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PARENTAL PERCEPTIONS OF FIFTH GRADE PHYSICAL EDUCATION:  
A CASE STUDY

A Dissertation Presented

by

DEBORAH A. SHEEHY

Submitted to the Graduate School of the  
University of Massachusetts in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

September 1993

School of Education

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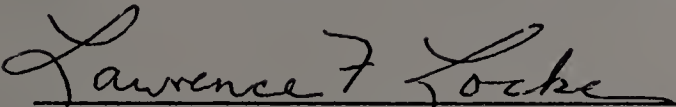
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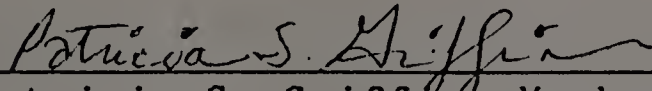
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## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the loving memory of my father, James A. Sheehy (1915-1989); my brother, James A. Sheehy, Jr. (1940-1989); my grandmother, Mrs. Nettie Jones (1891-1989); and my professor, Seth Kreisberg (1950-1989). Through their lives and their "transitions", I came to understand the value of love and connectedness with other people. For their love and their teachings, I am eternally grateful.

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There have been a number of people who have contributed in significant ways to my personal and professional journey. The order of their mention does not denote any special significance, rather, each person (in their own unique way) has special meaning to me.

### To My Dissertation Committee:

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\*\*\*\*\*

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ABSTRACT

PARENTAL PERCEPTIONS OF FIFTH GRADE PHYSICAL EDUCATION:

A CASE STUDY

SEPTEMBER 1993

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Directed by: Professor Lawrence F. Locke

Throughout the professional literature in physical education there is considerable rhetoric about the need to recruit and maintain the support of parents. Among those who teach a vulnerable and sometimes marginal special subject, there is a widely held belief that parental approval and support matters a great deal, in fact, that parental dispositions are critical to the future of the subject in the public schools.

Despite this article of professional faith, there are few studies that describe the attitudes of parents about physical education. None of those employed the strategy of probing the communication of program information and subsequent parental responses to program operation at a single site -- that is, rich case analyses simply are not available.

The purpose of this study was to describe parents' perceptions of and attitudinal dispositions toward a



physical education program at a single public school site. The primary sources of data were (a) a parent background questionnaire; (b) open-ended interviews with participants (27 parents of fifth grade children, the physical education teacher who taught those children, nine classroom teachers at the same school, and the principal); and (c) observations at the site.

Results indicated that many parents possessed inaccurate information about the physical education program -- information that typically was acquired from their children. Few parents attempted to obtain information from other sources. Further, all parents drew on their own, often negative, recollections of gym classes when describing perceptions of and dispositions toward their child's program.

Although anxious to obtain parental support, the teacher did not attempt either to communicate more than minimal information about the program, or to solicit more than trivial forms of parental support and cooperation. Her strong sense of the importance of teacher autonomy, and school norms restricting parental participation in educational matters, appeared to limit her efforts to improve relations with parents.

This study concludes with a discussion of the communication process between the physical education teacher and the parents, and a comparison of that with what occurred

between the classroom teachers and parents. This is followed by implications for both teacher preparation and school practice.

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CHAPTER 1  
INTRODUCTION

Introduction and Statement of the Problem

Throughout the published professional literature in physical education there is considerable rhetoric about the need to recruit and maintain the support of parents with regard to physical education. This rhetoric is understandable since in a variety of ways parents can influence both educational policy generally, and the particular nature of the school attended by their offspring. Through means as disparate as tax referenda, pressure group activities, testimony at public hearings, letters to the editor in the public press, parent/teacher conferences, and family discussions around the dinner table, parents can and do act to encourage, limit, or shape events in the schools.

The same parents also may choose to ignore the curriculum content, teaching processes, and operating policies of their children's schools. Either choice, active engagement or passive disengagement, has its consequences. Some results of parental dispositions are immediate and of obvious importance, as in the case of exercising the vote to support or deny funding for particular school programs. Others, however, are subtle and may be visible only in terms of long term relationships between schools and the community, as in the case of parental engagement in curriculum development projects. For physical education, in

particular, there is a widely and uniformly held belief that parental perceptions matter a great deal (Buturusis, 1984; Moore & Gray, 1990; Nelson, 1986; Smith, 1985; Wilcox, 1987), in fact, that they are critical to the future of the subject in public schools.

Despite this article of professional faith, and the obvious potential for influence by parents which might validate such belief, there are surprisingly few published research reports that describe the attitudes of parents about physical education. Further, the studies on which such research reports are based are difficult to compare and synthesize into useful knowledge because they (a) investigate such diverse populations that generalizations would be difficult, and (b) employ such a variety of methods for gathering data that no replications are available (see also Chapter 2). Researchers investigating parental attitudes about physical education, for example, have most commonly used written questionnaires and telephone surveys (the latter often based on fixed format interview guides) to gather data. Questionnaires limit the conclusions inferred from the information gathered because the participants' responses are so powerfully influenced by the particular way in which questions are worded. While this limitation also is true of many other direct survey techniques, such as closed ended individual or group interviews, the latter methods may present some opportunity to follow-up and probe

responses, and do allow the gathering of contextual information which can illuminate otherwise ambiguous or misleading responses.

Although the small set of studies located for review was useful in reporting some information about parent attitudes toward physical education in general, none of them employed the strategy of probing responses to program operation at a single site -- that is, rich case analyses simply are not available. Further, no attempt has yet been made to identify a list of factors which may be primary in their influence on parents' perceptions of physical education.

#### Purpose of the Study

Accordingly, the purpose of this case study was to describe parents' perceptions of and attitudinal dispositions toward a physical education program at a single public school site. One goal was to provide a data base for identifying both the modes of communication involved and a list of factors which appear to be salient in developing those perceptions and dispositions -- factors which subsequently might be investigated through the use of other research designs. A second goal was to pursue one factor already identified in a previous pilot study (Appendix A) as potentially salient -- the relationship between parents' personal experiences in physical education and their perception of their child's physical education program.



## Major Research Questions

The questions used to guide the case study were as follows:

### Parental Knowledge

1. What information do parents have about their child's physical education program?
2. From what sources does that information come?
3. What sources of information about their child's physical education program do parents regard as most and least credible?
4. What categories of information appear to be most and least significant in developing parents' perceptions of their child's physical education program?
5. How does what parents know about physical education compare to what they know about other subjects like English and math?
6. Do parents wish they knew more about the physical education program?
7. What is the parent's evaluation of their child's current physical education program?
8. What is the parent's vision of an ideal physical education program for their child?

## Parental History

1. Generally, how is a parent's personal experience in school physical education and sport related to their understanding of their child's current physical education program?

2. Specifically, to what degree is a parent's personal experience in school physical education and sport an apparent precursor to interest in seeking or ignoring information about their child's physical education program?

3. Specifically, how does personal history or experience in physical education and sport influence a parent's qualitative evaluation of their child's program?

4. To what degree is a parent's previous experience in physical education and sport an apparent precursor to a disposition to support or not support their child's current physical education program?

5. In what ways, if at all, are a parent's vision of the ideal physical education program altered as a consequence of encounters with their child's physical education program?

## The Physical Education Teacher

1. Generally, what are the teacher's beliefs and attitudes about parents' role in their child's physical education?

2. Specifically, what are the teacher's beliefs and attitudes about parents' role in their child's physical education program at the case study site?

3. How does the teacher respond to parental comments, questions, or indications of interest in their child's education?

4. Under what circumstances does the teacher interact with parents?

5. Through what means does the teacher typically communicate with parents?

6. In what ways, if any, would the teacher like to have more support from parents, how do they believe that can be achieved, and what do they see as the primary impediments?

#### The School and Parental Involvement

1. What appear to be the most common beliefs and attitudes among the school's teachers and administrators with regard to communication with parents?

2. Through what means does school policy and procedure provide regular communication with parents?

3. How long have these procedures been in place and how rigorously do they appear to have been followed?

4. In what other ways (informal and unscheduled contacts) do administrators and teachers cultivate communication and positive relationships with parents?

## The School and Physical Education

1. How do classroom teachers and school administrators rank the importance of physical education in relation to other school subjects?
2. In what ways do administrators show or fail to show support for the physical education program?
3. What expectations do administrators have for physical education classes?
4. What expectations do administrators have for physical education teachers?
5. By what means and on the basis of what data do administrators evaluate the current physical education program?

### Definition of Terms

The following section contains definitions of the major terms. They are intended to provide the reader with an understanding of the terminology that is used throughout the document.

#### Attitude

"A learned predisposition to respond in a consistently favorable or unfavorable manner with respect to a given object" (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975, p. 6).

#### Communication

A complex and dynamic process of negotiating meaning while exchanging messages between individuals that has both



a content and a relational component (Cooper, 1988). Please refer to Chapter 2 for a more detailed explanation of this process.

#### Information

Information represents the facts or data about a person, place, or thing (Woolf, 1976, p. 593).

#### Involvement

For the purposes of this study, involvement means to take part in or participate in a particular event or school program. Involvement can take place on a variety of levels ranging from single, isolated occurrences in particular events to continual ongoing participation in a program or group.

#### Knowledge

Knowledge refers to the acquaintance with or understanding of the information about something (Woolf, 1976, p. 639).

#### Parental Support

For the purposes of this study, parental support refers to a parent's willingness to stand up for or defend a specific program or teacher, particularly in the face of adversity.

#### Perception

For the purposes of this study, perception refers to an awareness of something interpreted through one's own experiences with that person, object, or situation.

### Significance of the Study

This case study provided information presently not available in the physical education research literature. The case study produced has both utilitarian value for teachers and administrators of public school physical education programs and theoretical value as a stimulus for rethinking our present understanding of communication with parents and the issue of parental support.

Specifically, this case study provided: (a) detailed descriptions of parents' perceptions of their child's physical education program; (b) insight into what parents consider to be significant factors affecting the development of their perceptions; (c) detailed descriptions of parents' personal experiences in physical education classes; (d) some hypotheses about the relationship of parents' experiences in physical education and sport to their dispositions concerning their child's physical education program; (e) parents' ideas about what goals and activities an effective physical education should include; (f) sources of information that parents regard as effective for learning about their child's physical education program; and (g) insight into factors which constrain teachers' willingness to engage parents in the kind of communication which might truly recruit parental support. Specifically, the effect of the teacher's ambivalence concerning the proper limits of any exchange with parents about educational matters.

Insight into factors that mold parental perceptions will provide physical education teachers and school administrators with a better sense of what might be effective among the alternatives for changing those perceptions and recruiting the support of parents. If, as is commonly assumed, parental perceptions are critical to the future of physical education in the public schools, then understanding the significant factors that shape those perceptions is equally important.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

#### Introduction

The literature in this chapter describes the relationship between parents and schools and the influence that relationship may or may not have on the development of parental perceptions and attitudes. There are many interesting papers and research reports written on this topic (see Appendix B); the focus for this review, however, is primarily based on the following areas of research: (a) communication theory as it relates to the formation of perceptions and the interactions between parents and schools; (b) home/school communication in general; (c) parent attitudes toward schools in general; (d) public attitudes toward physical education; and (e) parent attitudes toward physical education. Each of these research areas will be discussed in order to provide both a sense of the importance of the proposed study, and a rationale for the particular design selected.

The literature was reviewed with several fundamental questions in mind -- questions that would serve the purposes of the present study. Those questions include (a) What do parents know about schools in general? (b) How do parents find out about what their children do in school? (c) What are parents' attitudes about school? (d) Is there a link



between information, involvement and attitude? (e) What are parents' attitudes about physical education? With these questions in mind, published research reports, dissertations, and books written between 1982 and 1993 were reviewed and selected portions subsequently included in this chapter.

Excluded were studies regarding parental involvement, model parent programs, parent conferences, the politics of teacher/parent relationships, the marginality of physical education, and commentaries on the need for parental involvement in schools. While these topics contain valuable information and are occasionally mentioned, as bodies of knowledge they are located on the periphery of the proposed study and, therefore, were not included.

#### Communication

Before one can understand anything about the effects of communication between parents and school personnel on parental perceptions, it is important to consider the concept of general communication and at least some of the basic constructs involved in the communication process. For the purpose of this study, the following definition discussed by Cooper (1988) will be used.

Communication, according to Cooper (1988) is a complex process that may involve up to six components: (a) interactants (two or more people), (b) messages (information) to be communicated, (c) channels through which

the messages are transmitted and received (sight, hearing, and other senses), (d) verbal or nonverbal feedback (messages sent in response to other messages), (e) noise (includes anything that interferes with the accuracy of the messages i.e., distracting sounds or attitudes), and (f) the environment in which the communication occurs. Each of these six components affects the communication process in significant ways.

To further illustrate the concept of communication, Cooper's components indicate certain assumptions -- namely, that communication is "(a) a transaction, (b) a process, (c) complex and symbolic, and (d) has both a content and a relational component" (Cooper, 1988, p. 3). Accordingly, each of these axioms will be discussed separately for clarification.

#### Communication is a Transaction

The transactional nature of communication refers to the simultaneous exchange as it occurs between people. A teacher, for example, when talking with a parent sends both verbal (the words) and nonverbal (facial expressions, body language) messages. At the same time the teacher receives verbal and nonverbal messages from the parent. The communication between the teacher and the parent then, becomes a dynamic and continuous transaction in which "each individual gains identity from participation in the communication event" (Cooper, 1988, p. 3). In short,

communication involves a relationship and negotiated meaning rather than the simple transmission and reception of information.

### Communication is a Process

The concept of communication as a process implies that it is dynamic, and has no clear beginning or ending. As two people engage in the interaction, the verbal and nonverbal messages of each individual affect the verbal and nonverbal messages of the other.

### Communication is Complex and Symbolic

Communication is complex in that when two people interact there are really six people involved in the interaction: (a) me, (b) my impression of you, (c) my impression of the way you see me, (d) you, (e) your impression of me, and (f) your impression of the way I see you (Cooper, 1988). In addition to all of these "people," moods, attitudes, and circumstances also affect the communication, thereby making it a more complex process.

Communication is symbolic in that people relate their experiences and perceptions to others through words and behaviors. Just as words have assorted meanings, behaviors too can be interpreted in differing ways. What we intend to communicate through symbols such as speaking, facial gestures, or our actions, therefore, may be misinterpreted by others.

## Communication has a Content and a Relational Component

That is to say, communication occurs simultaneously on two levels. The content level is the substance of what is said which is transmitted through verbal messages. At the same time, the relational level signifies how you view the other person, how you view your relationship with the other person, or how you view yourself and these are transmitted through nonverbal messages.

In sum, communication is a complex, dynamic, ongoing relationship between two or more individuals that is dependent upon both the verbal and nonverbal messages sent and received as well as dependent upon each person's perception (of themselves, the other person, and the messages exchanged).

### Perception

Perception then, becomes a key factor in understanding communication. As indicated earlier, for the purposes of this study perception refers to an awareness of something interpreted through one's own experiences with that person, object, or situation. This is admittedly a general definition and in order to help the reader (and myself) more fully understand the complexities of this phenomena, Warr and Knapper (1968) have outlined three components of perception: (a) the attributive (characteristics that one ascribes to a person or object), (b) the expectancy (expectations one has of the person or thing perceived), and



(c) the affective (feelings or emotions about what is being perceived). All three components are derived primarily from one's own previous experiences and contribute to one's perception of the person, object, or situation.

According to this outline, then, perceptions may significantly influence communication between home and school. That is to say, based on their past experiences in schools, parents assign certain attributes to teachers, hold certain expectations of teachers, and undoubtedly have many emotions about teachers in general. Likewise, teachers' perceptions are based on their experiences with parents, the attributes teachers assign to parents, the expectations they have of parents and their emotions regarding parents in general. Thus, communication may or may not be problematic, depending upon the degree of saliency of prior positive or negative experiences and their influence on individual perceptions.

#### Parents and Schools

Not only is it imperative that the reader (and the author) understand the constructs of communication and perception when considering the topic of parental perceptions of physical education, but the reader must also consider the literature on how parents communicate and perceive schools in general. Accordingly, the following section contains an overview of the literature on parents and schools.

## Home/School Communication

The literature on communication between parents and schools suggests that most parents know little about what their child does in school (Cattermole & Robinson, 1985; Epstein, 1986; Lareau, 1987; Leitch and Tangri, 1988). For example, in 1986 Joyce Epstein published a paper entitled "Parents' reactions to teacher practices of parent involvement." In it she discussed the results of a survey sent to 1269 parents of first, third, and fifth grade students in Maryland. A large number of the parents never received any information from their child's teachers. Further, those same parents also were uninvolved at school. The assumption was that those parents who had little information about the school were less likely to be involved. This and other reports have repeatedly suggested that parents' attitudes about schools and their decisions to be involved with schools are at least partially related to what they know about schools.

In addition to having limited information about schools, research results have indicated that some parents may want only to be informed rather than involved in their child's education. This point was illustrated by Thornburg in his 1981 study entitled "Attitudes of secondary principals, teachers, parents and children toward parental involvement in the schools." In that study Thornburg attempted to measure the actual involvement of parents as

well as obtain an estimate of how much parental involvement principals, teachers, and children really want. He distributed a written questionnaire that was based on a three-level system for parent involvement: (a) parents as informed supporters and learners; (b) parents as volunteers; and (c) parents as decision makers. Overall the principals and teachers wanted more parent involvement than the parents and students did. Parents instead preferred to be informed supporters rather than be involved. Similar conclusions were reached both in an earlier study by Sloan (1973), and in a later study by Cattermole and Robinson (1985).

Whatever level of involvement parents may prefer, several important questions remain: (a) Would more information cause a positive shift in parents' attitudes? (b) What types of information do parents regard as most valuable? (c) Through what means would parents like to receive information? The research of Cattermole and Robinson (1985) entitled "Effective home/school communication: From the parents' perspective" provides some insight.

Cattermole and Robinson surveyed 202 Canadian parents and asked questions regarding (a) the actual ways parents learn about their child's school; (b) their preferred ways of learning about their child's school; and (c) the most effective ways of communicating with school personnel. The results indicated that the most frequent and most preferred



source of information was the children. Other preferred ways of learning about their child's school were report cards, teacher notes, phone calls, and face-to-face interactions. Despite their preference for indirect methods of obtaining information, parents considered direct approaches by the teacher (phone calls or in person) as the most effective communication with the school personnel.

Cattermole and Robinson's study is a replication of a study conducted in 1973 by Sloan. Both studies produced similar results and consequently the authors suggest direct personal contact is the best method for getting information to parents and for getting them involved at school despite the fact that such personal contact is not the parents' preferred source of information.

The consequence is a conflicting situation -- while parents think that direct personal contact is the most effective way to learn about their child's school, they do not prefer that method and would rather hear about school through their children. It seems likely that this preference for indirect methods of obtaining information reflects parents' past backgrounds and present situations, their own experiences as children in schools, parents' own attitudes about schools, and their insecurities in dealing with teachers.

There is, however, some evidence that other related factors (such as the social class background, gender, age,



or occupation of parents) also affect family/school communication and relationships (Lareau, 1987; Wilson, Pentecoste, and Nelms, 1983). Consider the following example. In her 1987 study, Lareau conducted in-depth interviews with parents of first and second grade children, teachers, and principals in two distinct schools (one working class and one professional middle class). She found that a variety of factors influenced parents' level of involvement with the school: (a) educational level of parents; (b) parents' views of division of labor between teachers and parents; (c) information that parents had about their child's school; and (d) the amount of time, money, and other resources available to parents.

Lareau also found connections between those influencing factors and parents' social class background. Working class parents, for example, had very limited information about their child's school and what they did know came primarily from their children. The working class parents believed that the responsibility for education was to be left to the teacher. They had completed a lower level of education themselves, had meager interaction skills along with limited time, income, and resources to spend on their children's education.

On the other hand Lareau found that professional middle class parents had extensive information about their child's school and that information came from a variety of sources

such as their children, the teachers, or other parents. Middle class parents viewed education as a shared undertaking and were typically involved in their child's education. Finally, middle class parents had completed a higher level of education, generally possessed competent interaction skills and had more time, income, and resources to spend on their children's education.

Moreover, the results of the study by Wilson et al. (1983) indicated that the parents who had the most favorable views of the teacher/parent interactions were those parents who themselves participated directly in those interactions. The parents who were most likely to interact with teachers were between 20 and 30 years of age, housewives, and high school graduates.

