and pathways forward. The next chapter describes the methodology and methods used in this study.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The purpose of this chapter is to outline the methodology and tools used to explore the perspectives of teachers, students, and administrators of physical education in schools. This chapter will discuss the research approach, paradigm, and design in which this research is situated. The chapter will present the participant selection methods, participant groups, context of the school, and how data was collected and analyzed. Finally, this chapter will discuss the positionality of the researcher, the ethical considerations, and limitations associated with this study.

3.1 Research Aims

The methodology and methods presented in this chapter were used to reach the aim of exploring attitudes and perspectives of PHE from various groups in a school setting. The guiding research questions were: 1) What are the perspectives of students, teachers, and administrators on physical and health education? 2) What is the perceived value of PHE in schools?

The aim of the research and investigation of the research questions were directed by the following objectives:

1. To examine personal experiences of students, teachers, and administrators in PHE
2. To identify the perceived role and value of PHE in the curriculum
3. To investigate the challenges presented in the school setting for executing a meaningful PHE program

3.2 Research Philosophy and Approach

The nature of the research aims call for a qualitative approach as it looks to gain in-depth meaning from personal perspectives. Qualitative research is used when exploring issues requires a complex understanding of people's lived experiences and cannot be easily measured by other metrics (Creswell, 2013). For this study, quantitative and mixed method approaches were rejected as the aim purely strives to understand and interpret meaning from personal beliefs,

stories, and emotions in a natural setting, rather than gathering numerical data. Furthermore, qualitative researchers are part of the meaning-making process and understand that reality is socially constructed and varied (Isik, 2025; Creswell & Poth, 2018). With an aim to interpret rather than measure data, qualitative inquiry like this study focuses on the process of finding meaning and investigates how people make sense of their world in a specific context (Hastie & Hay, 2012; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Philosophical assumptions, such as ontology and epistemology, are the guiding beliefs behind qualitative research and include the researcher's views on the nature of reality and knowledge (Creswell, 2013). Research paradigms are used to combine philosophical assumptions into distinct worldviews (Isik, 2025). Creswell (2013) and Mertens (2010) state that the interpretivist and constructivist paradigms are often used interchangeably, with both ideologies believing that reality and knowledge are socially constructed, context-dependent, and developed through researcher-participant engagement. Conversely, Isik (2025) argues that interpretivism and constructivism are closely related yet distinct paradigms. He agrees with ideas from Lincoln and Guba (1985) stating that "constructivism builds on interpretivism, placing strong emphasis on the co-construction of knowledge. Meaning is created through dialogue between researcher and participant rather than existing independently" (Isik, 2025, p. 23). Furthermore, Creswell (2013) builds on the constructivist paradigm by describing *social constructivism* as not only co-creating meaning about one's own perspectives but also understanding meaning through an individual's experiences with others in a shared context. Thus, the methodology of this study is rooted in the interpretivist paradigm with a social constructivist lens.

The constructivist paradigm is grounded in the idea that all meaning is fundamentally interpretive and reality is socially constructed (Mertens, 2010). From an epistemological viewpoint, this means that knowledge is created from the lived experiences of those involved in the research process (Mertens, 2010). "When researchers conduct qualitative research, they are embracing the idea of multiple realities" (Creswell, 2013, pg. 20). In the constructivist view, multiple realities support the merit behind seeking multiple perceptions from various people or groups and the researcher should provide the background and context for participants and the research setting (Mertens, 2010). In social constructivism, the researcher seeks understanding of the world in which they live and work by interpreting meaning from multiple viewpoints

(Creswell, 2013). This means the research relies heavily on participant views and personal experiences where meaning is formed through social interaction and the societal norms that operate in the setting of the study (Creswell, 2013; Byrne, 2021). Knowledge is known through the subjective experiences of people and the more immersed the researcher is, the more they “know what they know.” (Creswell, 2013, pg. 21) Therefore, conducting research in the field where people live and work is imperative to understanding individual perspectives (Davidson, 2001).

In qualitative research, a case study offers an in-depth examination within the real-world context of an individual, group, event, or organization (Isik, 2025; Yin, 2018). The research approach of this study could be described as an instrumental case study, meaning it focuses on an issue experienced by broader populations and uses a specific case to gain insight into the issue in question (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Isik, 2025). Case studies are inherently interpretivist and align well with social constructivism (Isik, 2025). According to Creswell and Poth (2018), characteristics of instrumental case studies relevant to this research include exploring a single system or organization and studying multiple individuals, all bound by place and time. In this investigation, the study is confined to a single school with specific individuals undergoing a unique experience. Instrumental case studies can illuminate new ideas and perspectives applicable to the general population within a topic area. The current study can benefit physical educators across all educational sectors. By learning about real people in authentic situations, readers can gain a deeper understanding of the presented ideas through the exploration of lived experiences in a real-life context (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018).

3.3 Sampling Methods and Participants

The research was conducted at an independent K-12 school in Burnaby, BC, with participants drawn from the student and staff populations of the institution. At the time of the study, the school was attended by 299 students and employed 45 staff members. Across 13 grade levels, the school is divided into three divisions: primary, intermediate, and high school. Purposive sampling was used to select participants that would provide high-quality insight across diverse demographics and roles. The selection criteria included age (students), grade division (students and teachers), and administrative roles (principal and vice principals). Additional factors

influencing the sampling process were authorized consent, availability, and the aim to gather perspectives from participants of various ethnicities and genders. Figure 1 illustrates the school divisions and interview participation from each category.

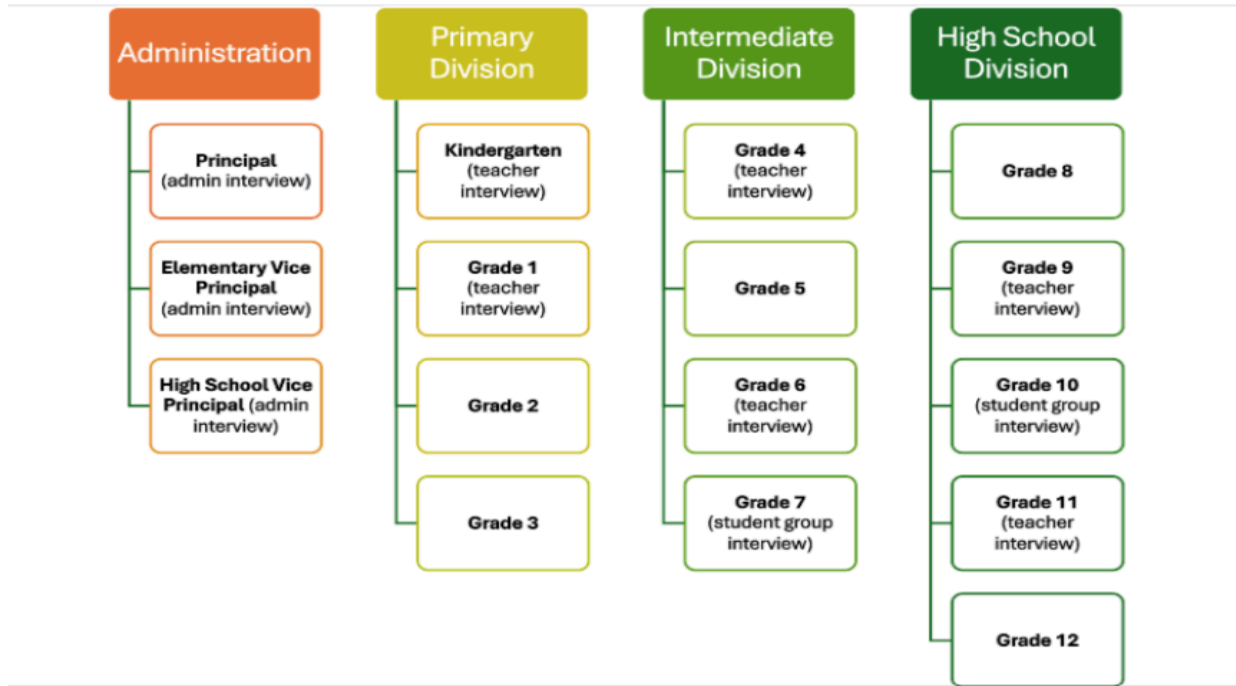


Figure 1 Representation of School Grade Divisions and Interview Participants

Seventeen participants were interviewed, comprising three administrators, six teachers, and eight students. All adult participants consented to the study after being informed of its purpose and signing consent forms (Appendix A) for data collection through interviews. Ten selected students were briefed on the study's purpose and given parental consent forms (Appendix B) to be returned with guardian signatures. However, one female student from the grade 7 group and another from the grade 10 group did not receive signed consent and were not replaced by other participants. The administrator sample involved one male principal and two female vice principals. The teacher sample included three female and three male classroom teachers. Student groups from grades 7 (ages 12 and 13) and 10 (ages 15 and 16) consisted of three girls and five boys. Using descriptive coding was determined as the best way to maintain anonymity while distinguishing participant roles. Participants were assigned identifying labels based on their subset: Student 1-8, Teacher 1-6, and Admin 1-3.