These two studies (Lareau, 1987; Wilson et al., 1983) seem to suggest that multiple factors contribute to a parent's ability or desire to interact with their child's teachers concerning what their child does in school. This lack of interaction or perceived ability to interact appears to influence parental perceptions of both their child's teachers and their child's school.

#### Parent Attitudes Toward School

Building on the presuppositions discussed above concerning the relationship among information, parental involvement, and parent attitudes, Bingham, Haubrich, and White (1989) conducted a study examining some of the factors

that contribute to parents' attitudes about the effectiveness of schooling in a midwestern urban school district. The authors believed that the more familiar a parent is with a school or program, the more likely that person is to give it a positive evaluation. The data were collected via closed-ended telephone surveys with 1,346 black, white, and Hispanic parents who had children in grades 4, 7, or 11. The participating school district was one in which desegregation had been occurring for ten years. Bingham et al. (1989) categorized information into three groups: (a) specific beliefs about components of the school and school system; (b) characteristics of the parents themselves; and (c) the academic performance of their children in school.

Results of the Bingham et al. study (1989) were as follows: (a) parents' opinions of the school appeared to be related to their assessment of the teaching quality and principal's work; (b) parents who had attended, worked in, or whose spouses worked in the school district appeared more likely to respond favorably toward the schools; (c) Hispanic parents seemed to have higher opinions than whites or blacks; and (d) their children's elementary and junior high school performance was only minimally related to parents' opinions about the school while parents' opinions of high school appeared to be directly related to their children's achievement.



The authors concluded that parents distinguish between their child's school and the school system when forming attitudes. It is possible then that parents hold more favorable attitudes about their child's school because of their familiarity with it.

Parental feelings, attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs about their child's urban school were further explored in a recent dissertation conducted by Herley-Hogan (1990). For that study, Herley-Hogan distributed an initial survey to a selected sample of 80 parents. Intensive, qualitative interviews were then conducted with 13 of those parents. The goal was to understand the parents' perspectives on the relationship among their child's school, their children, and themselves.

The author concluded that there are many barriers to parental involvement in their children's education. Those barriers seem to originate both in the present and past experiences of the parents, are sometimes generated by the practices of schools, and originate from misconceptions, misperceptions, and cultural misunderstandings.

These studies confirm that understanding parental perceptions and the process of communication between home and school is a difficult and complex task. There are a variety of factors that influence parents' perceptions which in turn either facilitate or limit their abilities and/or desires to communicate with their child's school personnel.



A lack of communication is linked to apathy, negative attitudes, or misperceptions and results in little or no parental support or involvement in schools.

### Parents and Physical Education

Another important piece in understanding parental perceptions of their child's physical education program is to investigate the literature specifically regarding parental attitudes toward physical education. This section contains a summary of that literature.

The number of published research reports concerning the attitudes of parents about physical education has been small, scattered, and consequently ineffective for informing the development of policy or programs. Empirical research reports on the topic are disjointed and thereby difficult to compare because they employ such a variety of methods for gathering data that no replications are available and investigate such diverse populations that generalizations would be difficult.

Researchers (e.g., Stewart & Green, 1987) investigating parental attitudes toward physical education, for example, have most commonly used written questionnaires and telephone surveys (the latter often based on fixed format interview guides) to gather data. Questionnaires limit the conclusions inferred from the information gathered because the participants' responses are so powerfully influenced by the particular way in which questions are worded. In some

cases it was impossible to understand if the participant was referring to their child's physical education program, to physical education in general, or to out-of-school sport activities when responding to a question.

Moreover, some researchers (e.g., Gillam, 1986; Snyder & Spreitzer, 1983) have investigated diverse and often incomparable populations. That is to say, investigators exploring this topic have surveyed the public in general (which would include at least some unknown percentage of parents) and particular groups of parents both with and without specification of concurrent enrollment of a child at a specific grade level. It is possible that these studies are not comparable with regard to what they reveal about attitudes toward physical education.

In addition, a number of studies involve the survey of parents from different countries (e.g., Poitras, 1984; Pritchard, 1988). This practice certainly adds a cross-cultural dimension to our knowledge about attitudes toward physical education, but the cultural norms in other countries regarding the importance of physical education also are different, which makes true comparison problematic. In other reports, parents represented only a small subgroup of the participant sample and their responses were most often summarized in one general statement which might not have represented their individual responses.

Admittedly many of these disparities cannot be eliminated, but in order to minimize their effects, I have organized the discussion of attitudes toward physical education into two categories: (a) attitudes of the public and (b) attitudes of parents. These topics of public and parent attitudes will be discussed in greater detail because they relate directly to the proposed study.

#### Research on Public Attitudes Toward Physical Education

It is necessary to review the literature on public attitudes toward physical education because the sample populations include at least some unknown percentage of parents. To understand the public's attitudes, then, is to understand at least something about the attitudes of parents toward physical education.

Snyder and Spreitzer (1983) conducted a large sport sociology study and utilized data from part of that study to prepare a report about "the perceptions of adults concerning their physical education experiences in the schools and their experience concerning community sports on a retrospective basis" (Snyder & Spreitzer, 1983, p. 88). The study was based on the assumption that people who had positive experiences in physical education and youth sports would be more active in recreational sports as adults. The authors mailed a questionnaire to three groups of people: (a) the entrants of a 10 kilometer road race; (b) people entered in a large racquetball tournament; and (c) randomly



chosen members of the general population in Toledo, Ohio. The sample yielded 321 runners, 202 racquetball players, and 120 respondents from the general public.

The results indicated that these adults were generally critical of the physical education programs they had experienced in schools. In fact, 44% of the racquetball players, 51% of the general population, and 55% of the runners reported that their school physical education programs had not stimulated them to be physically active adults. Because some of the adults surveyed can be presumed to be parents, Snyder and Spreitzer's (1983) study offers evidence that contradicts the generally favorable parental attitudes toward physical education reported by others (Gillam, 1986; Poitras, 1984; Pritchard, 1988; Stewart & Green, 1987). It simultaneously seems to support prevailing public opinion found in a recent Gallup Poll (1988).

The Gallup Poll (survey of public opinion toward public schools) is sponsored annually by Phi Delta Kappa and is conducted by the Gallup Organization. Its purpose is to document the public's attitudes toward public schools in the United States. In 1988, the participants were 1,594 adults randomly selected in various areas of the nation and in all types of communities. Personal in-home interviewing was the method used to gather data. Physical education appeared in the results only twice -- once under the heading of required core courses and again under the heading of subjects that



should be emphasized in schools. Participants were asked to indicate which subjects they would require of every public high school student who plans to go on to college.

Mathematics, English, and U.S. Government respectively filled the first three slots with physical education coming in eleventh out of a possible fourteen subjects. Only 40% of the participants said they would require any physical education for those students planning to go to college.

In 1989, a somewhat different conclusion was reached by Loper who surveyed three groups to get their perceptions of physical education programs in Nebraska. The three groups were (a) adults; (b) physicians, dentists, drug counselors, and directors of health agencies; and (c) principals and superintendents. The results showed consistently that there was strong support by all groups for a physical education curriculum that would emphasize healthful living. This clear support for fitness as a significant component of physical education classes echoed the earlier findings of Gillam (1986).

Alabama was the site of Gillam's (1986) study of public attitudes toward physical education. The following were among the questions investigated: (a) Is there a need for physical education in the educational curriculum? (b) Will physical education be useful to children in their lifetime? (c) Is the physical educator properly trained? and (d) Is the physical education program content appropriate? To

answer these questions Gillam developed a 16-item telephone questionnaire that was used to gather data from a sample of 532 people obtained through random digit dialing. The questionnaire covered a variety of topics relating to physical education including the exercise patterns of the adults surveyed. Like Snyder and Spreitzer (1983), Gillam predicted that these patterns would be a by-product of childhood and adolescent physical education in the public schools.

The results of Gillam's study showed that ninety-nine percent of 260 parents included in the survey thought teaching their child about fitness (how and why to exercise) should be the emphasis of the physical education curriculum. The parents ranked individual lifetime sports and team sports behind fitness in terms of importance as objectives for the physical education curriculum. In addition, 38% of the respondents indicated that their own participation in physical education classes as children did not stimulate them to be active adults.

All of these studies share a common thread -- they deal with attitudes toward physical education in general and do not tap responses related specifically to parental roles, specific schools, programs, or teachers. This ambiguity invites responses based primarily upon personal experiences because no other set of role functions are specified. In other words, if respondents are not asked to assume a

particular role (e.g., as parents or as a member of the general public) when answering the questions, it is difficult to know from which orientation the person is responding. The answers provided by respondents are dependent upon their orientation. In the following category, however, the participants were asked to respond as parents.

#### Research on Parent Attitudes Toward Physical Education

Poitras (1984) investigated the attitudes of French-speaking and English-speaking students, teachers, and parents in the province of New Brunswick, Canada. Students from 48 schools were selected randomly from grades 7-12. The parents and teachers of the students selected also were included. There were approximately 3600 participants. To collect data from all groups (students, teachers, parents), the author used the Wear Inventory (1951) which was originally developed to measure attitudes of college students enrolled in physical education activity courses.

Despite the fact that most of them had never participated in a physical education class, both parents and teachers had similar scores on the attitude inventory. The scores of the groups indicated that parents, teachers, and students all had positive attitudes toward physical education. The lack of previous experience in physical education for these adults appears troublesome given the

instructions for the Wear Inventory (1951), even though their responses indicated positive attitudes toward physical education.

The Wear Inventory (1951) instructions explicitly require participants to think about their own physical education experiences when responding. The author (Poitras, 1984), however, did not explain the conditions under which the inventory was taken, and thus omits a particularly salient piece -- the participant's vantage point. In other words, it is unknown if parents were thinking of their child's current physical education program, their own physical education classes as children, or physical education in general when completing the questionnaire. A similar problem occurred three years later in a study conducted by Stewart and Green (1987).

The purpose of that study was to determine the attitudes of parents toward physical education. The authors utilized a written questionnaire developed by Edgington (1968) to measure the attitudes of high school freshman boys toward physical education. This questionnaire was distributed to parents in a large, midwestern, suburban school district and 505 parents responded (333 with elementary children; 84 with junior high students; 88 senior high students) representing a 72% response rate. The responses were a cross-sectional sampling of parents whose children attended K-12 schools. The results showed,



overall, that parents were favorable toward physical education in the public schools. Parents particularly valued health, fitness, skill acquisition, and the social benefits of physical education. Specific results indicated that 82% of the parents felt that physical education should be a part of the total education of students; 84% of the parents thought that physical education was a valuable subject although 65% felt that physical education was not as valuable as other subjects; and 87% of the parents thought that physical education should be a required school subject. Again, however, the conclusions drawn from these studies (Poitras, 1984; Stewart & Green, 1987) are troublesome because the authors do not report the directions given to participants that would indicate their frame of reference.

Nevertheless, these results were largely replicated in a study conducted by Pritchard (1988) to examine the perceived physical education needs of parents, students, and teachers in England's secondary schools. His published research report provided a comparative view of attitudes toward physical education in England and North America. A total of 269 parents, 277 students, and 296 teachers responded to the written questionnaire (a 57% return rate). Although it is unclear from the report, it appears that no attempt was made to follow-up with nonrespondents.

Pritchard's perception was that "the total sample mainly attributed value in physical education to the

improvement of personal health, fitness, and to the development of sporting behavior" (Pritchard, 1988, p.155). Parents as a subgroup considered physical education an important subject in the high school curriculum. Moreover, parents asserted that physical education should emphasize the development of fitness and social interaction skills.

The studies on public and parental attitudes toward physical education share a common theme -- that is, in broad public surveys physical education receives high ratings from parents. Those ratings probably are very specific to certain beliefs and possibly misunderstandings about physical education -- namely that physical education continues to include a substantial and explicit health component as it did in prior decades and that fitness is a probable outcome for students attending physical education classes. These studies do not, however, investigate the attitudes of parents toward a particular public school physical education program with which they have had personal experience.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHOD

#### Introduction

The purposes of this chapter are to describe the methods for gathering data and the data analysis process. Specifically, the first section of this chapter will provide a description of the data collection methods, selection of the participants to be interviewed, selection of the setting, and the process of gaining access. The second section of this chapter will include a description of the data reduction and analysis process, and the procedures for establishing trustworthiness.

#### Data Collection

The primary sources of data for the case study were: (a) a parent background questionnaire; (b) formal, open-ended interviews with participants (parents, teachers, principal); (c) field observations at the site; (d) collection and examination of formal school policies concerning communication with parents and parental involvement in school affairs; (e) collection and examination of specimens of communication between parents and teachers; and (f) attendance at school events and informal conversations with the participants who were present.

## Parent Background Questionnaire

A questionnaire (Appendix C) was given to each participating parent in order to elicit basic demographic information such as age, gender, occupation, number of children, and other details important for describing the parent. The information from the questionnaire was used to write descriptive statements about the parents, as a general group, and to develop parent typologies.

## The Parent Interviews

I conducted 2 one-hour audiotaped interviews with 27 parent participants (of a possible 100 parents of fifth grade children) at a time and place convenient for them -- usually their own home. A standardized open-ended interview format with predetermined questions was used to allow the most efficient use of the interview time, assure that each participant was asked the same questions in the same order, and facilitate the comparison of participant answers to the same question (Patton, 1980).

Each parent was asked to read and sign a written consent form (Appendix D) immediately before the first interview was conducted. The written consent form is a contract that explained the study, how the rights of the participants would be protected, and how the information would be used subsequently by the researcher.

The purpose of the first interview was to establish a supportive and nonevaluative tone for eliciting the



participants' experiences and perceptions. It also allowed parents to briefly describe their values regarding schools and education, information which was used to frame the parents' responses to questions about their child's physical education program. The parents were then asked to recall in detail their own experiences in physical education classes (see Appendix E).

The purpose of the second parent interview was to follow-up, clarify, and correct information gathered in the first interview and then to explore the parent's views of their child's current physical education program (see Appendix F).

#### Other Interviews

Audiotaped interviews were conducted with 13 school personnel such as the fifth grade physical education teacher (see Appendix G), several classroom teachers (see Appendix H), the principal (see Appendix I), and the physical education coordinator. In the original proposal, I indicated that I would also interview the other special subject teachers (i.e., art and music) as well as other school administrators; unfortunately, that was not possible due to the unwillingness of those particular personnel.

Each interview was held at a time and in a place mutually agreeable to the participant and the interviewer -- usually during their "prep" period. Immediately prior to the interview, each participant read and signed a written

consent form. The general purpose of these interviews was to collect information about the nature of the interviewee's own communications with parents, their perceptions of school policy and procedure in that area, and their beliefs and dispositions about the physical education program. These interviews provided a deeper understanding of the everyday circumstances under which the parents interact with this school's personnel.

#### Field Observations at the Site

I conducted numerous observations at the school over a period of 15 weeks. These observations occurred concurrently with the interviews of participants and provided a sense of the way things operated at the school. The observations took place at each of the following carefully selected events: (a) two Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) meetings; (b) two after-school events which involved parents at school; (c) one school board meeting; and (d) numerous fifth grade physical education classes across several different units of instruction. The original proposal indicated that I would attend a parent/teacher conference that involved the physical education teacher; no such conferences occurred at the time of my study.

Detailed field notes containing both descriptions of these events and reflections on what was observed were kept.

The witnessing and recording of these events added important contextual information to data from interviews with the participants.

### Setting

The study took place in a public elementary school that serviced approximately 300 children in grades K-6. The setting was one in which there were no immediately apparent signs indicating that relations with parents were exceptional in character or under any form of unique stress. The site selected was also one at which parents appeared to be welcomed when visiting the school and to be generally informed about school programs and their child's progress. It was presumed that at a typical site, enlistment of parental support for special subject programs was primarily the responsibility of individual teachers. In addition, the school selected employed a full-time resident physical education teacher who provided physical education on at least a twice weekly schedule.

### Access

The preliminary survey of five potential school sites was done by first contacting the physical education teacher through written correspondence. The written note was followed by a telephone conversation in which I requested a visit and volunteered to spend a day with that person teaching line dances to their students. Although this method was not part of my original proposal, I elected to do

it because I believed that by giving something to that teacher first, perhaps they would be more willing to participate in my study. I used the day as a teaching and learning experience but also as a way of establishing dialogue with the teacher. At the end of the day, I left an abbreviated copy of my proposal for the physical education teachers to read at their leisure. Each visit was followed by a written thank-you note and a subsequent phone call to assess the teacher's willingness to participate.

Of the five teachers, only one agreed to participate. Two of the teachers could not participate because they were itinerant teachers -- travelling between buildings and therefore their situation was less desirable for a study such as this. One of the teachers had been assigned to teach only first and second grade students and was therefore unable to participate. Another teacher indicated that she did not want to participate.

Once permission was granted by the physical education teacher, she passed my abbreviated proposal to the school principal and the physical education department coordinator for review. This was followed by a meeting with them in which I answered their questions and provided further explanation where necessary. Upon the request of the principal, I made some minor changes in the wording of several interview questions. With the approval of the physical education teacher, her department coordinator, and



the principal, the paperwork was then passed to the school superintendent who approved the study, after a week, without any question or request for a meeting. The final approval for the research project came from the school committee after an additional 2 week waiting period. The total amount of time that elapsed between the initial permission of the physical education teacher and school committee approval was 5 weeks.

After I obtained school committee approval, another meeting took place among the physical education teacher, the department coordinator, and the principal in order to clarify the details of the study, establish the boundaries, and receive input from them as to the most effective way of contacting the parents. Their input was valuable for adjusting the process of contacting parents.

For example, in the original proposal, I indicated that a letter would be mailed to each parent of a fifth grade child explaining the general nature of the study and requesting their participation in the study. As a result of their suggestions, I sent the letter home with each fifth grade student and offered a free UMASS pencil to each student who returned the bottom half of the form with their parent's signature on it (Appendix J). The letter was typed on official school stationary, signed by both the principal and the physical education teacher, and parents did not have to participate in order for the child to get a free pencil.

All 100 forms were returned with parent signatures. Thirty-three parents originally agreed to participate but 6 parents dropped out for various reasons, leaving 27 parents who completed both interviews.

#### Data Reduction and Analysis

The data analysis occurred concurrently with the data collection (Bogdan & Biklen, 1983). After each interview, approximately 30 minutes were spent writing in my journal. As the data were collected, information from the interviews was transcribed and reviewed to suggest ongoing adjustments in the protocol.

The first time I reviewed each transcript, I did so while listening to the audiotape of the interview -- making corrections and notes in the margins. These notes included descriptions of non-verbal participant behavior I had observed during the interview as well as brief reminders of questions or insights I had subsequently developed. Each transcript was reviewed (without the audiotape) on several subsequent occasions, and analytic units of text (sentences, phrases, or words) that appeared to present complete expressions of a single thought were identified and sorted into categories. Those categories originated from (a) regularities or patterns in the data, (b) the literature in this area, or (c) categories developed in the pilot study (Appendix A). Categories were created, merged, and adjusted as the analysis proceeded. In addition, the data were

examined for relationships among categories as part of the inductive reasoning process (Goetz & LeCompte, 1981). Negative cases which did not fit into the categories also were identified. Whenever possible, an attempt was made to clarify or confirm negative cases by further checks with the participants who were involved.

In the original proposal, I indicated that I would identify and describe themes that cut across categories; that action, however, did not appear to correspond with the patterns in the data. Instead, quotes from the interviews were extracted and grouped around the research questions used to guide the study. This procedure was followed by a general discussion of points that the reader might find particularly helpful in understanding what was observed at Sunny Brook, and how the data from this case study related to the current literature. Finally, when considered within the framework of the contextual descriptions of the site and participants, the data were used to suggest a general understanding of how parental perceptions were formed.

#### Establishing Trustworthiness

When conducting qualitative research, particularly a case study, it is imperative for the researcher to (a) credibly represent the multiple realities of the participants, (b) provide descriptive data about the context, (c) describe how dependability was sustained through management of the data collection and analysis, and

(d) show that the findings are grounded in the data -- in effect to illustrate that the findings are trustworthy. In order to insure the trustworthiness of this particular case study, then, four techniques were utilized: triangulation, peer debriefing, member checking, and personal journal writing (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

### Triangulation

In order to develop a comprehensive perspective on the interactions between parents and the physical education teacher at the study site, different methods of data collection as well as various sources of information were used. Accordingly, I collected data in the following ways: (a) a parent background questionnaire; (b) formal, open-ended interviews with participants (parents, teachers, principal); (c) field observations at the site; (d) collection and examination of formal school policies concerning communication with parents and parental involvement in school affairs; (e) collection and examination of specimens of communication between parents and teachers; and (f) attendance at school events and informal conversations with the participants who were present. Each of these data sources provided opportunities for cross-checking individual accounts and validating factual information used in the case study report. Utilizing these different methods and sources was necessary



because no single source could provide a comprehensive perspective on what was happening at the site with regard to school personnel/parent communication.

### Peer Debriefing

Peer debriefing was a process which occurred throughout the study and was used to (a) probe researcher bias, (b) analyze working hypotheses, (c) test the next methodological steps, and (d) provide an opportunity for articulating feelings experienced by the researcher during the data collection process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Both by improving the quality of data collection and processing, and by providing a means of monitoring the investigator's personal involvement in the research process, peer debriefing can add credibility to the research report -- particularly when it is carried out with a disinterested peer who is familiar with the topic and the qualitative paradigm. Several peers who were familiar with qualitative research and public school physical education served as peer debriefers.

Prior to the data collection there was one meeting with the peer debriefer to discuss the proposed study and to discuss those aspects of my biography that were expected to influence data collection and analysis (Appendix K). During the data collection process, I met with a peer debriefer for about 1 hour on alternate weeks, and occasionally engaged in

a telephone conversation. In addition, a peer debriefer reviewed representative samples of transcripts, fieldnotes, and analytic products.

### Member Checks

In a limited sense, member checks were possible with the parents because a follow-up interview was conducted. I was able to check my understanding of the data with each parent during the second interview session. Parents had an opportunity to respond to specific questions about topics that were unclear from the first interview. In addition, during my observations at the site, I had the opportunity to clarify informally anything that I misunderstood during the interviews with participating teachers or the principal. The use of member checking in its larger sense of interacting with participants who have reviewed formal products of the study was not a part of the present investigation.

### Personal Journal

In addition to the data collection procedures described previously, a personal journal was kept throughout the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The information recorded in this journal included such things as (a) personal reflections on the research process, (b) methodological decisions made, (c) questions raised, (d) insights regarding my own values and biases, (e) overall logistics of the study, and (f) notes about my evolving perceptions of the setting and

participants. The information recorded in this journal was shared only with the peer debriefer and the dissertation committee chairperson.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

The general purposes of this chapter are to describe the setting in which this case study took place as well as to report information collected through the various methods of data collection. Specifically, the first section of this chapter will provide a contextual description of the town, the school, the physical education program, and the parents. The second section of this chapter will include a report of the data accumulated during interviews with parents and teachers. These results will be linked with the research questions used to guide the study. Pseudonyms are used for all persons, places and organizations.

#### Contextual Descriptions

The following descriptions of the town, the school, the physical education program, and the parents are typical products of a case study report. These descriptions are intended to provide the reader with a sense of the characteristics of the town and neighborhood, as well as a sense of the unique attributes of Sunny Brook School at the time of this study. While some of the descriptions would apply to virtually any suburban elementary school, other aspects of the site for this study represent unusual if not unique characteristics.



## Description of Town

The New England town of High Bluff has an approximate population of 20,000 residents. It is one of several towns that are situated on the periphery of a city of approximately 750,000. The residents of this white, suburban town represent a variety of economic classes. Most of the residents are English-speaking, although a small group continue to use Italian in the home.

High Bluff was originally established as a farming and industrial center and many of those residing there still earn a living by those means. As the town expanded over the years, however, people began to make their money in other ways such as through the medical, legal, and educational systems. There are some people who commute to the large city for work and a small number who work in retail sales.

### The Neighborhood

The neighborhood surrounding the study site encompasses a 5 mile radius and consists of both single-family dwellings and multi-family dwellings. To the north, west, and east of the site, the single-family dwellings are located fairly close to each other and are in good general repair. These houses appear to be between 50 and 70 years old and many of them are two-story homes with trees, shrubbery, and flowers included somewhere in each yard. Most of the homes have a front porch, a garage, and a paved driveway. The yards appear to be kept well trimmed and some

people can be seen working in their backyard gardens in the early evenings. The streets recently have been paved with bright lines painted on them.

The multi-family dwellings are located to the south of the study site and were built in the early 1900s. These houses are large, three-story homes that have been converted into apartments without any major alteration in the original outside structure. As with the single-family dwellings, these homes are in good repair, are located fairly close to each other, and have landscaped yards with garages and paved driveways.

#### The School System

The High Bluff public school system consists of three elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school. One of the three elementary schools (referred to as Sunny Brook for the purposes of this document) was the study site. The authority structure in place is one that exists in many locations throughout the United States. The personnel servicing each school are primarily classroom teachers, specialist teachers, aides, and other staff members. Each school staff is managed by a principal, while the five principals are directed by a system superintendent. The school committee, however, has the ultimate power to make final decisions with regard to financial allocations and general system policies.

## The School Committee

Each school committee member is elected by voters to serve a term of 3 years and must be a resident of the town. The annual town report contains the specific dollar amount they are paid for their services as school committee members. According to the Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) chairperson, several of the members have served for a number of years due to lack of opposition in the elections.

The High Bluff School Committee has five members, three women and two men. One woman, Nettie, continues to serve on the school committee even though her children have graduated from high school. Another member, Nell, has school-aged children. The chairperson, Gertie, has a child who attends an expensive private school in the area. Lee is a committee member and businessman whose child also attends a private school. Finally, Sam has children at the elementary schools in town and is a small business owner.

The power of the school committee is most apparent at their meetings. These meetings occur every other week during the school year and once each month during the summer. The school committee sits as a panel behind three long, tables situated into the form of a "U". Also present at the meetings and sitting with the committee are the superintendent, assistant superintendent, a student representative, and a secretary. Those people who are making presentations to the committee approach the tables in



the space between the committee and the general audience. The school committee chairperson presides over the meeting and provides an agenda for those attending. A typical meeting lasts approximately 2 to 2 1/2 hours, during which time there is only one brief opportunity (5-10 minutes) for individuals in the general audience to address the committee. Because members of the audience often are whispering to each other, it is clear that those seated in the general audience (usually about 15 people) have many comments.

#### Description of School

Sunny Brook Elementary School is located on a small side street away from the mainstream of town traffic. It is a neighborhood school that primarily services working and middle class families residing close to the center of town. It is common to see children walking to school together along the neighborhood sidewalks with the two crossing guards negotiating traffic for them.

#### Physical Characteristics

The school building is approximately 25 years old and is in good structural condition. The exception to this is the flat roof that is scheduled for replacement in the near future. In the winter, the building is warmed by an old boiler system that is quite inefficient. In fact, many who work there say the heat does not reach the end classrooms until June.



The building resembles the shape of an elongated "Y", with classrooms situated side-by-side, lining the long corridors. The main lobby, office, teachers' room and gymnasium form the intersection while the cafeteria, stage, and janitor's storage space form the base of the "Y". The school is surrounded by a 40-foot hardtop area that outlines the back side of the building. That hardtop surface separates the building from large, flat, grassy fields, beyond which a line of trees marks the periphery of the school property.

### Principal

Jim has been the principal at Sunny Brook School for the past 23 years. Prior to his appointment as principal, he served as a sixth grade teacher in the building. His length of service offers him some unique advantages in that he has established administrative consistency and he knows many of the parents because they are his former students. He appears to have a genuine affection for everyone associated with the school -- faculty, staff, parents, and students. It is not unusual to see him in the teachers' room chatting over lunch or greeting the children by name in the mornings.

Jim says he has an open-door policy, meaning that he is available to talk to anyone and welcomes visitors to the building. He believes that teachers should be able to make decisions about the way they work in their individual

classrooms rather than having him dictate what should happen there. Jim appears to have a great deal of confidence in his staff as well as a comfortable working relationship with them.

### Sunny Brook Personnel

The full-time faculty members include 12 regular classroom teachers, a principal, a secretary, a librarian, a physical education teacher, a Chapter I teacher, and a special education teacher. A nurse's aide, a custodian, and two cooks are employed as the full-time staff. Also servicing Sunny Brook School are several part-time faculty members including an art teacher, a music teacher, an adapted physical education teacher, a guidance counselor, a speech pathologist, and a special education aide. The faculty and staff members at Sunny Brook Elementary School are primarily female with the exception of the principal, one teacher, a guidance counselor, and a custodian. This group provides services for approximately 300 children in grades K-6.

Each faculty member brings with them varying years of teaching experience ranging from 2 to 30 years as well as a wide range of teaching styles and individual personalities. Together, however, they appear to share a common love of teaching children. Many parents and teachers refer to this common bond as the "magic" of Sunny Brook.

## School Communication Practices Regarding Parents

Communication practices begin each year with an invitation from the PTO for parental assistance. The following passage is taken directly from that initial note:

Dear Parents: Volunteers play a very important role at Sunny Brook School. Both teachers and students benefit greatly from this program. Please read the attached form carefully, and if you feel you can help in any way it would be greatly appreciated. Please do not make your own arrangements with teachers, and if you have any special requests, indicate them on the back of the form.

Sincerely, PTO Volunteers.

A form is attached that lists the following categories:

1. CLASSROOM -- e.g., general assistance to the teacher such as duplicating material, clerical, putting up and taking down bulletin boards, preparing instructional materials, working with individual children.
2. LIBRARY
3. SPECIAL NEEDS -- e.g., resource room reading, involves working with individuals or small groups per teacher instruction.
4. ARTS AND CRAFTS -- e.g., coordinating and instructing a monthly craft project for your child's class, often centered around a holiday.
5. HOME PROJECTS -- e.g., clerical, typing, other as per teacher's request.
6. HOMEROOM MOM -- e.g., makes phone calls and arrangements for class parties, phone calls for bake sale contributions, and other PTO activities.
7. SCHOOL STORE -- e.g., every other week during the lunch period to help sell school supplies to students.
8. REFRESHMENTS FOR CLASS PARTIES -- e.g., juice, cookies, paper goods, etc.

Parents, then, are encouraged to help in one or more of these areas throughout the year. According to the PTO co-



president, it is believed that there is something on that list for everyone to do if they want to get involved with their child's school.

It is clear that this list is intended to specify the kinds of activities that the school personnel believe are appropriate and those activities in which they invite parents to participate. It is a document, therefore, that lists tasks and sets limits in order to exercise a certain degree of control over what the parents are allowed to do. This document designates what is acceptable parental behavior at Sunny Brook Elementary School.

Beyond this initial letter requesting parent volunteers, there are many general points at which school and home touch. Teachers send notes home and receive notes or phone calls from parents. Permission slips are sent home for certain events. There is a monthly PTO newsletter, an Open House each year, and various periods of time scheduled for parent/teacher conferences. These are public examples of school communication with parents as a collective group. What is less obvious are the contacts and relationships that some parents have with individual teachers. These contacts occur as need dictates and are rarely public.

There are no signs indicating that relationships with parents at Sunny Brook School are under any form of unique stress. In fact, parents appear to be welcomed when visiting the school and to be generally informed about



school programs and their particular child's academic progress. It is typical to see several parents chatting with various school personnel in the lobby, main office, halls or classrooms. The enlistment of varying degrees of parental involvement is openly encouraged by the principal and often is facilitated by the PTO. Ultimately, however, the degree of parental involvement in each classroom is left solely to the discretion of the individual teacher.

#### Parent Teacher Organization

Otherwise known as the PTO, this organization operates with a president, vice-president, secretary and treasurer who are elected annually. Meetings are held once each month with the officers, the principal, two elected faculty representatives, and any parents who want to attend. The role of the principal is to provide administrative support to the group's efforts and to provide information regarding school policy when necessary. The two faculty representatives serve as liaisons between the PTO and the school faculty.

Because the Sunny Brook PTO regularly sponsors and publicizes special activities, programs, and fund-raising events for the faculty, students, and parents, this organization plays a significant role in communication between home and school. There is a small core of approximately 25 parents who brainstorm ideas, formulate goals, and then enlist the help of large numbers of other

parents in order to accomplish their ambitious goals. It was my observation that these parents share the same love of children as do the teachers at Sunny Brook, and they appear to have a deep and personal investment in the well-being of the school.

#### Description of Physical Education at School

This section includes a description of the physical education teacher and the physical education program at Sunny Brook School. It is intended to provide the reader with an explanation of both the personal and programmatic aspects of physical education at the case study site.

#### The Physical Education Teacher

Kelly is the physical education teacher at Sunny Brook Elementary School. She is a single, white, English-speaking female in her early thirties. Her educational background includes a bachelor's degree in physical education with teacher certification as well as a Master's Degree in Education. She began teaching at Sunny Brook seven years ago following the retirement of a male physical educator whom she describes as a "roll-out-the-ball" teacher.

Initially, because she had only the generic K-12 certification and little special training or interest in elementary level physical education, she had intended to find a high school position. Because the Sunny Brook job was the only one vacant when she applied, however, she decided to try working with young children. It proved to be

a happy decision and over the years she has become a dedicated and enthusiastic advocate of elementary physical education.

At the time of her appointment, no formally structured curriculum was in place. Out of her belief in the importance of the subject matter of physical education and her dedication to the development of a quality program, however, she created and implemented her own curriculum.

Despite this surface picture of complete professional independence, Kelly is operating within certain limitations. While her immediate supervisor is the building principal, she also must function under the indirect guidance of the district's physical education coordinator. Although Kelly has virtual autonomy in her own building, her dream of an integrated K-12 physical education program has been frustrated by lack of support for this kind of curriculum development. Instead, the department coordinator, who is nominally responsible for curriculum development, has directed his attention to the secondary physical education program.

#### Professional Development and Career Plans

Kelly is a member of the national and state organizations for physical educators. She subscribes to several journals, attends conferences when possible, and occasionally purchases a new book to add to her professional

library. Kelly indicated that she has implemented several ideas found either in the journals or at conference meetings.

Along with taking advantage of the professional resources available, Kelly also gives some of her own energy back to the profession and her school. She works closely with several universities in the area to arrange meaningful visits for undergraduate students to her school and gym. In addition, Kelly volunteered to have student teachers work with her as often as possible, and she believed that agreeing to participate in this research project would benefit others in the profession as well as herself. Recently, Kelly facilitated an inservice physical education workshop for other teachers in her school district and she served as one of the faculty representatives to the PTO for a second consecutive year.

Kelly appears to work well with the other staff members at Sunny Brook School. She shares a daily lunch with available faculty in the teacher's room, is often seen chatting with the teachers as they pick up or drop off their children for physical education class, and is often the instigator of practical jokes involving faculty and staff in the building. It is Kelly upon whom many of the teachers and staff rely for help with xeroxing difficulties, computer challenges, and music equipment set-up. She often attends



the school events even if they do not involve the physical education program. Kelly wants to be there in support of her colleagues and in support of the children.

In terms of her career plans, Kelly appears uncertain. She enjoys teaching young children and is dedicated to physical education, but she is tired of wondering whether she will have a job from year-to-year. She has thought of pursuing a doctoral degree or moving to another district where physical education has a greater value in the eyes of school committees and administrators, but at the completion of this study Kelly had made no decision regarding either of these options.

#### Dispositions Toward Parents

At this time, Kelly has what she calls an open-door policy for parents or teachers who want to come in and observe or participate in her classes. That is to say, she welcomes those who are just passing through the building and hear something happening in the gym. There is, however, no formal program for getting parents involved in any aspect of the physical education program at Sunny Brook School.

#### Communication Practices Regarding Parents

At the beginning of each school year, Kelly sends home a note to parents informing them of the days on which their child has physical education class. She also includes her expectations for appropriate clothing and sneakers as well as her expectations for behavior in the gym. There is no

other communication at any point in the year unless she sends a note requesting parental permission for a special event. She did comment, however, that some parents on occasion have contacted her about their child's grade or informed her that their child was sick.

She explained that in her first three years as a teacher, she did not give any thought to communicating with the parents because she was dealing with a more important task of establishing a safe learning environment for her students. As Kelly became more comfortable teaching elementary physical education and as she established the desired learning environment, she then began to think about what she could do to improve her program. In the interview, she explained that at that point (her fourth year) she considered communicating with parents in an attempt to recruit their involvement and support but simply had no idea of how to go about it. She then began watching how other teachers interacted with parents and now hopes to adapt their ideas to use in the coming years.

#### The Physical Education Program

Kelly talks passionately about the foundation of her physical education program which is based upon six governing values (not listed in order of importance):

1. establishing a safe learning environment,
2. teaching appropriate kinds of student class behavior,

3. developing basic skills through a variety of age-appropriate activities,
4. increasing student self-esteem and enjoyment,
5. promoting individual success regardless of ability level,
6. developing an awareness of the importance of lifetime physical activity.

Individually and in various combinations, I observed Kelly persistently attempting to integrate each governing value into her daily interactions with the children -- both in and out of the gymnasium.

#### Typical Day

A typical day for Kelly begins with a 15 minute bus/playground duty followed by 15 minutes set-up time before her first class of the day. The average daily teaching load for her is six 45-minute classes. She teaches 2 classes, then has a 25 minute prep period followed by two more classes. The subsequent 25-minute lunch often is spent catching her breath and gearing up for the afternoon schedule of two more back-to-back classes. Each class has approximately 20-25 children who have physical education twice each week. The day ends with a brief prep period, which she often uses for equipment take-down, followed by another daily turn at bus duty.

In addition to her daily teaching obligations, Kelly takes on extra responsibilities which often include breaking

up fights between students in the hallway; cornering would-be bicycle thieves on the playground; diagnosing various student and staff recreational injuries; assisting teachers who request her help in the assembly of audiovisual equipment; answering various questions from students and staff concerning use of school computers; helping the custodian on special projects such as measuring the roof for repairs; pruning the school's bushes during clean-up week; rescuing teachers from the temperamental xerox machine; and assisting teachers with special projects such as hanging a pinata from the gym ceiling. Kelly invariably responds to these frequent requests in a spirit of helpfulness, a fact which clearly accounts for the high regard in which she is held by her colleagues.

While an in-depth description and analysis of Kelly's program is beyond the scope of this study, she includes a motivational component (called the sneaker race) which is unique, and from the author's perspective, worth mentioning. The sneaker race, based on Don Hellison's model (1985) for teaching responsibility, also provides an example of how Kelly plans activities that support her governing values. The purpose of the sneaker race is to motivate students to remember appropriate footwear and reinforce appropriate behavior in physical education class. Each class in the school has a chart on the gym wall with sneaker outlines on it. At the end of a class, if each child is in sneakers and



the class as a whole has demonstrated a level of behavior ranked two or higher, then one child in the class colors in a sneaker. When 10 sneakers are colored in, they earn a class in which the activity will be of their choosing. Kelly sent material to the classroom teachers and the parents explaining this idea, thereby making it public and visible. It was typical to see children reminding each other to wear sneakers, teachers allowing students to call home if they forgot their sneakers, and parents bringing sneakers to school if necessary.

#### Ecological Position of the Program in the School

As mentioned earlier, Kelly uses a model for teaching children responsibility. She has distributed a handout that explains the model to each classroom teacher and they are using it in their own classes. Kelly also appears to communicate quite well with the other teachers in the building in terms of how the children from each class are working in her class. She invites teachers to come in and watch or participate. In fact, some of the teachers do make a special effort to get to the gym at least 10 minutes before their students are finished in order to keep up with what's going on. I found that every teacher I spoke with thought what Kelly was teaching in physical education class was important to the development of well-rounded children.

The fifth grade teachers, in particular, spoke highly of Kelly and her program. Those teachers believed that

Kelly reinforced what they were doing in the classroom by teaching appropriate behavior and responsibility. In addition, they acknowledged that Kelly teaches a variety of motor skills, thus allowing opportunities for students to get turned on to lifetime leisure activities. Their comments indicated a true respect for Kelly and a general feeling that none of the teachers could themselves provide the quality and expertise presently provided by her in the physical education program.

#### Description of Parent Participants

Twenty-seven parents completed both interviews for this study. Of those 27 parents, only 4 were male. Each of the male participants was interviewed with their female companion. All participants were white and English-speaking. Twenty-five of the parents were married and most of them had at least two children. Fourteen parents reported an average annual household income between \$25,000 and \$49,999. Nine parents reported an average annual income of over \$50,000. Admittedly, salary is not the only indicator of social class; nevertheless, based on the types of dwellings in which these participants lived, the types of vehicles they drove, highest level of education completed, and their occupations, the parents interviewed for this study primarily were from the working and middle classes. A variety of details concerning each parent can be found in Appendix L.