3.4 Interviews and Data Collection

Semi-structured group interviews were used to explore participant perspectives and ideas. Semi-structured interviews are the most common type used in interpretivist and constructivist research because they are guided, flexible, and allow for meaningful conversations and storytelling (Isik, 2025). As the primary data source, questions were thoughtfully crafted to allow for understanding and encourage participants to think reflectively (Ennis & Chen, 2012). Three teacher interviews, two student interviews, and one administrator interview occurred in the data collection process. Initially, the intention was to conduct individual interviews with each adult participant and use focus groups for students. Time constraints and scheduling conflicts of the school day ultimately required the decision to implement paired interviews for teachers and one interview for three administrators. Additionally, it was decided to use group interviews of four students, rather than larger focus groups, for clarity and ease of use in the recording and transcribing process. This format allowed for a supportive, intimate setting where participants could have an open conversation, add to other's ideas, disagree, and comment on shared experiences, under the guidance of semi-structured interview questions. Lastly, interviewing children can present challenges in different ways. Ennis and Chen (2012) point out that young children may not understand the research topic, may not have interest in answering questions, and may have trouble holding attention through the interview process. Therefore, interviews were conducted with older children and adults only.

Data collection through group interviews occurred in 2025 in the months of January, February, and March. All six interviews were conducted by the researcher, who has a PHE teacher and coach role in the school. Interviews took place in classrooms of the school with round table seating and lasted 30-80 minutes. Two devices were used for audio recording in each session to ensure each voice was heard clearly and to provide a back-up if necessary. Student and teacher interviews were shorter as they were constrained to the schedule and duties of the school day. Alternatively, the administrator interview was the longest and had the least time constraints. Semi-structured interview questions were prepared in advance with different questions aimed at students versus adults. Questions were structured to cover the following topics:

- Past or present experiences and feelings towards PHE

- Learning and content in PHE
- PHE scheduling and time allotment
- PHE versus core subjects
- PE versus sport versus recess
- PHE specialists versus generalist teachers
- Grading and assessment in PHE

Student interview questions focused more on their current enjoyment of PE, what they're learning, time allotment, and how they like to be assessed. Teacher and administrator interviews looked more closely at the role of PHE in the curriculum, characteristics of PHE teachers, core subjects, and benefits of physical activity to learning. All interviews gave space to discuss personal experiences with PE and how it has shaped their worldview of health and physical literacy.

3.5 Data Analysis

Data analysis for this qualitative research involved transcribing audio-recorded files from interviews and coding the data to generate themes and organize findings, known as thematic analysis. The audio recordings were listened to several times, both shortly after the live interviews and throughout the transcribing and reflection process. Audio-to-text applications provided an initial rough draft of the transcriptions, which were then meticulously reviewed and compared to audio files to distinguish voices, correct errors, and draw insights from the data. Staying close to the data by carefully transcribing and rereading transcripts helps ensure that the voices of the participants are heard over the voice of the researcher (Domville et al., 2019; Braun & Clarke, 2021).

Using the transcribed interviews, thematic analysis began by assigning codes to the data. Constructivist epistemology has specific implications for thematic analysis, particularly in that the significance of information to the researcher plays a crucial role in shaping and interpreting codes and themes (Byrne, 2022). In recent years, Braun and Clarke (2019) reframed this as *reflexive thematic analysis* to reflect the nature of the researcher's role in the creation of knowledge. The codes were first derived from the research objectives, themes in the existing

literature, and recurring ideas that arose in the interviews. Passages with assigned codes were categorized to start generating themes. To find themes, researchers look at prevalence or patterns across the dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Braun and Clarke (2006) and Byrne (2022) note that the quantity of keywords is not the only way to determine themes, but also to consider ideas that are relevant and important to the research question, regardless of the frequency with which they appear in the dataset. While many topics were discussed in the interviews, creating a wide array of codes and categories, the data was analyzed and refined several times to determine the themes and subthemes that are presented in the findings and discussion chapters.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Before the research was conducted, a research proposal and supporting documents were submitted and granted ethical approval by the University of Wales Trinity Saint David. Approval was also obtained from the school where the study took place. Ethical awareness is critical to the data collection process, and researchers must obtain informed consent and respect confidentiality (Isik, 2025). Although this study did not present a risk of physical or psychological harm, the primary ethical considerations were informed consent, confidentiality, and anonymity. The methods used to perform ethical research included consent forms with adult and student versions outlining the study's purpose and participants' right to withdraw. Other methods included the use of descriptive coding to protect identities, data storage on secured devices, and personal reflection to consider how the roles of researcher, teacher, and coworker might influence the research.

Obtaining guardian or parental consent is an essential preliminary step in conducting research involving minors. In this study, two students who were denied parental consent were immediately removed from the process. The power dynamic between teacher and student was also considered. Although all participants were assured of adherence to ethical standards, it was explicitly communicated to the students that their participation was entirely voluntary and that their contributions or decision to withdraw would not result in any penalties. Reflexive researchers understand that they are not outside observers, but that their identities and assumptions influence every stage of the process (Tracy, 2020; Isik, 2025). Positionality is especially relevant in qualitative research as the researcher is the instrument of data collection

(Bourke, 2014). In this case, the researcher is also a teacher and colleague of those who participated in interviews. Reflexivity was maintained throughout the research by acknowledging positionality and reflecting on how biases, beliefs, emotions, reactions, and pre-existing relationships influenced participant responses and the interpretation of data.

3.7 Chapter Summary

This chapter discussed the methodology that framed the study, including qualitative research and a social constructivist, interpretivist paradigm. Rationale for the use of an instrumental case study was provided with relevance to the context of the study. The primary research method of this study was group interviews, conducted in a K-12 school setting across students, teachers, and administrators from all grade divisions. Methods in qualitative data collection and analysis were discussed, using Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis. Finally, ethical considerations of the study were acknowledged, including informed consent, participant confidentiality, researcher positionality, and reflexivity. The next chapter presents the findings of the research, represented by themes and participant quotes.

Chapter 4: Findings

This chapter presents the themes that were identified through thematic analysis. The themes are supported by evidence from participant narratives and provide insights to broader experiences surrounding physical education. In a single school setting, students, teachers, and administrators were asked about their personal experiences in PE, how it should be scheduled, structured, and assessed, how it impacts learning, and why PHE is important. Exploring student, teacher, and administrator perspectives on PHE resulted in the following themes and subthemes:

1. Perceived Purpose and Value of Physical and Health Education
 - a. Holistic Development and Well-being
 - b. Lifelong Health
2. Pedagogical Approaches and Student Experience in PHE
 - a. Program Design
 - b. Student Engagement and Barriers to Participation
3. Systemic and Structural Factors Influencing PHE
 - a. Assessment
 - b. Curricular Status and Logistical Constraints

As mentioned in the introduction chapter, PHE and PE are often used interchangeably. When participants say ‘PE’, they are referring to the subject of physical and health education (PHE), as is the official designation in the B.C. school curriculum. While many think of PE classes in the context of sport and physical activity, the findings presented here refer to PHE as a subject area in the context of the school where the study took place. More insight was provided on the physical education side of PHE but both the physical and health aspects of physical and health education are discussed in this chapter. This may be due to the recent integration of physical education and health education in B.C. in the last decade and the use of PE as the most common, shorthand name for the school subject.

4.1 Theme 1: Perceived Purpose and Value of Physical and Health Education

This theme was prominent across all subsets of participant interviews and supports answers to the research question: What is the perceived value of PHE in school? Participants across all

groups emphasized the holistic importance of PHE in developing physical, mental, social, and emotional well-being. It is seen as essential for building skills and habits for lifelong health, counteracting sedentary lifestyles, and fostering self-awareness, confidence, and regulation skills. PHE provides an opportunity to participate in a variety of physical activities and is especially important for students that may not otherwise have access to sport, physical activity, or team play.