## Overview of Responses to Guiding Questions

The research questions used to guide this case study were divided into five separate sets (see Chapter 1 for further explanation): (a) parental knowledge; (b) parental history; (c) the physical education teacher; (d) the school and parental involvement; and (e) the school and physical education. In turn, the interview guides were designed to provide a variety of participant responses related to the research questions in each question set. In the following sections these question sets will be briefly described and the general reactions of the participants will be explained.

### Question Set #1 -- Parental Knowledge

To obtain material for this category, the researcher asked parents to think about the factual information (i.e., teacher's name, number of days per week, types of activities offered) they had about their fifth grade child's physical education program. Parents also were asked about the sources from which that information came, the credibility of those sources, their attitude and their fifth grade child's attitude toward the physical education program. They were asked to compare the kind and amount of that information with what they knew concerning their child's other academic subjects. Finally, parents were asked to state their visions for the "perfect" physical education program.

The format for this section begins with a general overview of the parental responses to the questions stated

above. Quotes from the interviews with a number of parents are used to answer those questions and my own comments are interspersed throughout. Following the general overview, specific types of parents that I have identified are discussed in greater detail to provide the reader with a more comprehensive sense of what the parents were like.

#### What Parents Know

Of the 27 parents who completed both interviews, 8 parents said they did not know the physical education teacher's name and 3 of those eight indicated that they would not recognize her. On the other hand, 22 parents indicated they would recognize the physical education teacher and 19 of those also knew her name.

Only 18 of the 27 parents knew the exact number of days that their fifth grade child had physical education, 1 did not know, and 8 parents were unsure. While most of the parents interviewed appeared at first to struggle with the question of what was going on in their child's fifth grade physical education class, after some thought all but two parents were able to mention several activities or sports that they had heard about in passing from their children. The two parents who reported knowing nothing about the program (#1012 & #2003) were also the parents who perceived their child's attitudes toward the physical education program to be "indifferent".



The following excerpt represents one type of response typically given by parents when asked to explain what they knew about the Sunny Brook physical education program. Whenever necessary I have inserted clarifying words in brackets to illuminate parent responses.

...I know that they did a lot of different activities. It wasn't just one particular thing. They did play different games, they did jump roping...square dancing or folk dancing I guess it was...I believe they played a lacrosse type game...and various exercises...those are the only organized things that I know of...When he [her son] talked to me about it [physical education], he complained about some of the things that he thought the boys should not be doing... like jump roping and I don't think he cared for that dance very much.... (#1008-2, pg.1)

It is apparent that this mother knew only what her son told her about the physical education program, and some of that information was incorrect.

For example, Kelly never taught traditional square dancing; instead she taught a unit on line dancing using popular music. I conducted several field observations during the line dance unit and it is my assertion that the students (regardless of gender) gave the appearance of thoroughly enjoying the unit. As a culminating event, the fifth graders were invited to perform the line dances at a high school basketball half-time show and more than 50% of fifth graders (both boys and girls) participated in that event.

Generally speaking, her son mentioned those things that he did not enjoy doing in class. There was no mention made by her son of the other units that were covered throughout the year. One interesting point in light of this information is that this mother reported both her own attitude and the attitude of her son as positive toward the Sunny Brook physical education program.

A mother who reported knowing nothing about her son's physical education program responded to my questions in the following manner:

...I don't have a clue, I don't know anything...I don't know the teacher's name. I don't really know anything. I don't think he's [her son] flunking...I think he has gym one day a week...I might be wrong. And I know the only thing they require is sneakers... that's about it.... (#2003-2, pg.1)

Notice the inconsistency in this parent's remarks. On the one hand, she said she did not know anything yet once she thought about it she realized that tennis shoes were required for class. This same mother described her attitude as neutral and her son's attitude toward the physical education program as indifferent.

Another mother indicated that while her own attitude toward the Sunny Brook physical education program was positive, her daughter's attitude was negative.

...I really don't know that much about it...I do know who the gym teacher is... I guess I've always thought of it as just fun so I don't know that I've taken that seriously, you know, going in and checking

to make sure they're doing good [sic] in gym...  
but I know the kids come home and they  
talk about the different games that they  
played in gym...they do hockey, I know  
they've done basketball...those kinds of  
things.... (#1013-2, pg.2)

This mother had very little information about her daughter's physical education program and one might wonder why she perceived her daughter's attitude as negative. It was also evident that this mother would do nothing to learn more about the program or to try and improve her daughter's attitude toward it. The mother did not think that physical education class involved any significant form of student learning and believed instead that it was simply a time for playing games, thus making it unimportant from her perspective.

Further, her comments regarding basketball being covered in physical education class indicated that she had outdated information. She was only one of several parents who reported obsolete and inaccurate information. Ten of the 27 parents reported knowing that their child had practiced basketball in physical education class this year; nonetheless, Kelly specifically stated that she had not taught basketball skills for the past 2 years.

Another parent who participated in the study knew that her son had physical education class twice each week for 45 minutes. She also reported accurate information on the exact days on which her son had physical education class as well as three units they had covered during the year. She

knew the physical education teacher's first name and commented that her son "loves gym" (#4018-2, pg.1). She had more accurate information than many of the parents interviewed, but she did not think that she knew very much at all about the program.

... I actually don't know too much...I didn't think too much of this physical education until you approached me and I really started thinking about it...He [my son] gets his mark and that's it. I don't know how he gets it, it's just an S, N, or U...I have been to the open house and I think the gym teacher was there; we just never went over and talked to her... I think if the school made the value of physical education as strong as it should be, then maybe I would have thought of talking to her...but I never even gave it a thought...What would I want to know about, how he plays?... (#4018-2, pg.6)

In this quote, this woman's dilemma was evident. She realized that she didn't know how her son's physical education grade was calculated or the criteria on which it was based. She did not, however, have enough sophistication to formulate a question about a program that she thought was centered around playing games.

She also provided some insight about the hidden messages that are projected from the school (perhaps unknowingly) regarding physical education as a school subject. She believed that the grade of S, N, or U was given only to those subjects that were "nonacademic" and nonessential to a child's education. They were the subjects that she thought the school regarded as the "frills" -- nice



to have but not critical to academic development. The grading system of S, N, or U signaled to her (and to other parents interviewed) that Sunny Brook school personnel did not really consider physical education to be an important subject, so why should she?

A different parent talked about the same topic -- her sense that the school personnel did not consider physical education as an important subject.

... That [physical education] has never been on the list. They never needed anyone to come and help in physical education class...it does tend to get treated as something that's there but is not really as important as the rest of the school.... (#3020-2, pg.10)

This parent said that she thought physical education was not treated with importance because it was graded S, N, U and because it has never appeared on the PTO list of ways that parents can get involved at Sunny Brook School.

During one of my field observations, I asked the principal why he did not require that the physical education teacher assign letter grades. His response was that she would have to develop a sophisticated letter grading system by which she would have to evaluate nearly 300 children. He commented that knowing Kelly, she would tackle the challenge in a professional manner, but in Jim's estimation, that would be asking too much of her in terms of time and energy.

It is important to note that there were a number of parents interviewed who knew absolutely nothing about their child's physical education program and who, because of their

own perception of its relative unimportance to their child's academic future did not make any attempts to acquire any information. On the other hand, there were also a number of parents who knew a few details about the program including some of the units covered during the year. This information was extracted from the stories of their children about the activities either particularly enjoyed or disliked.

As indicated above, parents differed on the amount of detail they were able to give regarding activities offered as part of the physical education program, but the two activities mentioned most frequently were the Halloween Obstacle Course at the fall Open House, and the annual Jog-A-Long held every spring. Because of the amount of publicity and attention given to these two events, many of the parents had either attended one or both activities or had heard about them from their children or other parents.

One mother explains the Jog-A-Long as she understands it:

...they have like a marathon run in the spring where the kids get pledges and this is done to fund field trips...they [kids] can run it or walk it...and they have parents set up to help time and give drinks... I've been to a couple of them just to watch and it's funny to see...[there are] kids that are running and trying to race each other... and then there will be a group of girls and they're just walking and they're gossiping the whole time around...and it's not such a long course that the little kids can't do it...it's very age appropriate....  
(#4018-2, p.4)

This quote is a classic example of the confusion that can occur even if the parent attends a school event. The remarks of this mother indicate that she did not understand what she saw. The Jog-A-Long was not intended to be a "marathon"; rather, the students were instructed to walk, jog, or run as many laps as they could in one hour. Prior to this event, students collected pledges from adults in order to raise money for future school enrichment programs. This fundraiser was organized by Kelly and supported by the PTO.

Another mother explains how she understands the Jog-A-Long even though she's never attended:

...I'm aware of the Jog-A-Long...most parents in town are aware of the Jog-A-Long... the first year they had it no one had any measure of their child's endurance and they [the school] made a mint of money because everybody overpledged...we put down a dollar for each lap and a flyer came home saying that [we had] pledged \$78!...[the school] realized [what happened] and said we don't expect anybody to shell out more than \$30...so, I would say that we and the other parents in town are very aware of the Jog-A-Long...it's a great topic of conversation among grown-ups.... (#1016-2, pg.1)

The Jog-A-Long was a popular event that occurred every year at Sunny Brook School. It continued to be in the forefront of parental thought, possibly not because of the publicity or children's enthusiasm but because of memories and stories accumulated by parents over a considerable period of time.

This same parent goes on to explain the Halloween Obstacle Course, another annual event orchestrated by Kelly:



...we all look forward to the obstacle course [at] Open House...open house usually takes place around Halloween and they have the strobe lights in there [gym] and the music and it is such a draw for parents' night...The kids want to do the Obstacle Course...they're so enthusiastic about it [that] they drag the parents to Open House...so it's good for the school...it's good for the kids...we [parents] don't get to talk to the physical education instructor...so, while it is good for the school, it is not particularly good for the physical education program because it has limited my information about it.... (#1016-2, pg.1)

This parent believed that the Obstacle Course was something that motivated the students to get their parents to attend Open House, and she recognized the enjoyment that her son had when participating in it. She does, however, also see the negative effect that this format has on the physical education program.

This negative effect is more clearly articulated by another parent who compared what happened in the classrooms during Open House to what happened in the gym.

...They (classroom teachers) have the reports and projects all over the room and you can stop for a few moments, talk to the teacher and really find out a little bit about what's happening in the classroom... but you can't do that with the physical education program because of what they do... which is a shame...I'd like to be able to go in especially with my wimpy little son who is not sports-minded at all, he's the least physical kid I've ever seen, and be able to talk to her [physical education teacher]... even ask for her suggestions on motivating him to exercise outside of school...because she's the one who's trained, she's the expert, and I would like to be able to do that.... (#3020-2, pg.7)



This request of being able to talk to the physical education teacher during Open House was mentioned by several other parents as well. Parents saw the Open House as an opportunity to learn more about their child's physical education program, even if they did not have specific concerns about their individual child's progress. Many parents stated that they would feel more comfortable interacting with the physical education teacher in this situation and that they definitely would not request a specific conference with the physical education teacher in order to get information.

Despite the popularity of the Halloween Obstacle Course with the children, another negative outcome was that there was confusion among the parents as to who was responsible for organizing and running it. Several parents knew that the Obstacle Course was a success because of the extra efforts of Kelly, yet many parents believed that the Obstacle Course was sponsored by the PTO. In fact, the physical education teacher, Kelly, designs a different course each year and then enlists the help of other physical educators and student teachers within the school system to run it. The PTO has nothing to do with the Obstacle Course.

Notice one continuing pattern in the data presented thus far -- each parent interviewed made statements involving incorrect information concerning the physical education program at Sunny Brook School. That is, many of

them had not received new and updated information to replace what they had several years prior. Consequently, several parents thought that the physical education teacher was still teaching health and sexuality as well as several other sport units such as basketball. I asked Kelly to comment on these topics and she stated that she had not taught health or sexuality in three years and basketball had not been taught at all during the last two years. The end result was that parents unknowingly based their judgment of their child's physical education program on information that was both inaccurate and obsolete. Part of this problem can be attributed to their means of acquiring information.

#### Means of Acquiring Information

There was an interesting split in parental responses when they were asked if they had ever received any written information about the physical education program at Sunny Brook. Fourteen parents said they had received written information in the form of permission slips, requirements for proper dress, or fliers about special events, while 13 of the parents interviewed indicated that they had never received any written information about the Sunny Brook physical education program.

Given this confusion over written messages from the physical education teacher, one might expect that the most common source of parents' information was their child. Many parents admitted that they only heard about physical

education class if something really exciting happened or if something happened that their child did not like. Most parents asked questions about their child's day at school but those questions were most frequently either general (e.g., how was your day?) or specifically related to grades, homework, projects, or quizzes in academics, rather than the special subjects of art, music and physical education.

Most parents commented that when they did ask their child the general question, "how was your day?", the typical child's answer was something like "fine" or "okay". The parent usually reported changing the subject rather than asking for elaboration on such responses. The same parents stated that it was less difficult to engage their child in a conversation about a specific test or project when a teacher had written comments or a grade had been assigned. In the second instance, the parent could ask questions and the child could provide a somewhat detailed account.

I do not profess to be an expert on the language capabilities of children, but I do think that what is at work here is worth mentioning. Children and adults operate on differing levels of understanding and have varied capabilities to express their understanding. Children have limited command of vocabulary and are still developing their abilities to respond to oral questions. It is possible that they find it easier to repeat information from written sources, as in responding to a teacher's classroom

questions, than to answer questions which require that they remember an event in the course of their day and decipher their own feelings with regard to that circumstance.

Hence, when the physical education teacher instructs the class on the proper way to hit a ball using a bat, it is but one occurrence (without any written record) in a day filled with hundreds of occurrences, many of which will not linger in a child's memory unless they are particularly disastrous or exciting. Even if their experiences in physical education class remain in their memory until the end of the day, children often lack the sophistication to explain adequately (to an adult) what happened.

For example, suppose the parent asks "what did you do in gym today?" In reality, the teacher held structured skill practice in which there was one soft-textured ball and a modified, lightweight bat for every three students. They practiced without keeping score while the teacher circulated and gave individual, corrective feedback on each student's performance. The child's response to the parent's question is "we played baseball". When the child says this to the parent, that parent automatically equates this with the organized sport played by adults using official rules and equipment. The end result is a severely distorted message about what happened that day in physical education class.



## Credibility of Sources

For many parents their child was not only the primary source of information about the physical education program but was perceived as the most credible one as well. The following excerpt from an interview with a husband and wife is an example of a typical parent response.

...[male participant] All I know about the physical education system at the school is what my son tells me when he comes home... He tells me what they did in gym, whether he had a good time or a bad time...but usually, he comes home with positive things to say... I think he's a good source of information, he tells me what I need to know...[female participant] I think we're going to learn the most by listening to our kids...even if it's a one-sided type of a conversation and you're only getting the child's end of it...I also think the kids are the best source....  
(#3016AB-2, pg.5)

This quote suggests that this couple heard all they believed they needed to hear when their child described what his physical education class was like. They considered their son's stories as an accurate source of information because he talked about both the things that he enjoyed and the things that he did not prefer. This type of response was given by a fairly large number of parents interviewed for this study. In fact, 13 parents responded that if they really needed to know about the physical education program, their son or daughter would provide the most accurate and dependable information. Only six parents indicated that they would ask the physical education teacher about the

program. The remaining parents would either call the school office or speak with other parents if they wanted specific information related to physical education.

#### Parental Dispositions Toward Physical Education

During the second interview, parents were specifically asked to describe their own attitude toward the physical education program at Sunny Brook School. They were asked to choose among "positive", "negative", or "indifferent" as descriptors of their attitude (or to designate any other word that they thought would accurately depict how they felt about the program). Twenty-five parents said they had a positive attitude toward their child's fifth grade physical education program at Sunny Brook and that they believed good things were occurring in class. One parent described her attitude as indifferent (#4018) and another parent could not think of a word to pinpoint her disposition (2003-2, p.4).

#### Parent Opinions About Their Fifth Grade Child's Attitude Toward Physical Education

Parents were asked to respond to a similar question regarding their perceptions of their child's attitude toward the physical education program at Sunny Brook. Seventeen of the 23 children were reported as having a positive attitude, 1 as feeling neutral, 3 as negative, and 2 children were perceived by their parent(s) as being indifferent toward their physical education program.

I wondered if there was a connection between the parent's perceived attitude and the gender of their child, so I went back to the data. Of the 17 children perceived as possessing a positive attitude, 8 were female and 9 were male. For the parents who reported their child as being indifferent, there was one male and one female in each category. It was a fifth grade boy who was perceived by his mother as having a neutral attitude toward physical education. It was interesting but not surprising that all three children whose parents reported as having a negative attitude toward physical education were female.

Earlier in the data collection process, I asked Kelly to provide her perception of each fifth grade child's general skill level because I thought there might be a connection between that and the child's attitude. She did provide this list to me with the understanding that her assessment was based on the child's general level of athletic ability and that their skill level would fluctuate according to their experience with a particular skill as well as their personal interest in improving it.

The 17 children whose parents perceived them as having a positive attitude toward the physical education program were rated by Kelly as exhibiting a variety of skill levels (low, medium, and high), while the 3 children who had been characterized as negative were classified as being medium skilled. Those students who were identified by their



parents as indifferent were classified by Kelly as being a high skilled female and a medium skilled male. Finally, the student who displayed a neutral attitude toward the program was identified as being medium skilled. While there was no opportunity for further parental explanation to qualify these data, several points are clear. Three-fourths of the students were perceived by their parents as positive about Kelly's physical education program, and neither general skill level nor gender was an obvious factor in determining membership in the smaller group reported as less satisfied.

#### Comparison of Parental Information About Various School

##### Subjects

Twenty-four parents remarked that they knew more about the academic subjects that their fifth grade child was taking than they did about physical education. Most typically, parents reported knowing more about the academic subjects because of the large amount of information available through various sources -- their child's homework, test scores, teacher comments on certain projects or reports, and regular contact with the classroom teacher. None of these types of information were available with regard to physical education.

When they were asked to compare what they knew about art and music (the other special subjects at Sunny Brook) to what they knew about physical education, however, dissimilar answers were given. Two parents indicated that they knew



more about art and music than physical education while eight parents indicated that they knew less about art and music.

A large number (17) of parents said they knew about the same amount of information regarding all three subjects. This was an interesting response, particularly in light of the fact that both the art and music programs were only offered for one-half of the year during the time of this study. Parents who gave this response typically had very little information about any of the special subjects in which their child was participating. Without exception, all parents said that they wanted to know more about their child's fifth grade physical education program.

The amount of information that parents had regarding a particular special subject often reflected their own particular interest in the topic or their familiarity with the teacher. One parent said that because she had purchased a musical instrument for her son to practice, she was more likely to keep up with that aspect of her child's education.

If we return to the research questions, several points appear to be relevant concerning parental knowledge. While there were some exceptions, for the most part parents did not have a significant amount of detailed information about the physical education program in which their fifth grade child was participating. The information that parents were able to articulate was trivial, usually inaccurate, and often filled with discrepancies. This sketchy and

inconsistent parental picture of physical education at Sunny Brook can be attributed in part to the primary vehicle for acquiring that information -- their children.

### Parental Visions

During the interview, parents were asked to talk about their visions for a perfect fifth grade physical education program. They were specifically asked to describe what the goals of the program would be and what they imagined students would be doing in class. It was my assumption that by understanding their visions, I could further understand their current evaluations of their child's program. In other words, if their child's program did not measure up to what they believed should be happening, then it would be a basis for comprehending parents' evaluation.

When asked to talk about their visions for physical education, parents often mentioned the activities listed below:

swimming	gymnastics	baseball
soccer	field hockey	dodgeball
volleyball	basketball	hockey
tennis	golf	bowling
tetherball	track & field	walking
hiking	camping	skiing
survival skills	1st Aid	ice skating
obstacle courses	parachute	nutrition
health	physical fitness	aerobics

Most of what parents envisioned was expressed in terms of sports, equipment, recreation or health. Likewise, parents frequently suggested that "teamwork and sportsmanship" should also be taught. When asked, however, this group of parents indicated that they could not think of any "educational" goals they would like to see achieved by the program.

Without exception, parents indicated that in the perfect physical education program they wanted the following: (a) an increase in the number of days per week; (b) the teacher to make the activities "meaningful" so the effects [whatever they might be] would last a lifetime; (c) a well-rounded program that included a variety of fun activities; and (d) information distributed to the parents about the program. The parents indicated that these things would be characteristic of a perfect program from their perspective. In doing so, parents primarily identified instrumental means for conducting the program, rather than outcomes in terms of things to be learned by their children.

Several parents (9) indicated that based on what they knew of their child's fifth grade program they would not add anything to what is currently being done by Kelly. These parents believed Kelly was already doing the best she could with the resources and time that she had and they could not think of any ways to improve upon that.

Parents also were asked about the sources of their visions. Where did they think their ideas about a "good" physical education program originated? All of the parents interviewed responded to this question by saying "from my own experiences". This comment had different meanings according to the parent. For some parents, they wanted activities included that they had done in their own school physical education classes, regardless of whether they enjoyed them or not. Other parents wanted activities included that they did not experience in their childhood physical education classes.

#### Types of Parents

It is beyond the scope of this study to provide a comprehensive profile of every parent who participated in this study; nevertheless, I have included descriptions of three different types of parents in the form of composite sketches based on information about all of the parents. The three types of parents are (a) the uninformed, nonsupportive, disinterested type; (b) the semi-informed, supportive, interested type; and (c) the well informed, very supportive, interested type. These constructed archetypes are intended only to clarify the general effect of current information on parental perceptions, and the relationship of parental ideals for physical education programs to their evaluation of the present program.



Ruth and Tom: The Uninformed, Nonsupportive, Disinterested Type

Ruth and Tom worked in the area, were between the ages of 31 and 35, and had three school-age children. They both grew up in High Hill and went to the High Hill Public School System. They had segregated physical education classes and neither of them participated in after-school sports or intramural programs as children.

When I asked them what they knew about the physical education program, they both commented on their perception of Kelly's performance when she first took the job at Sunny Brook School.

...[Ruth] I know there were problems with her in the beginning when our son was in first grade. He used to come home with Ns in gym... see, gym was a time when the kids wanted to go out and start running around and whatnot... and she tried to keep them in order...so, our son was getting Ns in gym. And it really wasn't that he was acting up. It was just that he was using a little bit too much energy, you know, talking and what not...he was just trying to release some stuff...[Tom] yeah, he always had trouble with energy...I guess the way he vented his energy got him in trouble... [Ruth] so I had to talk to her and to the principal when we were having those problems.... (#3012AB-2, pg. 13)

Both Ruth and Tom viewed their son's misbehavior in physical education class as simply an excess of energy that could not be helped. They expressed a "boys will be boys" type of disposition and viewed the situation as being created by a teacher who was too strict. It was clear that they did not agree with the grade that their son received at that time.

They did say that things are much better now between their son and Kelly. This was reflected both in their perception that "he has a good time now" and his currently high grades in physical education. They attributed the improvement to Kelly becoming less strict in class rather than their son displaying more appropriate behavior in class.

The following excerpt indicates their response when I asked them what else they knew about their son's physical education program.

...[Ruth] Well, I think they do soccer and dodgeball...[Tom] Kickball, I'm sure. I don't think they do baseball...[Ruth] Actually, I never really asked him what he does in gym... [Tom] I think the only way we would know that much about it was if there was a problem and they [teachers or the principal] wanted to talk to us about it...then, we would find out more that way.... (#3012AB-2, pg.15)

Out of the three sports mentioned, Kelly did teach soccer skills, but she specifically commented that she had never taught dodgeball or kickball as part of the physical education curriculum.

At that point, Ruth talked about what she thought was happening in her son's physical education classes.

...Because I went to that same school, I'm just assuming that they're going to play your typical gym sports...you know, we had square dancing and gymnastics...and then it was basically playing basketball for a couple of weeks and then volleyball, stuff like that... I'm just assuming that they still do the same.... (#3012AB-2, female, pg.15)

Without any current information on what her son was doing in physical education classes, Ruth simply substituted what she

herself had done in gym as the current reality for her son. Tom also admitted to doing the same thing. Both agreed that since their son's grades in physical education class were excellent they believed he must be doing okay, so they weren't interested in pursuing any more information about the program.

Tom briefly talked about why neither of them was concerned with the quality of the physical education program at Sunny Brook School.

...I would agree [with Ruth] that his grade in gym is good so he must be doing okay...as for the program, I mean for him, I'm not that concerned about him having a good gym program because he is healthy...I mean if he were a child that didn't get much exercise and watched a lot of TV, I'd be more concerned over him having a great PE program...but with him, I'm not concerned about it. He's active.... (#3012AB-2, male, pg.19)

Tom was not concerned at all about the quality of his son's physical education program. Tom considered physical education as "just a time when kids play games" and as such physical education was unimportant in his child's education and future. He and Ruth both thought that as long as their son was healthy, getting good grades, and staying out of trouble the program was adequate.

Both Tom and Ruth had a similar vision for the "perfect" physical education program, and unlike many other parents, they specified learning objectives rather than general program characteristics. They wanted the children to be taught basic skills like "how to throw a ball or how



to swing a bat or how to kick a ball" so that children could develop the correct form while they are young. Ruth and Tom also wanted the children to learn weight lifting skills and swimming skills as part of the elementary school physical education program. Finally, they commented that the teacher should spend more than two weeks (that's the length that they remembered from their own physical education classes) on any particular topic "so that the kids can play it long enough to get good at it". It is interesting that with the exception of weight-lifting and swimming, their son was currently receiving the type of program that they envisioned as "perfect or ideal".

To summarize, the uninformed, nonsupportive, disinterested type of parent is one who has little or no current information about the physical education program and who is not interested in learning anything more about their child's program. This type of parent frequently operates under the assumption that their child is not at fault if there is an issue (between the teacher and their child) in physical education class; instead, the parent perceives it as a "problem with the teacher". These parents commonly substitute their own experiences when they lack specific and detailed information about what is actually happening, and they do not regard physical education as a serious part of the overall school curriculum.



Mona: The Semi-Informed, Supportive, Interested Type

Another parent shared quite freely her sense of what the physical education program was like for her daughter. The statements of this parent became particularly important because Mona provided a sense of history about the physical education program from an outsider's perspective -- that is, she did not attend Sunny Brook School as a child. In addition, she was eloquent in providing considerable detail about what she thought was happening in her child's physical education program -- a feature that was absent from many of the other parent responses.

Mona was a white woman between the ages of 36 and 40 years who described herself as "a physical klutz". She was a slightly heavy woman who reported on the background questionnaire that she engaged in vigorous physical exercise about once a month. She and her husband have two school age children.

Mona began by talking about the sources of her information.

...I haven't gone in and spoken to the physical education teacher, so most of what I know is from the kinds of things that the kids say, and I think there are some pretty good things going on there...yes, they moan and groan about PE, but at the same time, when they actually talk about what they're doing, they seem to enjoy it. Nobody would admit to liking PE, for God sake...but they're having fun and I think that is a good motivator....  
(#4013-2, pg.1)

This woman clearly acknowledged the limitations of her source of information about the physical education program, but she appeared to continue to listen to the stories of her children and take their remarks in context. From this quote one can conclude that she heard not only the content of what her children were saying, but that she also paid attention to expressions of their feelings about the class.

She talked more about her sense of what took place in the physical education classes.

...I think there's a real element of keeping it playful, which I think is wonderful...I've seen a change for the better from when she first started to what she's doing now...[she's] really trying to get them to do a lot of things... as far as I can tell as a lay person about PE, you know, they're talking about how they have a warm-up period and then they work on various types of skills, but at the same time, like I said, there is an element of what I would identify as playfulness in the program.... (#4013-2, pg.2)

By playfulness, this parent was referring to the fact that her daughters felt successful and they enjoyed doing the activities practiced in physical education class. In fact, they were motivated to do those same activities at home. This mother remembered that when the teacher covered jumping rope in physical education class at school, her daughters practiced for three weeks at home in the evenings with a clothesline in the basement. The actions of her daughters were enough to convince her that good things were happening in the program.

Nonetheless, it wasn't just her daughters' reactions to the jump rope unit that played a significant role in the development of her perception of the Sunny Brook physical education program. She talked about other influences as well.

...I get a general impression from the kinds of conversations that I have had over the years that the PE teacher has certain standards... there are expectations...it isn't just all fun and no work...there's always something that she's [PE teacher] trying to accomplish with the kids.... (#4013-2, pg.7)

These conversations were with other parents, with different teachers, and with her children. In addition to hearing a consistent message from a variety of sources, she heard it over a period of years.

One incident that occurred when Kelly first began teaching at Sunny Brook stood out in this woman's memory.

...She [PE teacher] had problems with my daughter for a while...she kept getting Ns on her report card for PE, not because of her physical abilities, but because my daughter wouldn't settle down and follow directions... from that I got the idea that cooperation was probably very high on the PE teacher's agenda and I knew that my daughter was not big on cooperation...but I didn't want to confront her [the physical education teacher] with it... I didn't want to do what a lot of people did, which was bitch when their kid got a bad grade [in physical education]...because I respected her right to do that. I thought it was appropriate. My daughter had to be responsible for her own behavior and she had to learn how to respond to the PE teacher...I just decided that it had to be worked out between them... and now they get along well.... (#4013-2, pg.10)



Not only had Mona consistently heard from various sources over a period of time that certain things were expected in physical education class, but she agreed with the teacher's actions, even when those actions affected her child's grade. In the long run, however, the relationship that developed between her daughter and the physical education teacher was a positive one.

In light of this information, Mona also said she knew more about her daughter's academic subjects than she did about the physical education program. She explained how she found out what her daughter was doing in her academic subjects.

...Most [classroom] teachers don't sit down and say 'this is my curriculum, this is what I'm trying to cover'. The only way you ever get a sense of that is if you start reading the homework. And because there is no written homework for PE generally, it's a little bit harder to find out what's going on beyond the conversation...so, it would just be nice to have some kind of overview of what's happening in PE class or why they do what they're doing in PE class...because everything that I've told you is based on inference...I'm aware enough to know certain things [about the program] but I'm just curious as to how the whole thing fits together, because I think there's a whole lot more going on there.... (#4013-2, pg.18)

Mona said that she would like the same opportunity to learn about her child's physical education program as she had to learn about her child's academic programs. Mona acknowledged that she did not expect written homework to be



given in physical education class, but she still thought physical education was important to her child's overall development.

Finally, this parent again recognized her lack of expertise in the field of physical education, but in no uncertain terms established the criteria by which she judges this particular program.

...I don't know what state-of-the-art is in PE, I haven't got a clue. Just whatever is in the popular press about exercise in general is where my information comes from...I have no idea what the theoretical criteria are or anything...I don't know what people are saying PE should be like...but I do know that she's [physical education teacher] given them the right attitude towards doing things with their bodies and taking care of their bodies... I do know that I'm happy with my daughter's attitude and the fact that she's interested [in physical activity outside of school]... she's [the physical education teacher] got a great attitude and she's done a terrific job there...she's on the right track as far as I'm concerned.... (#4013-2, pg.22)

Here's a mother who doesn't know as much as she would like to know about her daughter's physical education program, but who approves of what she believes is happening there. This is a perception that she has formed over a period of time and it is based on a variety of accounts from different sources. Her mention of "theoretical criteria" in physical education suggests that Mona thinks physical education classes might involve a great deal more than simply playing games.

When Mona talked about her vision for the perfect physical education program, she mentioned that she would include what Kelly is currently teaching the children and she would also add a few ideas of her own, such as golf, swimming, bowling, track and field, and tennis. Mona said she would have the children doing as many different things as possible. Mona also stressed the point "that getting parents involved would be a bonus". In response to a direct question of where she believed her ideas for a perfect program originated, she responded "from my own physical education experiences".

In short, the semi-informed, supportive, interested parent is one who has a considerable amount of general information about their child's physical education program (i.e., names of general unit topics covered) which is gleaned from a variety of indirect sources such as their child, other parents, and other teachers. What is noticeably absent is any information about the physical education teacher (i.e., her behavior as a staff member or beliefs as a teacher). Nonetheless, this type of parent makes an ongoing effort to acquire information about the program and is genuinely interested in it.

If an issue arose between the physical education teacher and their child, this type of parent would not automatically intercede on the side of the child. Such parents know at least some of what is occurring in physical

education classes, believe it generally is beneficial to the children, and it seems reasonable to assume, would be inclined to support the program in the face of adversity.

Betsey: The Well Informed, Very Supportive, Interested Type

Betsey, a white woman between the ages of 36 and 40, was married and had three school age children. She had lived in High Hill all of her life and had attended public school in the High Hill school system. She worked as a bookkeeper and served an important role in the functioning of Sunny Brook School as a PTO Co-President. She was very outgoing and energetic.

Betsey was the only parent of the 27 interviewed who had a great deal of accurate information about the physical education program at Sunny Brook School. During the interview she provided very detailed information about the program, including (but not limited to) the following: (a) activities offered in her son's physical education program; (b) Kelly's sneaker system; (c) the "super squad" program; (d) Halloween Obstacle Course; and (e) Jog-A-Long. She had accumulated this information from a variety of sources such as her son, informal conversations with Kelly, periodic observations of the physical education class, PTO meetings, interactions with other teachers in the building, and conversations with other parents. With all of these sources



available, Betsey was able to ask Kelly direct questions or see first-hand what was being talked about by others as a way of verifying the information she was receiving.

Not only was she accurately informed about the specific class activities that were being covered by Kelly, but Betsey was able to provide her insights on the development of Kelly's relationship with the children who attend Sunny Brook School.

...I can remember Kelly's first year. I know she was real tentative and nervous...I heard [through the grapevine] that she was really strict with the kids, which was good, but I think she found herself getting too strict and she was losing a lot of the kids...then, part way through the year, she just took that hard shell off and it was like 'here I am'...and now, she just has the love and respect of all the kids because she's so open with them. She's still strict with them, but it's in a different way and she really has their respect....  
(#2008-2, pg.1)

Again, this was Betsey's perspective on how Kelly changed during her first year of teaching as well as on how the children feel about Kelly.

Betsey went on to talk in more detail about the social climate in the physical education classes.

...She really encourages the kids a lot...she really boosts them up...her whole philosophy is that everybody needs to be trying their best... and she realizes that everyone's strong point is not athletic success...all kids get equal chances to be successful in Kelly's classes... I think it's wonderful and she's just so dynamic with the kids and fair. I know when I was in school, I was not real successful in phys. ed. and I mean if you didn't play a particular sport like field hockey, then you were just kind of left behind and you weren't taught or given a



chance...and I can remember getting a real down feeling a lot because I wasn't good...but Kelly doesn't treat the kids like that at all...she reinforces them and makes them feel good about what they can do...she just makes it so much fun...and she's keyed in on where the kids are and their different ability levels. To me, that's real important.... (#2008-2, pg.3)

Here, Betsey compared her own experiences to those of the children in Kelly's program and she noticed some distinct differences. Kelly was very positive with the children and she did not teach only to the highly skilled athletes.

To further illustrate her point, Betsey talked about her own three children and how they were all different in their physical abilities and interests, yet each one "loves going to gym". To her, the way that Kelly dealt with the children was particularly important. Betsey thought that because Kelly was very fair with all students, they were motivated to work hard while enjoying their physical education experiences.

Betsey also talked about other behaviors that she had observed.

...Kelly doesn't end with being the gym teacher. She's like friends to kids, the faculty loves her, she's one of our PTO advisors...She's just a dynamic person... We were here at the beginning of the year and she was unpacking boxes of books. That's not her job but she's always doing 200% above and beyond. It's like whenever she can help someone, she's willing to do it.... (#2008-2, pg.8)

Betsey recognized that in her own way, Kelly was willing to do things outside of her job description in order to make herself an important part of the school staff.

What was Betsey's vision for the perfect physical education program? She said that Kelly was already doing all of the things that she believed were important to a physical education program. From Betsey's viewpoint, Kelly was teaching a variety of basic skills, she was challenging all the students and making class enjoyable for them, she was teaching them about cooperation and sportsmanship, and she was building their self-esteem. These were all of the things that Betsey had missed in physical education classes when she was growing up and she was delighted that Kelly was doing them with her sons.

The well-informed, very supportive, interested type of parent has a considerable amount of specific and accurate information both about the physical education teacher and the program. For example, this type of parent knows about the incentive programs, social climate, specific units, teacher's personality, and teacher's behaviors as a staff member. This information is acquired in an ongoing way from a variety of direct sources -- personal observations, conversations with the physical education teacher, other parents, the child -- all of which are used to verify what has been previously understood.

Should a conflict arise between the physical education teacher and the child of this type of parent, the parent would respond by ascertaining the details of the situation from both the student and the teacher. In addition, this type of parent would offer to reinforce certain desirable class behaviors at home as a way of demonstrating continuing support for the physical education teacher and the program.

#### Question Set #2 -- Parental History

In this section, data will be presented that deal with the question of what parents remember about their own experiences in physical education. The reason for this is that in an earlier pilot study (Appendix A), parental history appeared to be a salient factor that influenced parents' current perceptions regarding the details of and significance of their child's physical education program. It will be important for the reader to remember these general responses when reading the last chapter of this document.

To obtain material for this question set, the researcher asked parents to talk about their own experiences as children in physical education classes (i.e., where those experiences took place, what they did, what was good and bad about those experiences, what they learned). Parents also were asked to talk about their former physical education teachers. Finally, they were asked to talk about their own participation in sport activities outside of school. The



parents' responses to these interview questions provided an important framework for understanding the factors that influenced their responses to additional questions about their child's physical education program as well as their visions for physical education.

#### Parents' Memories of Physical Education Classes

The experiences in physical education classes that all the parents were able to remember most clearly were either those that were absolutely disastrous or humiliating from their perspective or those experiences that were particularly exciting to them. While the types of things that were remembered depended upon the individuals themselves as well as the power of those experiences, there was one common thread -- most of the parents were unable to reconstruct a clear picture of their childhood physical education program. Instead, the parent group as a whole was only able to recall fragmented, emotionally-charged pieces of information regarding their physical education program and teachers.

As the data were sorted and reviewed, it became evident that the school system in which they had received their physical education instruction was one important factor in shaping how parents thought about their own experiences. Thus, the parents who were interviewed for this study were classified by school attendance in one of the three following situations: (a) the High Bluff school system, (b)



parochial schools (both in the High Bluff system and in other towns), and (c) public schools in other systems.

#### Parents who Went Through the High Bluff School System

Eleven of the 27 parents who participated in this study attended Sunny Brook Elementary School, went through the High Bluff school system when they were children, and are still residing in the same town. This was a unique opportunity, therefore, to get a variety of individual perspectives regarding the history of one physical education program.

Since nine of those parents were female, they provided a fairly clear picture of the programmatic offerings and their sense of the teachers who taught girls' [ages 6-18] physical education classes. In fact, these women experienced the High Bluff physical education program from different vantage points. That is, some were athletically inclined, some played on sport teams, some were not athletically inclined, and all had different personalities, yet their recollections bear a striking resemblance.

From the conversations with them, it appears that they had physical education twice a week in gender-segregated classes. These parents attended Sunny Brook Elementary School in the 1960s, and the elementary physical education classes were remembered by one female parent in the following manner:

...Throughout elementary school we did just a lot of running and calisthenics, honestly.

We didn't do much with games or learning sports -- nothing...we [boys and girls] would be in the same gym, but we never competed against one another. We did races [and] the boys would race with the boys, the girls with the girls because they [the teachers] were still convinced that girls would just never be as good as boys. They didn't want to hurt anybody's feelings so they separated us.... (#3020-1, pg.19)

This woman remembered physical education classes as being a lot of hard physical work and she picked up on the way the girls were treated differently than the boys. Her way of justifying this experience was to say that the teachers did not want to embarrass anyone, but it was a terrible experience for her. When this same parent was asked to talk about what was good about physical education classes for her as a child, she responded:

"... in my case I couldn't keep up with the other kids, so I didn't want to do it [physical education]. I hated doing it...I'd rather eat worms than go and be absolutely embarrassed in gym class...." (#3020-1, p. 23)

This parent did not enjoy physical education at all and tried to get out of it.

In addition, she referred to the limited curricular offerings, as did another of her former classmates:

...I always enjoyed it. I don't remember disliking it, but the only thing is we did a lot of repetitions of the same thing...maybe that's why all I can remember is that red ball... I don't think it was a creative curriculum so you got sick of playing kickball again...it was like, 'oh we're doing that again'.... (#2008-1, p.31)

There is an obvious discrepancy in the comment of this parent. On the one hand, physical education was redundant and boring, yet she said she enjoyed it. Her sense of enjoyment came from being able to move around and take a break from academic work.