4.1.a Holistic Development and Well-being

Education should address all domains of student development, including physical, mental, social, and spiritual health, and PHE is an important contributing factor to this holistic approach. Participants across all groups recognize the value of PHE in holistic development, particularly in improving learning focus, supporting emotional regulation, learning teamwork and sportsmanship skills, and fostering both collaboration and intrinsic motivation.

Participants in every subset commented on PHE as a vessel that goes beyond physical skills and its ability to contribute to academic development and beyond. Teachers challenged the narrow priorities that academics often have in overemphasizing core subjects like numeracy and literacy and appreciate how PHE contributes to balanced development in the school curriculum.

Participants in the administrator interview discussed the educational value of PHE when asked why they think PHE is in the curriculum. Administrator 3 provided the following quote:

I think also that education is holistic, and that it's not just about training the muscles of the mind, it is the entire person. And we know the research shows and everything else that, you know, the healthier you are, um, physically as well, that there's a connection with our mental health as well. And so um, it's not just about book learning and everything else, it's, you know, the muscle learning and because we want someone to be healthy for life as well. So that holistic approach to education I think is valuable and has been right from the very beginning when they set up the different school systems...I think that a large push on that was that, you know, to have a fully educated person includes that holistic approach, right?

A few participants extended this holistic perspective by emphasizing the interconnectedness of the domains of well-being. Students in the grade 7 interview recognized the connection between physical activity and learning communication and leadership. Teachers across all grade levels discussed the integration of health domains in different subjects and in PHE. Teacher 1 said that “...they need all the pieces; they need the physical safety and mental health and all those other parts of the health curriculum.” Administrator 2 added:

We talk about it all the time; all the faculties are connected. So mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical. And if one part is out of sync, then the rest are affected. So physical literacy, and not just physical literacy, but I love that our curriculum includes the social community aspect and the mental well-being. I love the health portion especially, um, because I don't think we did it when we were growing up as much. It has really come up a lot, and it's so important, like if you don't have that part, like how are you going to regulate yourself, how are you going to advocate for yourself?

Beyond the idea that PHE supports holistic health conceptually, Teacher 5 and 6 viewed the subject as a vehicle for experiential opportunities for personal development. In other words, PHE is the context for teaching collaboration, communication, critical thinking, and social awareness. Teacher 6 provided the following quote on this idea:

So through this game...you talk to your team - there's your social awareness and collaboration. Your critical thinking - this is a new sport, this is the goal, how do I achieve it? Like, I think I do actually see it that way, I think it goes deeper, the physical part is actually just the medium to deliver it.

Although some students recognized the multifaceted scope of PHE, others saw it as an activity-centered subject, mainly focusing on the sports and games played in PE classes. Alternatively, all teachers and administrators recognized the holistic, developmental approach to the subject as a whole. Adult participants commented on the opportunities PE provides to build social skills and demonstrate strengths that may be less visible in other subjects. Teacher 3 shared:

I think that PE gives kids the opportunities to interact in a way that they don't interact in the classroom. It teaches valuable social skills. Again, a lot of these kids are not getting after-school activities like they would have at some point. You know, in terms of holistic learning, we have to stop thinking that the only thing that's important is our math and language arts. Some of our kids are never going to be awesome in math and language arts. So, let's start developing the skills where they have gifts.

The findings in this subtheme paint an important picture of the goal of education to nurture and develop the whole child, including academic, physical, mental, and emotional growth. PHE plays a large role in holistic development and uses movement as the vehicle for teaching mental and social skills. Furthermore, PHE provides balance in traditional curricula that emphasize literacy and numeracy and can offer a space for students with kinesthetic intelligence to thrive.

4.1.b Lifelong Health Habits

Across the data, participants described the value in PHE for teaching physical literacy and building lifelong active living habits. Participation in physical activity in school, especially through PE, is seen as beneficial for shaping health habits in an era of increasing sedentary lifestyles. Furthermore, some students only have opportunities to be active at school and experience very little physical activity otherwise. An emphasis on the importance of PE providing the time and space for students to experience a variety of activities as their main source of exercise was an overarching theme from educators.

Counteracting sedentary lifestyles by learning physical activity habits in PE emerged as an important topic in different subgroups. Student 6 commented on the ability of sports and physical activity to counteract sedentary behaviours like scrolling on a screen for hours at home. Similarly, Teacher 3 emphasized that movement habits are an important alternative to passive technology habits.

Teacher 1 and 2 discussed how many of the young students come to school with very little experience doing physical activity, going outside, or playing with others. Many students come to school each day from an apartment building, to the car, to the school, without going outside or having any form of physical activity during their time outside of school hours. Teacher 1

described how school and PE are the only opportunities for some children to get regular physical activity and, while movement at recess is optional, PE provides a place in the school day where everyone is moving their bodies and learning physical literacy. Teacher 2 summed up this idea:

Oh, the kids need it so much. Yeah. Um, for some of them, I think it's the only physical activity they get and I wish [PE] was five days a week because, especially some groups of kids this year, they need that physical activity and they come back [from the gym], they're sweating, they've, you know, really exerted themselves and it helps them to be able to regulate and get emotions out. And I think especially in this age of technology, they sit in front of a TV, they don't go outside, they don't breathe fresh air, they don't exert themselves.

Extending these concerns beyond individual student experiences, PHE was situated in the broader scope of cultural shifts in health and technology. Teacher 3 emphatically shared that:

I guess if I had a final thought, it would be recognizing that we are in a city with a diverse population where not everybody puts an emphasis on health, especially with the media, social media, and technology that's happening in the world. A physical education program is more important than ever – *than ever* before in our entire educational history.

Healthy habit formation was described as a process through continued practice and participation to build confidence. Student 1 and 2 concurred that starting new sports or activities are beneficial to lifelong health in that, regardless of skill level, learning something new, continuing to practice, and improving over time can help build enjoyment and encourage continued participation.

Teacher 5 commented on the bravery to try new things, goal setting, self-efficacy, and how this leads to success: “But really it’s like confidence and trying something and having the bravery to take on a goal and then when we can build that in the classroom you see kids actually do very well.” These discussions suggest an underlying perspective of PE as a contributor in the formation of lifelong identities as capable, active people.

Fostering active identities, supporting skill transfer beyond school and sport, and developing movement competence are ways in which PHE is seen as a foundational guide to lifelong physical literacy. Teachers of younger students emphasized the need for early movement

experiences in school as a critical piece in child development. The hope is that these foundations are carried into adulthood. Teacher 1 explains:

You're setting up lifelong physical literacy, right? So if you don't have those experiences in your elementary school... if it's not treated as 'this is your physical health for your future', you know... and a lot of these things are set when you're a child, like your habits and even just your physical self. If you're obese as a child, it sets you up to struggle with that your whole life, right? So, um, learning these things I think everything is much more effective when we teach it to children when they're young. Instead of trying to remediate after the fact that, well, we have all these chronic health issues, now we're trying to teach an adult how to be physically literate. It's much harder.

Administrators discussed the purpose of the PHE program across K-12, centering their ideas around lifelong health and active living. Administrator 1 concluded:

I think when I see PE it's about getting the kids moving, like that's a big one, just getting the kids to have that daily physical activity, being physically, you know, working on strength and conditioning and coordination, and um, just general health. And hopefully in that process kids connect with those kinds of activities in order for that to become like a lifelong kind of pattern in their life... I think just that lifelong active person. That's what I think probably is the biggest objective in my mind for the PE program.

Students recognized the value of PHE in fostering lifelong habits and transferable skills. This frames PE as relevant beyond traditional sports contexts for students. Movement skills were discussed as being transferable to multiple sports, exercises, and daily tasks. Furthermore, in the social domain, skills such as leadership and teamwork developed through PE were seen as important competencies for life. Student 3 shared that, "We learn to have skills that you'll need for the rest of your life. Like physical skills and mental skills, like you learn how to be a kind person, get along with your team. And you learn to be a leader and be encouraging and stuff." Student 4 agreed, stating, "...it's like we use PE everywhere. Like we use PE for the tournament. We use PE to carry groceries. Like we need this for life." Through these discussions, participants

framed PHE not only as a platform to teach physical literacy but also to develop social and mental skills that extend into life.