Another parent was able to recall only one short excerpt regarding her elementary physical education classes:

"...[we would] sit and pass the ball in a circle and we played Dodgeball and that's what it [physical education] was. And that's the only thing that sticks in my mind...."  
(#3016AB-1B, p.9)

It is possible that the Dodgeball is a big part of her memory because she was either very successful or very unsuccessful when playing that game.

Another female parent remembers something slightly different about elementary physical education class:

...I still remember crawling around the gym like a crab. I can't remember what you call it anymore but we used to have to crawl around like a crab backwards and kick one of those huge balls. I also remember going outside at one point and playing with the parachute... as I got older, I have more memories....  
(#2021-1, p.29)

Notice that most of her memories are centered around the equipment that was used in class. She went on to say that these were among her favorite activities as a child.

One particular parent admits not remembering very much, yet she offers more of an explanation for her lack of memory than other parents were able to articulate:



...I don't have a lot of memories of that [elementary physical education] to tell you the truth. When I was in elementary school I was extremely shy, so that's probably part of why I can't remember a lot of it. It [physical education class] was too upsetting for me. I didn't get really involved.... (#1013-1, p.32)

Later in the interview, this parent discussed one of those upsetting events that took place in elementary physical education class:

...One of the things I remember [is that] it used to be tough on the kids when they [teachers] would let the teams pick each other. I was never one of the first ones to be picked, but I was never one of the last ones either. I always thought it was hard for the ones that really weren't athletic at all and who didn't have a whole lot of skills...and they must have hated gym. I can understand that because it [physical education] just should be a learning thing for everybody and not just for people who excel in sports...I don't think the physical education classroom is the place to really stress who is good and who's not because I think that stuff stays with you for a long time.... (#1013-1, p.35)

This parent had intentionally blocked out many of the experiences that she had, or had witnessed, in physical education classes. It was obvious that despite her references to the negative effects those experiences had on others, they affected her too.

All the parents in this study struggled to remember their experiences in elementary physical education. For many, these experiences took place 30 years ago and at the time their experiences were so monotonous that they would not stand out in their memory. In some cases, the parents



interviewed had experiences they would rather forget. From their recollections, however, the elementary physical education content appeared to be centered around games of low organization, calisthenics, and running.

Parents were able to remember their junior high and high school physical education classes with somewhat more detail than they were able to remember their elementary physical education classes. Their more distinct memories can be attributed to their own maturation -- that is, high school students are more developmentally ready to commit the events of their lives to memory and are more cognizant of that. The recency of the experience itself could explain their ability to more clearly remember it. Another explanation might be that in high school these parents experienced physical education classes that closely resembled organized sport, an institution that permeates our society, thereby constantly triggering parents' memories. Regardless of the reasons, the fact still remains that these parents could recall their experiences in high school physical education with greater detail.

During the interviews, parents were asked to reminisce about what physical education classes were like for them as students. The open-ended nature of this question allowed for a variety of individual answers based on their ability to recollect. As a general rule, the female participants recalled memories of various activities that were practiced

in class, of the Presidential Fitness Test (given annually), of taking showers, and of being required to wear a uniform during physical education class.

One female parent talked about her experiences in this way:

...Junior high and high school were great because in that time you had a little uniform... the girls were in one group and the boys were separate from them. We got to go outside and play field hockey. We learned basketball, soccer, and volleyball. We got to use the balance beam in high school, the rings, and the horse... oh, and the pool for swimming. I liked gym, that was a good period for me.... (#2010-1, p.29)

This parent appeared to enjoy her physical education classes. The uniforms were not a bother to her and she liked having classes that did not include boys. In addition, she enjoyed playing the different sports and being active in class.

For the most part, parents truly enjoyed their high school physical education classes and that is evident in this report from a highly skilled female:

...I loved gym...I loved the gymnastics, the basketball, and we did volleyball for a while and then they [the teachers] would switch over to another sport, and we'd get the fundamentals like field hockey and soccer...I had fun, I felt great...you know, when you got a hit, it was great...it was a good feeling...but I also remember trying to climb a rope and I could never do that. That was the most frustrating thing for me, climbing that rope. I mean why do we have to climb a rope? I also didn't like the fact that I had to be in front and center to do exercises. I liked to be in the back. That was miserable for me.... (#4018-1, p.18)

This parent particularly enjoyed the success she experienced in several activities; even so, her disappointment was obvious when she was unsuccessful or when she felt she was on public display.

Another female parent who described herself as a "jock" talked about her memories of physical education class:

... Like my daughter, I also enjoyed my physical education class the best, except when I got to high school and had to do swimming. I hated that because at that point you have to worry about getting you hair done before the next class.... (#3006-1, p.24)

It is interesting that she had generally favorable memories of her physical education classes, but that the one specific memory she could recall had to do with getting her hair fixed.

There was one event that each parent mentioned -- the Presidential Fitness Test.

"...We spent a lot of time in that Presidential Fitness Test...we practiced up and then we tested for like two weeks. I remember every week you would spend part of the time practicing...." (#3006-1, p.25)

It is unclear if this parent meant that there were fitness activities included in each physical education class or if one class each week was devoted to practicing for the test.

For many of the parents interviewed, simply participating in the Presidential Fitness Test was a negative experience. They felt sore afterwards and often felt unprepared to make high scores on it. One parent talked about how that affected her.



"...The part that wasn't so good was when you had to take the physical fitness tests...I remember getting older and not being as athletic or not doing as well as the next kid and feeling inferior...." (#2021-1, p.32)

She remembered the test as a negative experience and when she did not perform well for the test, that experience became even more psychologically painful.

Another parent talks about the process of showering after physical education classes. In her description she makes a distinction between the way she felt then and how she feels now:

...We had to take showers at the time and I hated it. You know, at that age having to take a shower in a room full of girls was embarrassing...you look back on it later and you realize the importance, but at the time it was not so great.... (#2021-1, p.32)

While the locker room procedures of taking showers with little or no privacy were usually a negative topic of discussion among the female participants, one female participant had a different perspective:

...Yeah, I can remember the gang showers and that never bothered me...I would just go in real quick and come out. You just don't think about it because they'd [teachers] have to check you off...I don't know why, but they had to monitor that.... (#2010-1, p.30)

This was yet another action that was taken by the teacher that the students did not understand. The negativity associated with showering after exercise is a memory that has remained with this parent for over 30 years, and she still does not understand the purpose of it.



Uniforms were another memorable experience, particularly for the female participants. One woman felt her comments represented the typical feelings of her former female classmates:

...I remember those ugly uniforms...they were one-piece, ugly, and uncomfortable to wear...and everybody felt silly wearing them...and everybody used to hate swimming because that meant you had to wash your hair and start all over again. We used to always make up excuses and try to get out of that. [The teacher would say] 'That time of the month again?' and it would be like the fifth time that month we had used the excuse.... (#1013-1, p.33)

This woman's comments were typical among the parents interviewed. It seemed that they would do anything (including telling lies) to avoid the intense public humiliation of wearing the gym uniform or getting their hair wet.

It was interesting that the male participants did not choose to talk about showers or uniforms during the interview. They tended to remember more about the competitive aspect of the class, the sport topics covered, their individual performance, and grades.

One of the men interviewed who attended school in the High Bluff system shared his experiences:

...I'm just like my kids; I couldn't wait to get out of the classroom and out onto the playing fields because I was very competitive...I loved competition, it brought out the best in me...I can remember going out and we'd have to run all the way across the fields...and they'd let you play kickball and baseball...I remember one time we had to do

square dancing and [at the time I thought] that was the stupidest thing...looking back on it, I don't think it was so bad...Even through high school I used to look forward to gym... there was no question that I could have stayed in the gym all day. The funny thing was, as active as I was in sports and stuff, I never excelled in gym. I only got Bs in gym. That used to piss me off...I was always the first one dressed and on the floor; how come I never got As in gym?... (#3016AB-1B, p.13)

Here was a person who was excited about gym class, yet he could not understand why he always received a B grade. He was visibly puzzled and frustrated by that, even during the interview.

The junior high and high school curriculum, then, was a collection of units organized around seasonal sports. The classes were gender-segregated, students were required to take showers as part of their grade, calisthenics were used as a warm-up, and then the class played sports. The Presidential Fitness Test was given at least once each year and the students could predict the unit topics according to the time of the year (i.e., in spring, softball and baseball; in winter, basketball and volleyball).

The general lingering sentiment regarding high school physical education appeared positive; nonetheless, all participants mentioned at least one experience that they did not completely understand, that they felt was unfair, or that they personally disliked. The following statement is one by a female participant who (like others) disliked

several activities practiced in physical education class, but in the end decided that overall she enjoyed the class:

...Well, I'll tell you something, it [physical education class] did break up the day. You got a lot of frustrations out and you got to go outside, which was great. It was something that cleared out your head and helped you get a lot of energy out so that you could sit for a little bit longer and pay attention a little bit closer in the next class....  
(#3016AB-1B, p.10)

It appears, then, that this person (like several of her former classmates) looked beyond her own dislike of a particular sport, like basketball, to her perception of the larger purpose of physical education -- a movement class that gave students a break from academics. It was because of her sense of a larger purpose of physical education that she was able to say she enjoyed the class, not specifically because she had positive, beneficial learning experiences there.

In fact, when parents were asked what they had learned in physical education classes, each gave at least one of three primary responses: (a) nothing, (b) the rules of some sports, and (c) sportsmanship. Further, the majority of these participants indicated that their sporadic participation in after-school sports and activities had a much greater impact on their current decisions to lead active, adult lifestyles than their participation in school physical education classes.



## The Physical Education Teachers in the High Bluff System

In addition to their memories of what physical education class was like for them, participants were also asked to share what they remembered about their physical education teachers. In doing so, parents provided a clear picture of what the social climate must have been like. From the interviews it seems that there were four teachers who stand out in the memory of the female participants: Mr. Foster at the elementary school, Mrs. Wheeler at the middle school, and Mrs. Beale and Mrs. McCurley at the high school. The words of parents best describe what these teachers meant to them.

Mr. Foster. He was the teacher at the elementary school and many of the students thought very highly of him.

...The teacher I had in the fourth grade was the most wonderful [teacher] and definitely ahead of his time because he was so encouraging with the girls. He would applaud you when you did something well and if you didn't do too well, he'd always tell you that if you kept trying you could get better...I remember him as being so nice, so encouraging, and so supportive.... (#3020-1, p.24)

"... He was so energetic about it [physical education]... He had so much enthusiasm that it was contagious...." (#3006-1, p.26)

These parents remembered Mr. Foster for the gentle and kind ways that he treated them. He apparently was progressive in his thinking about the capabilities of girls in physical activities and he left a lasting positive impression on his students.



Mrs. Wheeler. Mrs. Wheeler was the physical education teacher at the High Bluff Middle School at the time that these parents attended.

"...The [physical education] teacher we had at the middle school was fun. She used to make us laugh and we enjoyed [class]. She seemed to like everybody. She was a nice teacher...."  
(#1013-1, p.37)

Again, what this person remembered was the enjoyment she experienced from being a part of the class. This parent seemed to like the teacher and feel that the teacher liked her.

Ms. Beale. Ms. Beale was one of two teachers at the high school. Her patience with the students also made a lasting, positive impression on them.

"... We had a different teacher for swimming and I think she had a great attitude. I can say she was really trying to teach us something that we could really use later on...." (#2021-1, p.35)

"... I remember we had a very young swimming teacher at the high school who was very enthusiastic and well-liked by everybody... and my God, she had the patience of a saint...."  
(#3016AB-1B, p.17)

They talked about what they learned from her -- not only some very useful sport skills, but they knew she cared about them as individuals.

Mrs. McCurley. Mrs. McCurley was the other high school physical education teacher. At the time that most of these parents had her in class, she was reportedly in her mid-50s.

She too, made quite an impression on these parents, but in a different way than the other teachers mentioned thus far.

...We had a gym teacher in high school that no one liked. She must have been in her fifties back then and she was really mean...she did a lot of yelling...I always thought she just hated women...she taught us what we had to know but she didn't make it enjoyable and that's one of the reasons that people always tried to skip. She was just tough. She wasn't like a friend or someone who was fun...She was in great shape, but if you weren't like that, I felt that she didn't like you...I always felt she really liked you if she knew you were really athletic, but if you even looked like you were feminine or you just weren't as athletic, she made your life tough.... (#1013-1, p.36)

"... I remember in high school, I had an older woman who was like a drill sergeant that nobody liked and she was tough. And the attitude was much more discipline and it wasn't so fun anymore...." (#2021-1, p.35)

The parents made the point that while they typically enjoyed the activities practiced in physical education class, they did not like this particular teacher.

She was very strict and many parents thought that she did not like them because they were not a part of an athletic team.

"...I don't think she had a high tolerance for students that weren't athletically inclined...." (3016AB-1B, p.17)

...We had Mrs. [McCurley] for a physical education teacher and she was just a scream. Anybody who was on the field hockey team, well, we used to get away with murder. But we used to not have to do a lot of the things the other kids had to do, which wasn't fair.... (3006-1, p.27)

Even a parent who was a member of the field hockey team realized the unfair treatment that non-athletes got in Mrs. McCurley's class.

From the responses of these parents we are able to draw a mental picture of the social climate in the girls' physical education classes of the High Bluff school system nearly 30 years ago. The events which these parents have discussed are real to them and it was clear that several of these parents have not yet recovered from their experiences as children. What is not clear are the programmatic goals of the physical education department at that time, the professional goals and values of each teacher, the personal factors that might have motivated each teacher's behavior, or the professional circumstances under which these teachers may have taught.

Several key points about the experiences of parents who attended physical education classes in the High Bluff school system echoed throughout the voices of these participants. First, the girls were treated differently than the boys. This treatment was often blatantly obvious because of the gender-segregated activities (i.e., the boys competed only against other boys, and the girls (as a group) were excluded from many activities). In addition, the girls were required to wear one-piece uniforms that were uncomfortable and publicly embarrassing, while the boys could wear shorts and a t-shirt.



Second, all participants reported enjoying those activities in which they felt successful while strongly disliking any activity in which they were unsuccessful. When a participant was unsuccessful, they often labeled that event as "publicly humiliating" and one to be avoided at all costs.

Finally, most parents reported that they learned "nothing" during their time in the High Bluff system physical education classes. Those parents who did learn something; labeled it as "sportsmanship" or "the rules". Nevertheless, it was clear that the "nothing" experienced in physical education classes has had a long-lasting and significant impact on the adult lives of some of the parents -- too often in unhappy ways.

Parents Who Attended Parochial Schools (both in High Bluff and other towns)

Unlike the parents who attended High Bluff schools, some parents attended Catholic schools in other systems and then moved to High Bluff at some point after high school graduation. As a result, their responses are as individual and as unique as the classes they experienced. While it is more difficult to construct a complete picture of the programs or teachers they encountered, some commonalities did exist (e.g. physical education as work and play, boredom and no creativity, and no elementary physical education). The existence of these commonalities appeared to be a



function of a philosophy that did not encourage individual differences among teachers and programs rather than a function of deliberately designed curriculum content.

None of the eight participants who attended Catholic schools participated in elementary physical education classes. This was evident from their stories:

...When I was in elementary school there was no formal physical education program... We had the same teacher from the minute we got there [to school] until the minute we left -- no matter what we did...My recollection of gym was rolling mats out in the hallway and having the classroom teacher run us through some exercises...we'd all be standing in rows and the teacher led the jumping jacks, running, and all kinds of strenuous [exercises].... (#2009-1, p.19)

Physical education, for this parent, was led by the classroom teacher and was thought of as a time of work rather than games playing.

Another parent talked about the boredom and lack of creativity that she noticed in her childhood physical education classes.

...I remember being in an auditorium where we had lunch...[we were] all lined up and all doing [exercises]. It wasn't like it was anything special. It was just one person up front and we all had to do an exercise... there was no music or anything, just ten of these and ten of those, so it was monotonous... we would do things like relay races at times, and there might have been a few games here and there.... (#2006-1, p.15)

This parent did not enjoy her experiences and for the most part was uninterested in participating in physical education class as a child.

Other parents never experienced a physical education class at the elementary level.

"... I went from kindergarten to fourth in one school and then because we moved, fifth through eighth in another, and I cannot recall ever having an organized physical education program...." (#3017AB-1B, female, p.8)

"... We didn't have it [physical education] in grammar school. We had a playground but we didn't have a structured physical education course... instead, we'd go out to the playground for recess or lunch...." (#4012AB-1B, male, p.12)

Neither of these parents had a physical education program with an organized curriculum; they simply had recess.

It is important to note that the parents were referring to a number of Catholic schools in different locales that did not offer an organized program for physical education at that time. This appeared consistent throughout all parent responses and reflects a circumstance that was common in parochial education at that time.

For the eight parents interviewed who went to Catholic schools as children, it was not until high school that they attended physical education classes. Each person talked about the frustration they felt when making the adjustment. One nonathletic female remembers physical education classes in this way:

...I remember sometimes feeling intimidated because most of what we did was real structured... the type of things that kind of proved either to yourself or to the teacher what kind of an athlete you were...You wore a specific uniform and you had calisthenics to do. I do recall doing volleyball games but I don't remember it as being fun...It was segregated and the only

time in high school that boys and girls would meet together would be for square dancing... That stands out in my mind because I remember feeling uncomfortable because we didn't normally take gym with the boys...I will say this for it -- it was a point in the day where you could release some stress. I mean you weren't in the classroom and you could talk and interact a little bit more socially with your peers...that was probably the most fun thing about it [physical education].... (#2009-1, p.17)

Again, there is evidence of public humiliation and feelings of being uncomfortable in the physical education class. Physical education class was still viewed in somewhat positive terms, however, because it was a break from studying and a chance to talk to one's friends.

Another nonathletic female parent who attended a different Catholic school talked about her experiences in this way:

...I had it [physical education] and I didn't know what the heck I was doing. I had never played softball before, I had never played soccer before...so I never got picked to be on the team. You know how they always pick teams, well, I was always the last one picked...and I didn't know how to square dance, I had two left feet. I couldn't dance for nothing [sic]. It was like I don't even know how to do [any of] this...and they [teachers] really didn't care...I had no idea what they were doing so I never did it. I skipped class all the time.... (#1014-1, p.48)

This parent could not perform many of the activities being covered in physical education class, but she also noted that the teachers did not attempt to help her learn. In order to preserve her dignity, she avoided the class.



Another parent explained her feelings when attempting unfamiliar activities in physical education class.

... I never played an organized sport outside of school, so when it came to gym class, like volleyball, I was not good...I always tried to serve it and I couldn't do it, my hand would turn beet red. But other people were serving like it was nothing...And then I felt intimidated because if you're not good and people know that, then they don't pick you to be on their team and I hated that...I was always the last one picked and I hated it...I remember square dancing too in gym and it was like, 'square dancing? People don't even do that, why are they teaching us square dancing?'... and the girls had to wear this one-piece, polyester knit uniform with a zipper in the back. God, it was ugly, and you had to wear it...If you didn't you were pulled out of class and sent to detention....  
(#3017AB-1B, female, p.9)

There were no positive aspects of this situation for her. She could not do the activities and therefore was not chosen to be on a team. She believed that adults did not enjoy square dancing at that time and could not understand why they had to do it physical education class. She found the uniforms to be uncomfortable and embarrassing, yet she had to wear them or face detention. To this woman, physical education had not given her any skills that she thought were interesting, challenging or applicable to her teenage experience.

Perhaps her only comfort was in her perception that she was not alone.

"... I often wondered if the average high school student liked physical education. I mean, I know when I was in high school, everybody hated it...." (#3017AB-1B, female, p.12)



From the collective comments of people who attended parochial schools, it would appear that her statement has a great deal of truth to it.

This supporting statement regarding physical education class was made by a high school athlete:

...I hated physical education [class] because it was jumping jacks, push-ups and sit-ups... very regimented...I wanted to be playing softball or some other sport...physical education, that's for the geeks that don't exercise, and that's for the idiots...I wanted to go out and play...I was a jock and that's [physical education class] not for jocks.... (#3017Ab-1B, male, p.15)

While several students were frustrated because they could not perform the skills needed for games they were supposed to play, this person's comments indicated frustration of another sort. He had the feeling that because he was an athlete, he was too talented for a physical education class. Perhaps this is the attitude that the teachers helped to perpetuate.

What did this group of parents learn from attending physical education classes in parochial School? The characteristic answer was "nothing" (#2006-1, p.20). For the most part, physical education classes were simply an extension of the disciplined and regimented classroom. The difference was that in physical education classes the emphasis was placed on students' physical abilities and for those who were low skilled, this accentuation caused a

variety of negative emotions such as feelings of inadequacy, a sense of intimidation, and the experience of public embarrassment.