4.2 Theme 2: Pedagogy and Student Experience in PHE

This theme gives insight to perspectives on how PHE is taught, structured, and experienced, including factors that influence program design and student engagement. Focusing on the research question: What are the perspectives students, teachers, and administrators on PHE?, topics in this section provide foundational findings to the inner workings and experiences of PHE in the school. This theme discusses the integration of health education and physical education, sport-centric versus inclusion models, skill development, barriers to participation, and the social experience of PE.

4.2.a Program Design

Program design and pedagogical approaches are directly linked to student engagement and participation. PHE as two subjects integrated into one has presented mixed views in the data. Additionally, many PE programs focus heavily on traditional team sports, which can disadvantage some students. Including diverse activities and emphasizing skill development can improve engagement and inclusivity.

While some participants argue for and some against the integration of health education and physical education, many participants recognized the natural fit that health topics have in the physical education space. For example, Student 5 and 8 described health and PE as competing experiences: “I think if we want to learn about health, like for real, then it should be another class” (Student 8) and “...if I’m going to a PE class...even if [the teacher] sits us down, like let’s write stuff down, my focus is going to be like, ‘when are we going to do PE?’” (Student 5). Alternatively, Student 3 shared: “I like PHE. I feel like we get to learn and understand more about how other people and yourself work, you know? Like *why* we’re exercising our bodies.”

Administrators and teachers framed the integration of PHE as an alignment with holistic learning. Teachers appreciate the integration of PHE as health education was a standalone course under classroom teacher responsibility up until recently. Administrator 2 and 3 like the content as

one subject while Administrator 1 advocated for standalone, integrated, and cross-curricular structures. Administrator 3 said:

If we teach them with two different teachers and two different courses, there's that sense that somehow these are separate, but there's an integration in our body and that holistic approach to education, um, that things will come up within that PE class that naturally lend themselves to a teachable moment for things that are mental health issues or things that are dietary issues or things that...we should avoid, vaping, right? ...So, I think it's a good marriage to have the two of them together, um, and have a teacher that kind of integrates that.

Administrator 2 also advocated for the integration of PHE with the connection of physical and mental well-being:

I think it's so closely related. And I think that having a curriculum that does recognize that those are relevant is super important, because that's philosophically how we should think, and then you can make a bigger impact because I think there's a lot of connection there. ...So, when you make that connection between your mental health and your physical health, we can kind of tackle it from both sides, right? So, we can serve them on the mental well-being and the physical well-being. And hopefully we have a healthier population overall.

Administrator 1 gave the perspective of cross-curricular learning as health content not only fits into PE but also into the science curriculum, religious studies, and outdoor education. It was argued that the health curriculum should not solely be delegated to PHE but that there are many important opportunities where health content should be addressed. For example, "... there's a lot of health questions that we went over in grade 12 in bio class" (Administrator 1). Different areas of the science curriculum go deeper into important health concepts that are beyond the scope of PHE. Administrator 1 concluded that, "...we're still intentionally addressing health in all of the other areas of the curriculum."

Overall, the findings show tension between the separation and integration of PHE but there is more support from teachers and administrators in its integration. However, the students bring

forward important points about the delivery of PHE and the need to be more intentional in how health content is taught.

Further topics in program design and pedagogy that arose from the data were sport-centric PE models and emphasis on physical literacy over sport performance. Traditional team sports are a popular method in upper elementary, middle, and high school PE programs; however, this approach caters to a select group of learners and may exclude others. Participants in all groups, whether they like sport-centric models or not, agreed that effective PHE programming includes a variety of activities that focus on skill building, conditioning, confidence, and inclusion.

Multiple participants distinguished PE from sports, particularly competitive school sports. Student 7 noted that high school PE is structured and scheduled in line with extra-curricular sport seasons and treated like additional practice time for athletes, which is undesirable for others. Student 7 shared that, "... so at the same time that we're doing PE, we're also training the athletes to play the sport that they're practicing, so it's not just doing volleyball because we gotta do volleyball, but also because the tournament is coming up." Sport training in PE can be frustrating for those that are not involved in school sports. Student 7 concluded that, "I would prefer PE to be like a conditioning class, rather than, like, playing sports." Teacher 4 gave a fair warning:

One thing that I think we need to be careful at this school is that we don't conflate PE and a sports program. And I feel like we have to be very, very careful about that because there's definitely a danger that we will overemphasize the sport program within school bounds...And I feel bad for the kids who would like to be active, but they don't care about a sport.

Traditional team sport models frequently privilege some students and alienate others. Student 5 recognized this, saying: "I feel like a lot of the major sports – they only appeal to a certain crowd. For example, like, me and [classmate], we like basketball...and are dominating the courts basically. And so, it might not be fun for other people." Student 6 added that it's important to recognize student interests outside of the typical team sports like volleyball, basketball, and football, to appeal to each person in at least one way.

Diverse programming was linked to an increase in inclusion and engagement. Participants across all groups said that PHE programming with a variety of activities is a better approach for meeting the needs, abilities, and interests of more students in a class. Educators in the study often framed this shift from sport-centered pedagogy as physical literacy. Teacher 2 made a firm distinction between coaching sport and teaching PE as, “You coach to win. You teach to develop physical literacy.” Emphasis was placed on well-rounded development over specific sport performance in PE. Teacher 1 and 2 discussed the idea that PE cannot only be sport focused and that students need exposure to all kinds of activities to develop confidence and competence in a range of skills. Most students agreed that sports should be part of PE but not the sole focus. Student 2 and 4 echoed that sports should be one of the main focuses of PE, “but definitely not the only focus” (Student 2). Overall, students agreed that a balance between traditional team sports, choice, and diverse movement experiences support accessibility and meaningful learning.

The data presented in this subtheme suggest that effective development of physical literacy requires intentional, skill-based instruction across a diverse range of foundational competencies, distinguishing PHE from competitive sports and unstructured play. Program design and pedagogical approaches in PHE should consider all learners and go beyond traditional sport models, centered around physical literacy, skill development, and student interests.

4.2.b Student Engagement and Barriers to Participation

Student participants associated engagement in PHE with enjoyment, social connection, intrinsic motivation, and personal growth. Student 4 noted that school provides many exciting opportunities that would not otherwise be available, such as participating in unique sports and games in PE classes. Others described the benefits of social interaction, including accomplishing goals with a team and working together to problem-solve. Additionally, Student 1 recalled trying a new sport when encouraged by others, which led to a new favourite activity.

Many students reported enjoying movement, games, and sports, with PE identified as a favourite class among many participants due to both the activities and social interactions it provides. Student 2 observed that, “...people open up a lot more when they play sports, especially people who don't talk a lot, or are shyer.” Student 8 praised PE as a welcomed “break” from rigorous

academics like pre-calculus because it is movement-centric and involves less cognitive work or is “light on the brain.”

Furthermore, several students described intrinsic motivations related to personal growth in skill development and physicality. Student 6 shared, “I want to get better...I still gotta, like, push and get out of my like comfort zone.” Student 4 shared a similar sentiment, stating:

The whole reason I started being an athlete – I joined gymnastics, I got faster, I joined volleyball, I joined football... is because of physical education. Because when I was younger, I wasn't that fast. I was one of the slowest in this class. And then I got up there because I'm trying to get better. [PE] helps me to try and get better all the time.

While participants often described PHE positively, barriers were identified that can limit student engagement and participation, such as embarrassment, body shaming, lack of fitness, disinterest, and exclusion. Participants noted that differences in skill levels and competitive environments can affect confidence, belonging, and self-perception, which can either support or limit meaningful participation.

Embarrassment and low perceived competence were described as barriers to participation. Student 8 said, “I think a reason some people don't like [PE] is...if they're not that good, then it's, like, kind of embarrassing for them to play.” Competitive environments may reinforce exclusion and participants noted that sport settings privilege the skilled athletes while discouraging others. Teacher 1 shared supporting evidence:

I always felt like it was competitive and I wasn't that athletic. I felt like that it was always a lot of, like, you know, there were the ‘star athletes’ and then everybody else was in their way rather than just, you know, being out, just enjoying a game of soccer or something like that.

Besides physical barriers, social and psychological barriers were mentioned, including peer comments and judgment leading to self-consciousness. Student 3 talked about the mental aspect around physical performance and peer judgement, saying that “...for people that don't like

PE...sometimes someone might say something to them, so then it just makes them not like it even more, and then they don't perform well, because they're already having trouble with it.”