#### The Physical Education Teachers In Various Parochial Schools

The physical education teachers who taught in the parochial schools were nuns and clergymen (fathers). To these parents, their teachers were strict, regimented, demanding, controlling, and aloof.

"... In high school we had a real slave driver... it was a nun whose chief concern was that our uniforms should not be higher than three inches above our knees...." (#2003-1, p.31)

...She was a nun so she was just real strict... I think she pretty much liked to control a situation actually. I don't know if her thing was for gym or just generally keeping an eye on what the girls were up to.... (#2006-1, p.19)

These women remembered the behaviors of their teachers as being controlling more than helpful.

The men who attended parochial schools had different memories of their teachers, some negative and some positive.

...You learn, depending on the coaches... Speak when spoken to and so forth...but I always thought that they [teachers] were ignoring me and I never liked that. I've always liked the coaches that took time to teach you something and to show you properly even if you weren't the best at it.... (#3017AB-1B, male, p.20)

...Father Lewis was a basketball coach and a gym teacher...and I remember him...he enjoyed it [physical education]. He was a jock and he liked being involved in that aspect of the whole thing. He was a great teacher and he was a fun guy.... (#4023AB-1B, male, p. 17)

The men fondly remembered those teachers who were athletic, caring, and positive role models as being interested in helping them learn in class. It was those moments of instruction and personal attention (provided by the physical education teacher) that left a single positive impression amidst a multitude of negative memories.

Regardless of their physical ability level, the parents who participated in this study did not enjoy their physical education classes in the parochial schools 30 years ago. The people who were highly skilled did not enjoy class because of the heavy emphasis on disciplined calisthenics. The people who were not highly skilled did not enjoy their inability to play certain sports when the opportunity arose. In general, the classes were uninteresting and unmotivating to the students. The teachers were viewed as controlling and aloof -- more concerned with conformity to school rules than with caring about and teaching the students.

#### Parents Who Attended Public Schools in Other School Systems

The eight parents in this group attended a variety of different schools throughout the United States, and making any comparisons among their encounters in physical education classes is problematic. Their experiences serve, however, as a valuable backdrop against which to compare the childhood experiences of the other parents.

Their elementary physical education experiences varied from being nonexistent (as was the case of those attending



parochial schools) to having a program similar to the one at Sunny Brook nearly 30 years ago. At the junior high and high school levels, with very few exceptions, the stories about what took place were the same as those told by participants in the other two groups. When these female parents went to school they weathered the following situations: (a) being required to wear ugly, uncomfortable, one-piece uniforms; (b) participating in a traditional and relatively uninteresting curriculum that revolved around rigorous calisthenics, seasonal sports, square dancing, and the annual Presidential Fitness Test; (c) being required to take group showers with little or no privacy; and (d) consistently receiving strong messages confirming their lack of physical prowess. Given these experiences, it was amazing that they would even want to voluntarily participate in a research project involving physical education some three decades later!

Many of these women mentioned knowing at the time that they were being treated differently than the boys because the boys weren't required to wear uniforms. The boys got to play a wide variety of sports that the girls weren't allowed to play. The boys had opportunities to participate on after-school sport teams that were unavailable to girls at that time. The general response to such blatantly differential treatment was "...that's just the way things were back then." (#2007-1, p.25)



What did these women and men learn in physical education classes? What did they take away from those experiences that still remains with them today? The response of most participants was "nothing". The only thing that remains are their buried, fragmented memories of how things were -- the things that happened to them, the way they were treated or mistreated, and in some cases, a strong determination to see that the same wrongs are not committed against their own children.

Regardless of the context in which physical education classes were experienced by the parents interviewed for this study (i.e., High Bluff Public Schools, Parochial Schools, Other Public Schools), the process was the same. The girls were treated as athletically inferior to the boys. The low-skilled students often were embarrassed by students and teachers alike rather than encouraged or instructed. In general, the physical education classes were uninteresting and un motivating to the students.

#### Question Set #3 -- The Physical Education Teacher

The third set of questions used to guide this case study were focused on the physical education teacher, Kelly. Generally speaking, the research questions were directed toward her beliefs about the role of parents in physical education programs and her current means of communicating with the parents of fifth grade students at Sunny Brook School. It was my assumption from the outset that parents'

perceptions and behaviors would be more fully understood when the perceptions and behaviors of the physical education teacher at Sunny Brook were considered.

### The Role Of Parents in Their Child's Physical Education Program

Kelly's viewpoint regarding the role of parents in their child's physical education program was that the parents at the very least should be supportive. Kelly's definition of parental support, however, requires an explanation. To Kelly, supportive meant:

"...to back up [at home] what I'm doing with the children in school... this includes being interested but not necessarily being involved directly with their child's program... involvement depends on the parent's own situation...." (informal interview)

Ideally, Kelly wanted parents to "back up at home" what the children were learning in physical education class so that physical activity would become an integral part of their lifestyles. When she talked about a supportive parent "not necessarily being involved directly with their child's program", she was acknowledging that parents have hectic lives that may not allow them to spend time at the school. That was not to say, however, that Kelly did not want parental involvement. Kelly also acknowledged that there are many definitions for support but indicated that this was the one which she found most comfortable at the time of the study.

From various conversations and field observations, my understanding of "back up at home" is that it contained a dual meaning. On the one hand "back up at home" referred to exercise encouragement by the parents, so that the children would lead more active lifestyles. On the other hand, "back up at home" meant that parents agreed with Kelly's professional evaluation of their child's behavior in class and then used their parental influence to ensure the child's future compliance. The latter meaning was increasingly apparent throughout data collection and most frequently referred to in my conversations with Kelly, thereby making it, in my estimation, the more significant.

#### Signs of Parental Support

Kelly expounded on the idea of support by saying she believed there were different levels of it and that, "there should be tools in place to allow the parents to show their support through their behaviors." (informal interview) What Kelly is really saying here is that there are a number of behaviors that she accepts as signs of parental support. She referred to the following behaviors: (a) the ways in which parents respond to grades; (b) parent support from the PTO in the form of money; and (c) parents who come by and say hello. Kelly repeatedly made the point that these were the appropriate ways to be helpful and express interest.



The Ways in Which Parents Respond to Grades. At Sunny Brook School, the students receive letter grades for the core subjects of math, English, science, and social studies. For the specialist subjects such as art, music, and physical education students receive a grade of Satisfactory (S), Needs Improvement (N), or Unsatisfactory (U). In the case of physical education at Sunny Brook School, a child's grade was based on the teacher's evaluation of behavior and effort. A child's behavior was evaluated according to the Levels of Behavior (Hellison, 1985) used in the gym, whereas effort was evaluated according to the enthusiasm or lack of enthusiasm with which a child approached the activities practiced in class. The teacher recorded comments in her plan book when a child behaved inappropriately or demonstrated poor effort.

With regard to the report card grade in physical education, Kelly thought that a parent's behavior, when their child's grade was less than expected, served as an accurate indicator of their support for the program. Kelly describes a non-supportive parent in this way:

...when a child, typically a girl, gets an N or a U grade [for physical education class], the parent will call or visit...and say 'I've talked to this parent and that parent and their child didn't get this grade, so I think that my child shouldn't get this grade'...this is typically the parent who disagrees with the grade and doesn't want to know the reasons for it, but instead just wants the grade changed....  
(informal interview)



On the other hand, Kelly describes a supportive parent in the same situation:

...the parent will call or visit and say, 'my child got an N or a U, can you explain why?'... yes I can...and I tell them exactly why the child earned the grade...typically, this type of parent will say 'Thank-you. I'll work on helping them with that at home'.... (informal interview)

Kelly said that she welcomed any parent questions, particularly those regarding their child's physical education grade, but she explained that the way a parent approaches the situation indubitably demonstrates their degree of support for the program. In other words, Kelly views the parents who ask questions, but who then concur with her assessment of their child, as good and supportive parents.

Parent Support from PTO in the Form of Money. A second medium through which parents could show their support for Kelly's physical education program was via money from the PTO. This funding was referred to by Kelly as the "opportunity by the PTO to allocate money for various school programs" (informal interview). Kelly explained:

...Prior to this year, the specialists in the building got no financial support from the PTO... I think this year, though, they [the PTO members] finally realized that physical education was an integral part of the school and they allocated a certain amount of money to be spent specifically for the physical education program.... (informal interview)

This money was raised specifically by the active members of the Sunny Brook PTO and was distributed according to the

wishes of that organization. These funds were not a part of the regular school budget. To Kelly, the money dispersed by the PTO to her program was a clear indication of financial support from a nucleus of parents who were active in the school.

Informal Parent Visits. Kelly believed that the third medium that provided an occasion in which parents could show their support was the atmosphere of accessibility at Sunny Brook School. The general ambience created by the principal and building personnel toward parents and visitors to the school was very welcoming, friendly, and open. By creating an atmosphere such as this, Kelly thought it was the perfect environment to encourage parents to come in, see what's going on in physical education and express their support for the program. Kelly believed parents were expressing their support when they came in and took a few moments to chat informally with her.

This information represented Kelly's perceptions regarding parents and their degrees of supportiveness, but what about her sense of whether these parents of fifth grade children would offer deeper levels of support, e.g., whether they would vote to keep her program in the school? It became clear that Kelly took a different position on the issue of parental support with respect to the definition offered by the author as "a parent's willingness to stand up for or defend a specific program or teacher, particularly in

the face of adversity" (p.7). She explained that, from her perspective, parents only moderately supported her physical education program when it came to budget cuts. Kelly wanted to improve the level of parental support when it came to voting for the continuation of her program, but she was not sure how to do that.

#### Current Communication Practices

Also central to the understanding of parental perceptions were the ways in which the physical education teacher communicated or failed to communicate with parents as well as the ways in which the physical education teacher responded to parental inquiries. This process of communication, or lack of it, may have had a significant influence on the parental responses with regard to their child's program or their intentions to seek information about their child's physical education program.

At the beginning of the school year, Kelly sent a notice home requesting that students wear sneakers to physical education class. Included in that same notice were the days of the week and the time of day during which their child's physical education classes occurred. The only other form of written communication during the year from Kelly to the parents of fifth grade children was one permission slip requesting participation by the fifth grade children in a half-time performance at a local high school basketball game. Thus, the information provided to parents was limited



to the logistics of the program rather than its content or rationale. Likewise, the only form of written information that Kelly received from parents were occasional notes excusing their child from physical education class.

At the time of the study, Kelly generally interacted with parents only when the situation arose. In other words, if a parent called and asked about their child's grade, she returned the call. She nonetheless interacted more frequently with some of the parents because she knew them personally or because they were actively involved in the PTO, thus spending a great deal of time at the school. Still, at the time of this study, it was a rare occasion when a parent not involved in the PTO visited their child's physical education class, even with Kelly's "open-door" policy. In fact, one would be hard pressed to find a parent who knew her goals for the fifth grade physical education program or who could even name the unit topics covered within the year.

Given this pattern, two points are notable. First, there was no effort on Kelly's part to provide parents with detailed information about the types of physical education activities that were developmentally appropriate for the children. Second, there was no invitation extended specifically to all the parents for communication with Kelly



about what occurs in their child's physical education classes or for expressing parental interest, suggestions, or support.

### Means of Increasing Parental Support

Regardless of the level of support that Kelly wanted parents to demonstrate, (i.e., being interested in the program, allocating money for the program, or voting to keep the program as part of the overall curriculum) she believed (at least in theory) that she must reach the majority of the parents in order to get any support at all. From her perspective, it was not only a matter of reaching the majority but also of changing negative parental attitudes. She offered some thoughts on the process of changing parental attitudes:

...I have to find an effective way to get information to the parents...about what their children are learning [in physical education classes]...and then I have to figure out how to get them [parents] acquainted with the information so that it means something to them.... in the process, I hope that parents will get an understanding of how their child's program may be different from their own experiences in physical education, when they were young... but, I also think that it's possible that some of their experiences may not be that much different from their child's experiences now...so, if I can get them information and then they read it and understand and distinguish between their educational experiences and their child's, then perhaps they will change their attitudes and be willing to use some of the tools in place [at Sunny Brook School] to show their support....  
(informal interview)

In effect, Kelly realized that embarking on the process of gaining parental support would require a great deal of long-term effort on her part.

It is important to notice the number of quite sophisticated notions that Kelly holds about parental communication and support. The following represent several notions (stated by Kelly in the excerpt above) that I believe are particularly insightful. First, Kelly understands the importance of getting information to each parent regarding their child. Not only does Kelly think that the parent needs to receive information on individual students, but that information has to be meaningful to the parent. Finally, Kelly acknowledges the significance of parents' own experiences in physical education as children and the influence that those past experiences potentially have on parents' perceptions of their child's current physical education program. These complex views are indicative of a person who has given significant thought to the process of parental communication and support.

Kelly explained that her ideas on changing parental attitudes may appear quite modest, yet she believes there are several roadblocks to achieving an attitude change in order to get parental support. Finding an effective way to get information to the majority of the parents represents merely the beginning of the process. Kelly described her thought process on this matter in more detail:

...I want them [parents] to be more knowledgeable...and one way to do that is to flood them with information, but there's no way to insure that they get it...and even if they get it, there's no way to insure that they read it. I have no control over that...also, I can set up programs so they [parents] can come in [to school], but there's no way of insuring that I'm going to get a good turnout that's necessary to give the majority a knowledge base...I can't make it a requirement that they attend... I could send out a form asking when parents can attend and offer several options and then do an informational night several times... but now I'm talking about teaching children all day and then working several nights each week to try and reach the parent majority... I guess the bottom line is that anything I do is experimental, because I have no idea what will work or what can work....  
(informal interview)

In order for Kelly to invest a great deal of time and energy into changing the attitudes of parents, she expressed rather vividly the need to be assured a significant return on her investment. That return would take the form of parental effort to either read and attempt to understand written material, or to attend an informational night regarding their child's physical education program.

In the end, Kelly believed that the parents would not make those efforts, and consequently she had not acted on either of these ideas for informing parents. The following passage is a telling example of her feelings about the possibilities of informing parents and attempting to change their attitudes:

...It's an ongoing and exhausting process of educating those [parents] who have no idea what's going on...sending newsletter after



newsletter after newsletter and hoping they [parents] read them...of planning and organizing informational nights, developing packets, setting up the gym and wondering if anyone will come... and then I get angry and frustrated because I think, 'Why should I have to do all of this just to be recognized as having a valid program?'... I am a qualified person who is providing an educational and healthy program for the children, just like the classroom teachers are...and they [classroom teachers] don't have to do all of this extra work.... (informal interview)

Kelly's comments about newsletters in the quote above reflect her visions of what might happen in the future, not what she is currently experiencing.

The emotions of anger and frustration surfaced as she began to contemplate the lack of legitimacy that others, particularly parents, associate with physical education. She realizes the negative connotation that the name of her subject matter carried with it. Kelly's anger is not directed so much at the parents but at her world inside the school building. On some level, she understands that her significance to the functioning of the school lies in the fact that she provides a "prep" period for the classroom teachers. Her cry of frustration, however, is a rhetorical one. She knows perfectly well why she would have to sell her program when others do not have to sell theirs. What she feels, however, is the unfairness of the circumstance.

On the one hand, Kelly believed she had invested a great deal of time and energy in this program to make it an educational one for the students, and she did not want to see parents vote to have it eliminated in order to save



money. On the other hand, Kelly believed she was working as a teacher in order to serve the children and that she should not have to educate the parents as well, simply because they misunderstood her area of expertise. Yet, in the back of her mind she thought that in order to keep her program alive in the years to come, she would have to change parental attitudes and in her words, "that's a sad commentary on the educational system." (informal interview)

Her sometimes sophisticated notions about communication and support, as well as the realization that she must do what she considered virtually impossible in order to legitimate her subject matter to children, colleagues, and parents, seem to have created both confusion and a number of unresolved tensions in Kelly's mind. For example, she feels ambivalent and sometimes even apprehensive about letting parents into her classroom, but no one has ever helped her sort out this issue. No one has ever talked to her about the tension between parental concerns and legitimate teacher authority for professional decisions. What might constitute infringements on her much valued autonomy balanced against what might constitute reasonable (even valuable) parental inquiries, exchanges of viewpoint, expressions of interest, and forms of support was never clear to Kelly.

## Question Set #4 -- The School Personnel and Parental Involvement

The fourth set of guiding questions highlighted the attitudes of school personnel about parents. The following were among several questions addressed during the interviews with classroom teachers and the principal: (a) To what degree should parents be involved in their child's education? (b) What are the current ways that various school personnel communicate with parents? (c) What procedures or formal policies are in place regarding communication with parents at Sunny Brook School? (d) What types of conditions facilitate or inhibit parental involvement? (e) How do the school personnel at Sunny Brook cultivate communication and positive relationships with parents? The responses of various Sunny Brook personnel provided some understanding of the organizationally acceptable forms of behavior for parents at the case study site. This understanding provides a valuable backdrop against which to compare the attitudes and behaviors of the physical education teacher (as a member of the organization) toward parents.

### Common Attitudes of Teachers

What were some of the opinions regarding parental involvement that guided the behaviors of the personnel at Sunny Brook School? The principal had several opinions about this topic and he talked about various levels of

parental involvement. When it came to the question of parents simply being able to get into the school for an occasional visit to see their child or meet the teacher, he used this analogy:

...Now, you can do a couple of things when it comes to parents...you can turn your school into an old castle with the moat running around it which means that nobody comes in, or you can take a chance, and let parents visit...And I feel that the benefits from taking a chance and keeping [the school] an open building where parents can come walking in is a chance worth taking.... (principal, p.23)

The principal wanted parents to stop by, see what their children were doing, talk to him, and meet the teachers. In general, he wanted the parents to feel welcome at their child's school.

He also talked, however, about another level of parental involvement -- helping out in the classrooms. In terms of this type of parental involvement, he had explicit boundaries as to what was acceptable behavior in school and what was not.

...Some parents are just wonderful. You could have them here all day long and there would never be a problem for their child. It's not a problem for the school or the educators because we're very comfortable...but I think sometimes the kids are kind of embarrassed by their parents at school... So, for the most part, 90% of the involvement, I favor it...it's when the 10% start bringing neighborhood problems into the school or start bringing in propaganda that doesn't belong... those kinds of things create a negative atmosphere for the teachers and the children and unrest in the building.... (principal, p.28)



An important point to remember is that Jim (the principal) is beginning to build his case for the value of having parents involved with the school who are positive, but also compliant.

When asked if he thought parents should have a role in various decision-making processes that occur in schools, such as serving on a curriculum design committee, the principal gave this analogy.

...Let's just say I'm a brain surgeon, should we do that by committee? If you get two or three other brain surgeons together, then that would be something healthy because then you have a variety of people all with the appropriate knowledge and skill level to make decisions [that are healthy for the patient]...but I don't think that anyone who's had a brain operation figures that they are a brain surgeon, capable of making the decisions of a surgeon...[I say this to make a point] because one of the things that our schools are going through right now is that everybody figures because they have been in or gone through school then they are an expert on schools [and how the schools should be operated]...and I'm not so sure that the community definitely knows what's best for the schools...what I'm trying to tell you is that this is a complex issue, much more complex than people give it credit for and responding to it is a more difficult task....  
(principal, p.31)

The principal was very clearly articulating that from his perspective there are definite boundaries to the ideas and practices of parental involvement. In essence, what Jim is saying is that he welcomes parental involvement in the school as long as parents do not question the authority of professional personnel.



He believed that all teachers who worked within his building were professionals in their field. He viewed the parents as welcome visitors and important helpers in the business of education, but he believed that the teachers should have unquestioned control over their own classrooms. Here, Jim is referring to "control" as the teachers' jurisdiction over teaching methodology and curriculum content. Jim viewed his job as serving and coordinating the children and the teachers who studied and worked within the building. Good and helpful parents, then, should be responsive to the teachers' decisions and not question those decisions.

The points Jim made with regard to his desire for parental involvement echoed also in the responses of several teachers in the building. One teacher talked about the advantages and the limitations of parental involvement.

...A unique atmosphere is created when you have parents in and out and involved like we do here [at Sunny Brook]. [The parents provide] a lot more support, a lot more financial backing. If you [as a teacher] want something, they're there. The enrichment programs that [the parents] have raised money for have been great this year... I almost feel that the more involvement, the better the school to a degree...as long as they don't get into overstepping...What is considered overstepping?...When a parent comes in and questions the way things are being taught because [those ways] are different from the way [the parents] were taught in school [as children]... [and] when they question the type of things that are being taught.... (#T1000, p.10)

This teacher referred to particular boundaries beyond which parents should not pass. Those boundaries also included

decisions regarding curriculum and teaching methods, two areas in which she felt well prepared as a teacher.