Some participants described solutions to support barriers to meaningful participation. Students 3 and 4 emphasized the importance of encouraging classmates to help them feel included and capable, showing that supportive peer interactions can help reduce intimidation and foster confidence. Moreover, teachers emphasized the importance of inclusive environments in PHE, highlighting the value of variety and skill development over a narrow focus on sport performance. Across each subset, engagement and participation appeared to be linked not only to enjoyment, but also to competence and a supportive learning environment.

4.3 Theme 3: Systemic and Structural Factors Influencing PHE

The first two themes focused on the perceived value of PHE and how it is taught and experienced. This theme highlights the broader systemic and structural conditions that shape the implementation of PHE. In addition to pedagogy and student experience, the data showed that assessment practices and institutional constraints also have an impact on PE programs. The perspectives on assessment in PE were somewhat mixed. Lastly, competing academic priorities and scheduling were presented as constraints that influence PHE delivery. These factors showed how PHE is valued relative to other subjects and may result in a disconnect between the ideal vision of a PHE program and how it is enacted in schools.

4.3.a Assessment

Assessment in PHE was seen as a complex issue among participants, particularly regarding fairness and skill versus effort. In recent years, many schools in B.C., including the one in this study, have adopted a proficiency-based approach to grading and reporting. All K-7 courses use a scale that includes ‘emerging’, ‘developing’, ‘proficient’, and ‘extending.’ Some schools, including this one, use a mixed approach for grades 8 and 9 in terms 1-3 where the proficiency scale is used for non-core courses (such as PHE) and traditional letter and number grades for core courses (such as mathematics and language arts), then use traditional letter and number grades for all courses for the final grade entry in term 4. Grades 10-12 use traditional letter and number grades for all courses in all four terms. The shift to the proficiency scale and the

differences in grading practices among different grade divisions have caused confusion among parents, students, and teachers alike.

In discussing PHE assessment, most participants preferred the proficiency scale over traditional grading methods and placed emphasis on effort, engagement, personal growth, and sportsmanship as metrics of assessment over skill and athletic performance. Many participants demonstrated confusion over the complexities of assessing PHE. Student 8 said, “I feel like grading for PE is controversial. I don't know how you would grade that. I mean, people need to participate so I guess participation should be part of the grade. I don't know about skills.” Student 6 shared, “There’s been grading [in PE] that I really disagree with, but I don’t even know how to change it.”

All participants rejected the idea that assessment should be purely skill based and recognized that different abilities and backgrounds would make this approach unfair. Some students advocated for effort, participation and attitude to be the sole criteria for PHE assessment. Student 4 said, “I don't think it should be graded skill wise. I think it should be graded effort wise.” Student 1 agreed, saying, “I'm more about their effort, attitude, sportsmanship, um helpfulness, working with equipment, safety, that kind of thing, right?” Student 3 added, “...if you're not going to try, then why should you be getting a good grade compared to someone who's not as good at the sport but they're trying hard?”

Others advocated for a mixed approach where both skill and effort are considered in PHE assessment. Student 5 suggested that skill metrics be based on personal growth rather than comparing to others, saying, “But it's whether or not, like, by the end of the year have I grown in my athletic ability?” Teacher 4 also suggested including skill in assessment, proposing:

I thought that it should be three-pronged: improvement, effort, and also absolute skill. Because the kids are gonna know who's good and who's not. Why are we gonna pretend? "This kid tries hard, so therefore they're as good as the other one?" I've seen grades try to pretend that. It's clear to the kids. Just like they know that's not true in math, they know that's not true in PE. I'd also like to see a component of goal setting and reaching goals – that might be a good thing to add to it.

In the administrator interview, percentage and performance-based metrics in PHE were seen as unclear and possibly disconnected from learning goals. Administrators showed preference in the shift towards proficiency scales and learning objectives and framed assessment as individualized and focusing on progress over time. Administrator 2 said that self-improvement is a good metric that can be reflected in proficiency scales “because everyone starts at...a certain level, and they're all different. But what we do want to see is improvement.” Participants in this group also advocated for goal setting and self-assessment, highlighting the importance of building those skills.

All administrators in the study agreed that moving away from percentage-based grading in PHE was the logical choice. Administrator 3 questioned number grades saying, “An 82% in PE? What does that even mean?” Administrator 1 added:

I think especially as we move into this proficiency-based grading, I think it makes more sense. I think it's always been a little bit tenuous before that, like to give a kid an 85% in basketball...like a kid could be trying hard and working, you know, but not be able to hit a shot their whole life, right? Like, I think if you're doing percentages and tests and, like, your score on the beep test is going to affect your grade in PE, that's tough, right? I think that was the case before. I grew up like that.

Participants in the administrator group added some clarity to the different grading methods in different grade levels and courses. Administrator 1 clarified:

Principal: Well, I mean like what we're doing with the grade eights and nines...I think that actually has been helpful for those teachers and parents. In terms of, like, specific student engagement and feedback in a class, like when you're teaching PE... generally speaking, the nature of the curriculum has maybe an easier time engaging kids with working and playing and, you know, training, in a way that kind of percentage-based feedback is not as helpful. Whereas in a math class, having that percentage-based feedback to motivate and to inform in more precise ways fits better there. Different subjects, I think, lend themselves differently to different types of grading scales.

Overall, participants agreed there is a need for assessment in PHE. Student 6 commented that “it's important that we have a grade, though, so that everyone tries.” Furthermore, Teacher 5 discussed the need for a clear philosophy with intentional planning and instruction so that “students know what to expect and how to reach those standards because, if you don't have that, how can you grade that?” Lastly, administrators agreed that traditional grading in PE in the past was a poor fit but there are meaningful outcomes from using the proficiency scale that assesses self-improvement, effort, goal setting, and meeting learning objectives. When speaking on past assessment methods versus the current landscape of assessment in PHE, Administrator 1 concluded that, “I don't think that ever made sense, but I think where we are today, at least in BC, I feel like, yeah, this is absolutely something we can assess in a meaningful way and a helpful way.”

4.3.b Curricular Status and Constraints

Constraints in PHE such as scheduling, time allotment, limited resources, and conflicting academic priorities were all issues that arose in the data. These factors may signal an underpinning theme that PHE is deprioritized in the school curriculum. Participants noted the consequences of devaluing PHE, including impacts on student learning. Although all participants in the study value PHE, its implementation and success are shaped by the systemic and structural factors that influence program quality and how the subject is perceived within the school setting and broader society.

PHE is frequently positioned as less important than academic subjects like mathematics and language arts. Systemic and institutional decisions in overall program design signal a hierarchy in value. Teachers and administrators were asked about choices to remove students from PHE classes for reasons that include finishing a test, catching up on other work, or even disciplinary action. Although all participants in these subsets strongly disapproved of this practice, they provided feedback on why this might occur. Teacher 2 speculated that some might think “it's just PE.” However, Teacher 2 warned that the costs may outweigh the benefits when referring to the benefits of movement on student focus, saying, “...are you going to be farther behind because you didn't have PE class on Fridays because you got pulled for something? Maybe not, but were you able to learn as well that day? Probably not.”

Teacher 4 surmised that most elementary teachers would not take students out of PE unless “absolutely necessary” but thought that “in high school, it's more likely that [teachers] value their own subject area” over anything else. On the notion of removing students for discipline, Teacher 3 shared:

It's a terrible thing to do, to discipline a kid like that. That's teaching them that it's less important and less valuable than the... like, you're setting them up for a future where they look at that and they go, "Oh, so this is... this is a privilege," whereas math and this stuff is not. Which, I mean, I know that we're looking for currency when we discipline, but those kids more than anyone else need that outlet, the majority of the time.

Educators concluded that removing students from PHE classes is poor practice and can reinforce the perception that PHE is optional, “flex time”, and less essential than other subjects. Additionally, it was discussed that missing PE negatively affects focus, behaviour, and emotional regulation. Teachers 1 and 2 discussed the positive effects of PE on both young elementary and high school students. Teacher 2 highlighted that grade 11 students have expressed missing PE and have made efforts to include it in their grade 12 schedules. In regard to losing PE time or non-PE days, Teacher 1 added:

I don't think they factor in the value added. So, when you miss [PE], they can't sit, they can't focus, because their body hasn't had that chance to release its energy...I don't know about older kids but... I'm amazed at how much they sit. Because little kids, they cannot hide it, they are bouncing off the walls if they miss running around. Just the music days versus PE days – different kinds of days.

Through these discussions, the data showed that teachers view physical activity as essential for supporting readiness to learn and releasing energy. Additionally, educators view PHE as a valuable contributor to classroom functioning and overall student well-being. While most teachers in the study advocated for increased PHE time due to these benefits, they also acknowledged that time constraints and competing priorities limit the allocation of time to PHE.

Students also commented on scheduling and time allocation of PHE, with most participants wanting more or longer blocks. As a K-12 school with one gymnasium, 12 PHE classes share the

same space. PHE classes are three times per week with 35- or 40-minute blocks, with the exception of PHE 10 (80 minutes on alternating days) and Active Living 11/12 (50 minutes, four days per week). Students expressed the desire for more PE time for reasons including enjoyment, social connections, sport participation, competitive opportunities, and increased skill development. Students 1, 2, 4, and 8 agreed that “35 minutes is way too short” (Student 4) and “40 minutes goes fast” (Student 8). Student 5 suggested that PE “should happen every day” while student 2 requested that PE is “maybe not every day but for at least an hour.” While fun and enjoyment were primary motivators among students for more PE time, limited class time was seen as having a negative impact on continuity of skill development and competitive play.

In these conversations, it was recognized that time constraints and limited resources directly affect PHE scheduling. Government mandates on minutes-per-subject and graduation requirements also have a direct impact on how classes are scheduled. In B.C., PHE is required from kindergarten through grade 10, with a variety of PHE classes offered as electives in grades 11 and 12. Most participants agreed that PHE in K-10 is an adequate mandate. Two students advocated for PHE being required across K-12 and two students suggested separating the course into boys and girls PHE classes after grade 8. More data is needed in this topic area, however, mandated participation in specific grade levels may reflect broader societal values on PHE.

Lastly, in teacher and administrator interviews, participants were asked about the need for PHE teachers that are specially trained in physical and health education, or “specialists.” Mixed perspectives were presented in the data. About half of the participants in these groups were strong advocates for specialist teachers because of their ability to deliver more intentional and rigorous content and instruction. It was argued that generalist teachers may limit planning time and program quality. Teacher 2 described it as the following:

Oh, I think they're going to get a much better physical education from having a specialist because PE is not going to be my priority to plan for, which is probably why my elementary time growing up was playing just like tag games and relays, because who has time to plan when you're teaching everything else in the classroom? For PE, it's less of a priority planning wise.

Teacher 6 put higher responsibilities on specialists with the notion that a specialist teacher should elevate expectations and program design, saying, “I feel like that's what I would assume a specialist would do. Like, educating [other teachers] or develop a more intensive curriculum to make it a little bit more respectable to the level of other core classes.” Furthermore, Administrator 1 commented on the scaffolding that can occur year-to-year when a PHE specialist teaches across grade levels, noting that the expertise and connections “definitely makes a difference.”

Other teachers and administrators agreed that specialist PHE teachers are not always necessary and that passion and interest in a subject area are more important. Teachers 1 and 6 mentioned the benefit for students when a teacher is passionate in a subject area. Administrator 2 added, “We do want teachers in their area of giftedness, but also interest, and whenever you have somebody who is passionate about something, the learning will be better, the teaching will be better, the kids will really pick up on it.” In the interview with Teachers 5 and 6, this topic prompted a query about pre-service training and if or how much they were trained and prepared for teaching PHE. Teacher 5 and 6 both acknowledged completing only one course in physical education and did not recall topics in health education. This suggests that improvements in education degree programs are needed in teacher preparedness in PHE instruction.

While all participants voiced that PHE is valued, systemic factors like assessment, scheduling, academic priorities, and limited resources put constraints on how PHE is structured and perceived. These findings suggest that PHE is not only shaped by pedagogical approaches and student experiences but is directly influenced by institutional systems that either support or hinder its quality and potential.

4.4 Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the findings from the research. Thematic analysis uncovered three themes from the data: perceived purpose and value of PHE, pedagogy and student experience in PHE, and systemic and structural factors influencing PHE. Through student, teacher, and administrator perspectives, these themes described why PHE matters, how PHE is taught and experienced, and what systemic factors shape and constrain it. Overall, it was found that all participants highly

value PHE and advocate for its holistic benefits, however, tensions exist between the ideal vision of PHE programming and the realities of its practice. The next chapter will discuss and interpret the key findings in relation to the existing literature.

Chapter 5: Discussion

This qualitative study explored the attitudes and perspectives of students, teachers, and administrators towards physical and health education within the K-12 school curriculum. The study was guided by three objectives: to examine the personal experiences of students, teachers, and administrators in PHE; to identify the perceived role and value of PHE in the curriculum; and to investigate the challenges that affect the execution of a meaningful PHE program in the school setting. This chapter discusses the themes that emerged from the data and connects the findings to the literature. The themes included: 1) perceived purpose and value of PHE, 2) pedagogy and student experience in PHE, and 3) systemic and structural factors influencing PHE.

Within the interpretivist paradigm, the data from this qualitative research was interpreted through a social constructivist lens, meaning that knowledge was co-constructed through dialogue, shared context, and lived experiences (Guba, 1985; Isik, 2025; Creswell, 2013). Numerous and diverse perspectives were sought to develop rich data that support the interpretation and understanding of the multiple realities that exist in one school (Mertens, 2010; Creswell, 2013). While it is acknowledged that the role of the researcher is not independent of the data in its influence or analysis (Tracy, 2020; Isik, 2025), the following interpretations intend to provide insight into broader implications of issues in PHE.

6.1 Perceived Purpose and Value of Physical and Health Education

The data showed that all participant groups viewed PHE as essential for holistic development across the physical, mental, emotional, and social domains of health and well-being. Teachers and administrators emphasized that PHE uses movement as a vehicle to teach social awareness, collaboration, and critical thinking. Meanwhile, some students viewed PHE more narrowly as having an activity-centered purpose. This observation links to Fan and McMullen's (2025) notion that students focus on personal experience and social connection, while adults emphasize physical literacy and holistic development. This was evident throughout the data as a trend in student versus educator responses. Additionally, the perceived purpose of PHE in holistic development mirrored the consensus across many studies claiming that PE develops social,

emotional, and physical skills (Ni Chroinin et al., 2019). However, it is cautioned that social and cognitive benefits are not automatic outcomes of participation in PE but rely on intentional leadership and instruction (Bailey et al., 2008). This data shows that even in the same school, students and educators have different ideas on the purpose of PHE and may require deliberate communication to align goals.

Participants described PHE as a critical component in building physical literacy and lifelong health habits, especially in an era of increasing sedentary lifestyles. Teachers observed that many students only have access to physical activity through school and early movement experiences are foundational in cultivating active people for life. These lifestyle observations resonate with studies showing that few children and youth meet the recommendations for daily physical activity (Hickson et al., 2012; Centeio & Brusseau, 2024). An emphasis on early habit formation in school can be linked to Ennis (2017), who argues for teachers nurturing intrinsic motivation in students to guide lifelong activity. Kirk (2013) similarly frames physical literacy models in PE as existential to movement competence. Student interviews revealed an interest in transferable skills in PE to daily tasks, sports, teamwork, and confidence, which extends to Ennis' (2017) discussion of grounding PE in relatedness and personal meaning.

6.2 Pedagogy and Student Experience in PHE

The findings revealed a tension between separating and integrating health education and physical education and gaps between the intention of PHE and the delivery of curricular content. Teachers and administrators generally advocated for the integration of PHE, as it aligns with the holistic education framework. Students raised concerns about its integration, with some wanting designated and intentional health instruction rather than competing for activity time in PE. These lived experiences of student frustration are linked to policy-level structures that have been put in place. However, inconsistencies among provinces and territories create difficulties in streamlining suitable practices. Sulz et al. (2025) examine the autonomy afforded to regional policies in education across Canada, leading to diverse approaches and varied outcomes. While the province of B.C. has integrated PHE into a single curriculum, schools can individually structure how PHE is delivered. For example, past class schedules at this school have featured health classes once per week in the classroom and PE twice per week in the gymnasium.

Understanding student experiences and adjusting program design accordingly can improve the delivery and value of PHE for students.

Many participants discussed team sports as a dominant and traditional approach to PE design. Concerns were raised about the role sports play in PE to privilege athletically gifted students while excluding others. A direct example from the data came from Student 5 commenting on “dominating the courts” while Student 7 would prefer PE to be “a conditioning class, rather than playing sports.” This experience can be linked to Walton-Fisette and Sutherland (2020), who critiqued competitive sports in PE for marginalizing lower-skilled students. Participants from all stakeholder groups agreed that effective PHE programming should include diverse activities that focus on skill building, confidence, conditioning, and inclusion, framed as physical literacy over sport performance. This was supported by Teacher 2, who distinguished coaching from teaching and sports from physical literacy. These observations point to the importance of a shift needed in teaching practices. Geisler’s (2017) study on the socialization of PE teachers provides hope that new teachers are entering the field with pedagogical philosophies that prioritize lifelong health and wellness over competitive sports.

This discussion of effective PE programming mirrors findings from Baker (2016), who found that traditional models emphasize competition in ways that alienate certain students. Models like Teaching Games for Understanding are common in Canadian PE but are often executed in a manner that prioritizes sports and misses the mark on other important intentions of the model, such as engagement and accessibility (Baker, 2016). Participant discussions on the need for diversity in PE also relate to Kirk’s (2013) argument that the traditional, one-size-fits-all approach fails to deliver holistic goals in PE. Most students in the study expressed that they value both competitive sports and inclusive physical activities. Therefore, in the context of program design and pedagogy, the data raises the question of how PE delivery can encompass holistic development and physical literacy without excluding students who value competitive sports.

The findings show that students associated their engagement in PHE with enjoyment, social connection, intrinsic motivation, and personal growth. However, conversations across all groups illustrated barriers to participation, including low perceived competence, embarrassment, peer

judgement, self-consciousness, disinterest, competitive environments, and exclusion. In their study of student enjoyment in PE, Domville et al. (2019) found similar experiences of engagement and barriers, including positive social interactions, activities connected to individual preferences, and disinterest in curricular content. These findings highlight the complexity of student engagement in PHE, where positive experiences and barriers coexist in the same environment.

Participants demonstrated a developmental shift in how engagement is experienced. Teachers of younger students emphasized the importance of play, while older students identified challenges (Student 6), personal growth (Student 4), and improved performance (Student 5) as meaningful aspects of participation and engagement. This reflects Dismore and Bailey's (2010) description of "fun" evolving from play to challenge and skill mastery. Ennis (2017) and Standage et al. (2003) discuss Self-Determination Theory as a framework for understanding motivation in PE through autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Although participants did not explicitly reference these constructs, shared ideas on competence through skill development and relatedness through student interests were evident. For example, participants emphasized individual preferences as a key component of engagement, with students highlighting their favorite activities, such as basketball, volleyball, gymnastics, and martial arts, as examples. Student 6 described student interests as an important component of activity design to appeal to different learners, reinforcing the role of relatedness and competence in supporting motivation.

Some of these findings diverge from the literature. Many studies have pointed to the prevalence of girls disliking PE and having lower participation rates. Zalech (2021) found that more girls than boys dislike PE, while Martins et al. (2016) found that girls describe disengagement due to activity design and logistics. This was not strongly reflected in the current study, except in the context of competitive environments. The small sample size in this study did not include female students who reported disliking PE; however, four female teachers recalled negative past experiences, including body shaming, disinterest, overly competitive environments, and low confidence, as factors contributing to disengagement. Lastly, Student 3 and Student 4 specifically suggested strategies to address social and emotional barriers in PE, including fostering supportive peer interactions to reduce intimidation and build confidence. While the literature

often emphasizes the role of teacher behavior in reducing barriers, these student suggestions highlight the additional importance of peer attitudes and social culture within PHE environments.

6.3 Systemic and Structural Factors Influencing PHE

In this study, assessment in PE was viewed as complex and controversial. Participants rejected purely skill-based assessment as an unfair practice, preferring metrics linked to effort and personal growth. The school in this study uses a proficiency scale for elementary courses and certain middle school subjects. Most participants preferred proficiency-based assessments over traditional percentages, though confusion exists around different grading practices across grade levels and what assessment in PHE truly means. The educators represented in this study have very little to no experience teaching PE, so insight on specific assessment practices was not found. However, the administrator group framed the proficiency scale used in B.C. as a step towards meaningful assessment. Some participants offered recommendations that evaluate outcomes that are more tangible and measurable, including assessing learners on goal setting, self-evaluations, and personal achievement. These perspectives may be helpful to researchers investigating assessment in PE, as some have found that teachers have difficulty evaluating knowledge, attitudes, effort, and skill in meaningful ways (Irmansyah et al., 2025).

Justifiably, data from the administrator interview appeared to demonstrate more focus on learning outcomes, meeting curricular expectations, and upholding educational policies. Increased academic rigor influenced by public trends was noted by both Luke et al. (2019) and Ennis (2006) and may place added stress on PHE teachers to align assessment practices with the prioritization of evaluating learning outcomes (Ni Chroinin et al., 2019). This interpretation can be linked to the significant misalignment identified by Sulz et al. (2025) between policy, competencies, and assessment, leading to participants' confusion on what is assessed in PHE and how it is measured. While participants provided ideas on what is and what should be assessed in PE, the data shows little understanding of how PE assessment should be materialized. Lastly, the findings here may contribute a rare student perspective on PE assessment to the literature. Students favouring effort-based metrics and understanding the fairness problem in skill-based grading provide interesting insights for further research. Notably, Student 3 commented on the

disparities between effort and skill, while Students 6 and 8 recognized the complex and controversial nature of PE assessment.

Literature in PE research frequently draws attention to the subject's inferior positioning in academics. While all participants spoke to the value and importance of PHE in the curriculum, structural and systemic decisions signal a hierarchy. Observed examples specific to this case study may reflect the broader devaluation of PHE, including the removal of students from PE to finish tests or catch up on work, limited scheduling across K-12 in a shared gymnasium, and even using PE time as disciplinary leverage. Participant speculation that some educators think "it's just PE" or "flex time" can reinforce the lower status of PE in the school and among students and parents. Centeio and Brusseau (2024) and Johns and Dimmock (1999) offer the explanation that the prioritization of literacy and mathematics, along with societal views on which subjects equate to academic and professional success, significantly contribute to the hierarchy of subjects and the time and resources allocated to their delivery. These findings reflect sentiments in the literature of PE being described as a "high need, low demand" subject (Ennis, 2006) and lower status in the hierarchy of academic courses (Kirk, 2013; Barney & Ehrlich, 2010). However, in this study, the school does meet the minimum requirements for weekly minutes in PHE across K-12, unlike the findings of Hickson et al. (2012), who report that 43% of Canadian schools fall below the standards. In the current study, students' requests for increased PE time reflect their enjoyment and favouritism toward the class, not an issue in marginalized resources.

Finally, when investigating perspectives on who should teach PHE, approximately half of the teachers and administrators in the study advocated for the need for PHE specialists due to their perceived ability to deliver more intentional and rigorous instruction. This finding is supported in debates from Lawson (2018) and Fletcher et al. (2018), who argue that PHE specialists are necessary for effective PE programs and that practice and perceived value suffer when generalist teachers are assigned to PHE teaching duties. Others in the study emphasized interest and passion as adequate benchmarks for a PHE teacher. However, it is worth noting that there appeared to be misunderstandings regarding how a PHE specialist is defined. In this context, a specialist teacher has a specific designation or degree in their subject area. Some participants may have equated interest and passion as the sole criteria for specialized teaching, indicating that

further research is needed to determine whether specialized training or passion is the primary driver of quality PHE.

In a discussion on education degree requirements, Teachers 5 and 6 recalled that only one course in their teacher training program was devoted to physical education, which is an immense contrast to the education that PHE specialists receive over the years in their programs. This evidence depicts a gap in the education necessary to develop the adequate knowledge, experience, and confidence required to teach the wide range of educational and interactive components of the PHE curriculum. These interpretations are supported by Barney and Ehrlich (2010), who found that 62% of classroom teachers lacked the confidence to teach PE themselves. Similarly, Faulkner and Reeves (2000) found that self-perceived sports competence strongly correlates with attitudes toward teaching PE. Competence as confidence appeared in the data of this study; Administrator 2 shared, “It would be a nightmare for me to teach PE because I don't feel confident in it.” These findings demonstrate the need for better preparation in education degree programs for teaching PHE across K-12 curricula and a closer look at what defines a PHE specialist in relation to education and training, rather than subject interest alone.

6.4 Chapter Summary

This chapter discusses the key themes and subthemes that arose from the data in this qualitative study, examining topics related to PHE value, practice, and marginalization. This chapter provides further interpretation of the results and emerging ideas from the Findings chapter and connects themes to real-world practice and existing literature. The next chapter discusses the strengths and limitations of this study and outlines recommendations and future research.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

This study aimed to investigate and understand stakeholder perspectives on PHE in a K-12 school in British Columbia, Canada, guided by two research questions: 1) What are the perspectives of students, teachers, and administrators on physical and health education? 2) What is the perceived value of PHE in schools? This chapter concludes the dissertation by summarizing the findings, describing the strengths and limitations of the study, and offering recommendations for practice, policy, and future research.

6.1 Summary of Findings

The interpretation of the themes demonstrates that they are deeply interconnected, which is supported by the narratives of the participants and the existing literature. Physical and health education is valued as a subject that develops the whole child, supporting academic, physical, mental, social, and emotional growth and success while providing balance in a curriculum that prioritizes literacy and numeracy. The value of PHE depends on how it is taught and structured. Designing a PHE program with inclusive, varied, skill-based activities and intentional health integration matters more than sport performance. Student engagement increases when learners feel included, competent, confident, and supported by their peers and teachers. Barriers such as embarrassment and overly competitive environments decrease participation; however, strategies such as peer encouragement and a variety of inclusive activities can help mitigate these issues. Structural components, such as assessment, scheduling, academic priorities, and resources, shape what PHE can realistically achieve and influence how PHE is valued in schools and communities. In addition to providing insights into issues in PHE in the broader educational context, the key contribution of this study is the multi-stakeholder design that reveals where perspectives align and diverge.

6.2 Strengths and Limitations

The strengths of this study come from the in-depth understanding and meaning that emerge through the social constructivist lens. Rich contextual data and findings were uncovered by investigating the real experiences of different groups within the school. The teacher-researcher role provided an additional layer of in-depth understanding, as context clues and details were

easily understood as they pertained to daily school life, school programming, and the wider educational context. The multiple stakeholder design of the study offered more angles to the research than a single subset would allow. These research decisions made it possible to see where participants' views aligned and differed in program purpose and delivery.

While researcher positionality has merit as a strength in this study, it is also a limitation of qualitative research. Prior knowledge and personal experiences influenced the data and its interpretation as student and colleague relationships and personal biases were inevitably prevalent. The small sample size from a single setting limits the ability to make generalized claims and the nature of qualitative research leaves much room for interpretation compared to quantitative data. The data was interpreted by a PHE teacher, but the narratives did not include PHE teachers specifically due to the limited sampling pool within one school. The absence of these perspectives limits the extent to which the findings can be applied to PHE classroom practices. Finally, in recognition of traditional case study methods, this research could have been strengthened by additional data sources, such as observations and field notes, questionnaires, or mixed method approaches.

6.3 Recommendations and Future Research

The findings of this dissertation support recommendations for PHE practice and policy, as outlined below:

1. Where applicable, the integration of health education and physical education requires the intentional delivery of health content to promote learning and avoid being seen as a distraction from physical activities. Schools are recommended to hire PHE specialists, if possible.
2. Traditional sports-centric models should shift to inclusive models that focus on physical literacy and holistic health.
3. Assessment in PHE may benefit from a proficiency-based evaluation and should include criteria such as effort, sportsmanship, and personal growth.
4. Structural improvements, such as protected PHE time and better resources, should be a priority for administrators to adhere to holistic education.

5. Education degree programs should improve their course designs to better prepare teachers for PHE instruction and increase the perceived value of the subject area.
6. Greater accountability is needed between policy and practice. This may be improved in Canada by implementing a unified set of standards for PHE across the country, with increased awareness and education for professionals and stakeholders.

Future research should continue to investigate the views of multiple stakeholders in the context of PHE. More research can be conducted to include the voices of parents, administrators, and policymakers, as they are underrepresented in the literature and significantly contribute to the support and perceived value of PHE. Secondly, research can examine how quality PHE programming is impacted, either in terms of content knowledge and/or student engagement, based on teachers with specialty training versus generalist teachers with passion and interest in PHE. Lastly, the discussion of lifelong health as an outcome of PHE inspires recommendations for future research involving longitudinal studies on the impacts of PHE from early childhood to adulthood.

6.4 Conclusion

This study answered research questions pertaining to stakeholder perspectives and the perceived value of PHE in schools. Through the research process, it was determined that PHE matters most when it is inclusive, intentional, and supported by structural and systemic frameworks. Pedagogy and assessment can strengthen the subject's holistic aims and increase student engagement. However, when marginalized by institutional priorities and policy gaps, PHE struggles to reach its full potential as an essential component of holistic development and lifelong health.

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Appendix A: Adult Consent Form



Research Study Consent Form

Background

I am conducting a study in our school that involves interviews about Physical and Health Education (PHE) with several different groups. This study is part of my Master's in Physical Education, Sport, and Physical Literacy through the University of Wales. The purpose of the study is to explore what perceptions and attitudes towards PHE are present in our students, staff, and administrators to help me further research the perceived value of PHE in the school curriculum.

Consent

After receiving information about the study and agreeing to continue to participate in the research, please fill in the following consent form:

I, _____, consent to participating, as requested, in the research, led by Brittany Dobbin.

1. I have been fully informed of the research project.
2. I agree to audio recording and transcription of the interviews and may be quoted or referenced by the researcher.
3. I understand that:
 - a. I will not benefit financially, or otherwise, from taking part in this research.
 - b. I am free to withdraw from the project at any time and free to decline to answer questions.
 - c. I will not be identified, and individual information will remain confidential.
 - d. I may ask that the recording be stopped at any time and may withdraw at any time from the session or the research completely.

Signature:

Date:

Appendix B: Student Consent Form

Informed Consent

Authorization for a Minor to Serve as a Research Participant

I am conducting a study in our school that involves interviews about Physical and Health Education (PHE) with several different groups. This study is part of my Master's in Physical Education, Sport, and Physical Literacy through the University of Wales.

I am writing to ask permission to use the information I collect from your child during this process. Participation in this study involves recorded discussions through focus groups where your child will be one of five students participating in the group interview. You may contact me at any time regarding your child's participation. My email is -----.

The purpose of the study is to explore what perceptions and attitudes towards PHE are present in our students, staff, and administrators to help me further research the perceived value of PHE in the school curriculum. The interview with your child will take place at ----- School and will last for 30-40 minutes (with one follow-up session if needed). Questions will be presented to the group of students and audio will be recorded for transcription and analysis. During the study, I will collect information such as age, gender, and grade level, however, students will remain anonymous if their data is used in the dissertation of this study.

Only my instructors at the University of Wales, particularly Dr. Kate Piper, will have access to the data collected in this study. Your child's participation in this project is strictly confidential. Only my advisor and I will have access to your child's identity and to information that can be associated with your child's identity.

Please check the appropriate line below and return this form to Brittany Dobbin.

___ I give permission for my child's data to be used in this study. I understand that I will receive a signed copy of this consent form. I have read this form and understand it.

___ I do not give permission for my child's data to be part of this project.

Student's name

Signature of parent/guardian

Date

Appendix C: AI Acknowledgement

I acknowledge the use of AI tools in the assistance of my research. I confirm that all analysis, interpretation, and writing in this dissertation is my own. The following table lists the AI tools used and their purpose.

ChatGPT	This was used to organize research notes into categories, brainstorm topic ideas, and create simple chapter outlines.
SciSpace	This was used to find articles that were relevant to the topics in the study. Features where you can ask questions about an article or provide a summary were used.
Ailyze	My transcripts were uploaded to Ailyze and I entered my own codes and research questions as a prompt to organize the data. This tool produced several dozen themes and subthemes, with links to participant quotes. I meticulously reviewed and organized the themes and subthemes, eventually narrowing them down to three themes. I also saved all of the relevant quotes to my notes. All interpretation of the data is my own.
RefWorks	This was used to store literary references and create a bibliography for my dissertation.
Paperpal	This was used to edit grammar and punctuation throughout the writing process, providing improved fluency when needed.