A different teacher thought that parents should be somewhat involved in their child's school because their involvement was beneficial to the child as well as the school. When good things happened at a school where parents were involved, this teacher knew that the word got around very quickly.

"... I have found that the grapevine in the neighborhood does 90% of the publicity we may need as far as how the school feels about parents...." (#T8000, pg.1)

The "parent grapevine", then, was seen as a positive way to get the attention of parents who were not involved, thus making the school look good in the eyes of all parents.

Another teacher in the building voiced her opinions about certain levels of parental involvement primarily in terms of its benefits to the children and the school personnel. In this comment, she also recognized the effect of the parent grapevine mentioned by her colleague in the previous quote.

...They're [parents] the best public relations people we could possibly have, so I encourage them to come in...for example, we went on a field trip yesterday and the two parents that came with us, I know they went home and said what a wonderful day it was and how educational and valuable it was...and I went home feeling great about those two parents being the particular ones that were with us on the field trip... [because] I know that they are part of a network of parents, so I know that the good word got out there yesterday.... (#T2000, p.20)

She went on to say that those parents were actively involved with the PTO and she as a teacher appreciated their willingness to be involved. This teacher talked about wanting a greater number of parents involved rather than talking about the extent to which they should be involved.

...It's often the PTO parents that are most involved in the first place...they end up volunteering in the classrooms and for special events...and that's terrific because they are very supportive and they already like what's going on [in the school]...but I want to try and work it so that I can get other parents to come in who weren't necessarily involved with the PTO...so they could also see how neat it is...I think other parents should come and see that too.... (#T2000, p.20)

Her comments made it obvious that she appreciated the PTO parents, yet she looked at the concept of parental involvement as a matter which should include all parents. This particular teacher goes on to elaborate why she believes it is important to involve more parents at school.

...If I have a parent in here and we have a better working relationship, I think they could have a better relationship with their child... then [the child] knows all the adults in their little world are working under the same focus and it helps...I think the more involved they [parents] are, the more support we'll get and the better the child will learn, that's my theory.... (#T2000, p.21)

This teacher's theory was mentioned by all the teachers interviewed for this study. That is to say, in general, the classroom teachers at Sunny Brook wanted parents to be involved in the school, and it was a common belief that if the parents were so involved, the children would benefit.



There was, however, less unanimity and considerable reservation regarding the extent to which parents should be involved in the actual conduct of their child's education. Generally speaking, the classroom teachers and the principal encouraged parental involvement as long as teacher authority was not challenged with regard to teaching processes, curriculum content, school policy, and student evaluation.

#### Formal School Policy and Procedure

Within almost every school building across the country there exists at least one set of policies and procedures that are intended to govern the behavior of the personnel who work there. Likewise, within almost every school, there is an apparent difference between the formal policies and procedures that are written and the operating policies and procedures that are regularly practiced. At Sunny Brook School, an official policy manual for the High Bluff school system was located in the school library and a building policy manual occupied an inconspicuous place among the piles of paperwork in the principal's office. Apart from these written policies, certain operating policies were followed by school personnel but remained unrecorded. Of all the formal policies, only those regarding communication with parents or the involvement of parents will be discussed in this section.



The official policy manual for Sunny Brook, under the heading of communication with parents, includes the following statements:

It is important for teachers to establish and maintain effective communication with the parents of their students. In addition to periodically having students take home work which they have done in school, it is frequently desirable to send home duplicated notices about classroom and school activities. These should be well written, dated, and signed by the teacher or principal issuing the notice. Notices and letters to parents must be cleared through the school office before being sent home. (p.316)

The building policy manual for teachers at Sunny Brook School includes the following single excerpt regarding communication with parents.

"The school will close several times this year to allow teachers time to schedule conferences and curricular sessions. Teachers are also expected to be available for additional conferences at parents' requests. The dates are listed on the school calendar." (no page number)

These written policies for communicating with parents were on file, yet the understanding of several teachers was somewhat different. One teacher explains her understanding of the formal policies at Sunny Brook School.

"...The only formal policy that I know of is that once a year it is required that you meet with every parent, or document the phone calls that you have made [attempting to schedule a conference]...." (#T2000, p.1)

A different teacher explains her understanding of the formal policies on communication with parents:

...It is suggested that you meet with the parents at least once...and you do the best you can, like if you get refusals and the parent

is not willing to come in [at that time] or doesn't want to take the time off from work or whatever, then that's the parent's choice.... that's about it, I think [in terms of a formal policy]...and if there is anything else, I am not aware of it and I haven't been doing it.... (T1000, p.1)

While both teachers articulated somewhat similar understandings of the formal policy regarding communication with parents, they did not regard it as a rigid policy. Instead, that policy was referred to as informal. Teachers' casual attitudes toward the procedure of holding parent teacher conferences was primarily a function of the way the principal approached the topic. When asked how teachers learn about the formal policies with regard to parents or any other aspect of the school, his reply was "in the faculty meetings" (Principal, p.4). He had this to say about his perception of the effectiveness of informing teachers through that means:

...I optimistically figure that only 60% of the information that I dish out [at faculty meetings] is retained... because it's a flood of information and when you throw out a flood of information, the things that will stick are the things with a fair amount of importance at that particular time.... (Principal, p.5)

That is not to say that information regarding communication with parents is viewed as unimportant by either the principal or the school personnel. Rather, as he went on to clarify, there often are issues of greater urgency, such as recent school committee decisions and teacher contract issues, that capture the attention of the teachers.

The principal stated his reason for having only one written policy regarding communication with parents:

...I want to make it very clear that I view a manual of school policies as the restrictive tool that an administrator can hide behind...what happens most often when someone comes in with a situation, they'll [respond by saying] 'well that's the building policy' rather than deal with the issues...that's not the way we do things here...the policies [at Sunny Brook] are flexible enough that we have some written plus we've got some policies that are not written...I can have the nicest policy book submitted, get all kinds of awards, but it means nothing if I fail to address the issues....  
(principal, p.7)

The principal believed it was more important to face the issues and work out resolutions than it was to have a well polished policy manual. His comments reinforced the notion that implicit policies were of more importance than formal written ones at Sunny Brook School.

With both formal and informal policies in place, one might ask the question, "How did the parents find out about these policies?", particularly those policies that pertained to them. This information was transmitted to the parents in two ways. First, information was delivered through a pamphlet sent to the parents of children who attend Sunny Brook School. That pamphlet included the following information about parent teacher conferences.

Parent Teacher Conferences are regularly scheduled during the year as noted on the school calendar. Parents will receive notification of their specific conference dates and times. Parents are encouraged to call the school at any time and ask about their child's progress.



Cooperation between parents and teachers  
inevitably results in benefits for the child.  
(no page number)

The second way parents were informed of the school policies was through the first PTO meeting of the new school year. Since the building included children in grades K-6, the parents of the kindergarten students were extended a special invitation to attend the first PTO meeting. The thought behind this, according to the principal, was to welcome the new parents, inform them of school policies, and solicit their active involvement in the PTO.

As stated earlier, two faculty representatives and the principal attended each PTO meeting. The parents of all kindergarten students, however, were not required to attend this orientation meeting, thus automatically leaving the absentee parents uninformed. At the orientation, the principal explained the school policies, stressing the fact that when parents and teachers communicate and work together children receive the most benefits from their educational experience. He also talked about his process for handling complaints and the "open-door" atmosphere at Sunny Brook School. In the following excerpt the principal explained, in further detail, the reasoning behind this orientation meeting:

...At the orientation meeting, we get into a great deal of detail [with the new parents] about what should and shouldn't be done...so they learn it, but they're not discouraged [from being involved]...what [this orientation meeting] does is it stops a lot of the pettiness and it



makes [parents] investigate a little bit more before they make a complaint. I mean, you're fooling around with professional reputations and if you get this band wagon approach when one neighbor talks about this teacher, then the first thing you know, it's detrimental to the school.... (Principal, p.3)

It is in the words of Jim that one becomes even more aware that Sunny Brook is a typical neighborhood school located in a small town. The principal stated that he understood the contextual conditions under which he was operating, realized the possible damage that could occur, and he took deliberate actions to control the content of information passed along the grapevine.

#### Process of Cultivating Communication and Positive Relationships

The ways in which teachers or administrators cultivate communication with parents, or attempt to build positive relationships with them, frequently occur on an informal level and in private rather than public forms. According to the teachers and principal at Sunny Brook, these informal and unscheduled contacts between home and school are particularly important to developing and maintaining effective communication and beneficial relationships with the parents.

The principal thought that the fundamental aspects involved in effective communication with parents included being "... approachable, available, consistent, and honest...." (Jim, pg.44). These fundamental aspects fit in

nicely with his "open-door policy" for Sunny Brook Elementary School. He explained how these aspects worked in his favor.

...A parent makes a call to my house and I encourage that...Incidentally, I have very few of them call me because I encourage them... they'll leave a problem with me, especially if it's a Friday afternoon, rather than carry it over the weekend...it may have started off as a very small problem, but you get into Monday and it has mushroomed...[if they don't call me on Friday at home] I'll end up giving heck to the parents...I've been in the job so long, the parents can anticipate almost everything that I'm going to do...I've been that consistent over the years and that's the other part of good communication.... (principal, pg. 21)

During his tenure as principal at Sunny Brook, Jim had apparently lived by these rules of thumb, and experienced great success.

As one might imagine, the approaches used by the teachers at Sunny Brook to communicate with parents were as varied as the teachers themselves. Nevertheless, several common ways of establishing and maintaining communication between home and school were apparent -- written notes, phone calls and conferences. In the final analysis, it was evident teachers agreed that it was most effective to use a combination of various approaches when communicating with parents.

Written notes were mentioned frequently by parents as a way teachers communicated with them. The use of written notes was not a requirement or formal policy at Sunny Brook, but several teachers mentioned this method as important in

the development of their relationships with parents. Written notes often took the form of positive teacher feedback on student papers, comments regarding the child's general progress, or requests (by the teacher) for a telephone conversation or parent/teacher conference.

One teacher shared her perspective on written notes and how she thinks they can function as an influential form of communication between the teacher and the parents.

...I like to write long notes to kids on their papers...I direct it to the kids, praying that if I've written a long enough note and the parent sees all of this stuff written at the end of their child's paper then they'll read it...and if I'm saying really reinforcing things to the kid, the parents will read that and know their kid is doing well...and if I write 'you really haven't been doing so good [sic] on these periods and punctuation marks, but I know you know how' then they [parents] also see that stuff....  
(#T2000, pg. 10)

It is clear that she had developed the strategy of providing positive corrective feedback. She is aware that many of the parents do read their child's homework (a fact testified to by parents in this study) and she sees that as a way of communicating with them.

This same teacher went on to talk about the obvious impact her long notes have on the students as well.

...If I've written them [the kids] a big, long, hairy thing, [then] it goes home...I never find those papers on the floor [in the classroom], I never find those papers in the trash...but if I just put a 'good job' on the top, it's [the homework or paper] in the trash or it's on the floor, or it's in the hall and it doesn't go home.... (#T2000, pg.11)



This teacher believed that her technique was effective because the information was meaningful to the children. She also emphasized that if the information was meaningful to the children, then that same information often became meaningful to the parents -- a point that was also underscored by many parents interviewed for this study.

Several of her colleagues also believed that written information was an effective way of communicating to parents, particularly when relaying positive information about their child. Of course, the teachers had differing opinions on this topic and all believed that the types of appropriate comments were specific to the individual student's situation. In other words, there were different ways to communicate in writing -- some teachers sent home comments on homework, and some devised duplicated sheets in which the teacher could fill in a behavior or academic achievement that was worthy of praise. Many teachers agreed that regardless of their method of choice, it was important to use positive written communication to develop and maintain good relationships with parents.

There was, however, an exception to this sentiment regarding the use of written notes as a way of communicating with parents. Two teachers explained why they would use written notes to communicate with parents only as a last resort.

...notes really don't convey [the message very well] sometimes...you [the teacher] write



something and a parent reads it and the way you meant it and the way they read it are totally different...you have to be careful about what you sign your name to...so I think it's better that you just call them and it's more personal too.... (#T1200, pg.6)

...a note is a note...it doesn't say much and you're always careful because you never know how the parent will interpret it...things get misconstrued and then it's just a bad situation... I'm not real big on notes. Personal first, not a piece of paper.... (#T6000, pg.7)

These teachers thought, then, that written notes were too frequently misunderstood and consequently they viewed written notes as less effective than phone calls or face-to-face interactions in communicating and building relationships with parents.

Still other teachers used written notes as a way of requesting more personal contact. In other words, a teacher would send a note home to a parent requesting that the parent call the school or come by at their earliest convenience to discuss a certain matter regarding their child. Most frequently, notes of this kind were sent home when the student was having moderate difficulty in school.

In contrast to the various forms of communication with parents provided by written notes, several teachers at Sunny Brook thought that contacting parents by telephone was an effective technique for establishing and maintaining positive relationships. These teachers talked about experiences in which they called parents regarding their child's behavior or academic progress, and indicated that

the parents were usually appreciative. One teacher described why her telephoning strategy works well for handling situations in which parents need to be informed of a child's inappropriate behavior or a negative incident at school.

...I use phone calls...in fact, most of the time I wait until later in the evening when I think the child is in bed or the parents are free, like 8:00 PM...then, I call and talk with them... their [parents'] initial reaction I guess when the child comes home is maybe they're annoyed, but by then they've kind of calmed down...and it seems like [when they're] in their own home too, they're a little bit more comfortable than inviting them here to school.... (#T1200, pg.1)

Later in the interview, this teacher underscored her perception of the delicate nature of interactions with parents. She explained that by calling later in the evening, she too, was able to calm down and get her thoughts together before speaking with the parent, thus making the interaction more productive and helpful.

For the most part, teachers mentioned relying heavily on the use of telephones for communication with parents. The classroom teachers at Sunny Brook liked using the telephone as a way of immediate communication because it was more personable than a note and in many instances a quick phone call could clear up a situation for which a conference was not necessary.

...many times they [parents] will send notes in expressing their concerns about particular areas and sometimes if it's a minor thing, it can be addressed with a simple call home. Or, if it's of a major nature, then we try to make

arrangements to have the parent in as soon as possible...so that the problem doesn't fester... so it can be addressed before it gets blown out of proportion...and we've found that it serves as damage control, it prevents things from getting out of hand...sometimes just 10 or 15 minutes [on the phone] can set the tone for the remainder of the school year.... (#T8000, pg.4)

What was unmistakable in the voice of this teacher was the continual theme regarding the fragile balance that must be maintained in home/school relationships. It was of the utmost importance to both the principal and classroom teachers to communicate quickly and effectively with parents in order to keep virtually insignificant matters from growing into larger issues.

The strategy for some of the teachers was to give their best effort to keep small issues from becoming larger due to confusion on the part of the parents. When a larger, more significant problem did occur, however, the teachers at Sunny Brook appeared adequately prepared to handle it, by scheduling a parent-teacher conference. Again, it was a matter of the teacher's individual style.

...I will not demand, but I will strongly urge a face-to-face conference if there's a potentially ugly situation...because I've found both mothers and fathers tend to be much more aggressive over the phone...but when they come in, that aggression is toned down considerably...so rather than somebody say running off at the mouth over the phone, I've found that a face-to-face conference is much more rational, shall we say...and it usually simplifies the situation.... (#T8000, pg.6)



This teacher understood the value of holding parent conferences, but used discretion about which particular situations required a conference. In short, this teacher believed that only the most significant matters warranted face-to-face interaction with parents and that less serious matters could be handled more efficiently by a phone call or note home.

Nonetheless, this teacher's beliefs about parent/teacher conferences were not reflective of the majority of teachers at Sunny Brook. Most of the teachers thought that parent conferences should be held as much for the personal interaction with the parents as to discuss the child's behavioral and academic progress. In fact, several teachers believed that parent/teacher conferences were influential in dispelling parental fears regarding the teachers and the school.

In summary, the teachers at Sunny Brook used various modes of communication including (but not limited to) written notes, telephone calls, informal conversations, and conferences to develop relationships with parents. As a group they acknowledged the sensitive nature of relationships with parents, and generally speaking, believed that having the parents informed and involved would benefit the children. These teachers appeared to be well informed about the home lives of the children in their classes and



they were sensitive to the complexities involved in parenting, so that they planned their interactions with parents accordingly.

#### Question Set #5 -- The School and Physical Education

The fifth and final set of questions used to guide this case study was focused on the value placed by school personnel on physical education as part of the school curriculum. Most of the research questions in this category centered on the expectations and evaluations that administrators had for the physical education teacher and program at Sunny Brook. Only one of the research questions pertained to how classroom teachers and administrators ranked the importance of physical education in relation to the other school subjects.

It is sometimes true that the questions used to initially guide the study may not be answered due to the idiosyncracies of the particular study site. That is the case in this study. All but two of the nine teachers interviewed consented to being interviewed during their 45-minute "prep" period. Under those circumstances, it did not seem appropriate to ask them to do a precise and mechanical ranking of the importance of school subjects. Instead, I have accumulated some general information that provides a sense of the degree to which they value physical education as a subject and the physical education teacher as a colleague.

In addition, due to conditions at the time of the study, I was able to interview only two administrators -- the building principal and the physical education coordinator. While reviewing the information gathered from the interview with the physical education coordinator, it became evident that his views would not be useful in answering the guiding questions. This person worked in a different building and was not well informed with regard to the elementary physical education program at Sunny Brook School.

With regard to the principal's expectations and evaluations of the physical education teacher and program at Sunny Brook, he gave no precise answers. Given the overall nature of his remarks during formal and informal conversations, however, my general impression is that he viewed the physical education teacher as an invaluable staff member and physical education as an important part of the overall school curriculum.

Jim made several comments that indicated his support for physical education as an important subject matter.

"...people confuse game playing with physical education.... and they don't realize that [physical education] is a progression of skills... it [physical education] is a critical skill area and it should be developed as such...."  
(principal, pg.58)

Jim's comments indicated that he expected student learning to occur in physical education classes. Further, he was

aware and pleased that Kelly was teaching basic skills to her students and that she had a highly organized and sequential program.

Jim also indicated that he and Kelly had a good working relationship.

...my communication with Kelly is excellent... in terms of if she's got something exciting going on in the gym, she wants to share it with me and with the staff...and, she does so much more above and beyond [her assigned duties]...like at Open House, she's not just standing around in the gymnasium talking with the parents, she's always got something that's a lot different going on... and that makes me say to myself 'geez, I'm proud to have her as my gym instructor'....  
(principal, pg.62)

Jim talked a lot about Kelly's interest in teaching and enthusiasm for working with the students and teachers in the building. Generally, he viewed her as a very positive person who was always helpful and he seemed to like and respect her both as a person and as a trained professional.

With regard to the classroom teachers' expectations and evaluations of Kelly and the physical education program at Sunny Brook, again there were no precise answers. Given the nature of their remarks during formal and informal conversations, however, my general impression is that all of the classroom teachers liked Kelly as a person and believed her physical education program was an important part of the overall school curriculum. As will be indicated subsequently, the latter judgment was based not on the

validity of the subject matter but on Kelly's class management techniques and her goals for certain aspects of student social development.

In my conversations with them, I found the teachers to be generally informed about the unit topics being covered in Kelly's program. They reported learning about the program through a variety of means such as asking their students specific questions upon returning from physical education class, regularly watching a part of the physical education class (either by staying for the first 10 minutes or arriving 10 minutes early to pick up their students), occasionally participating in a segment of the class, and talking with Kelly. Through these various modes of communication, the classroom teachers were able to receive accurate and current information about the physical education program at Sunny Brook School.

During my field observations, I heard frequent exchanges between Kelly and the other teachers. The topics of these conversations ranged from remarks about individual students to the personal lives of the teachers. Regardless of the topic, the communication between Kelly and the classroom teachers was face-to-face, ongoing, and appeared to be both friendly and meaningful to those involved.

When I asked the teachers to talk about what they believed Kelly's goals for her physical education program were, several teachers indicated the programmatic aspects on



which they themselves placed emphasis -- student behavior, student responsibility, student cooperation, and student self-esteem. The comments of the following two teachers are representative of the types of responses given.

...I think it would be a big loss to the children if it [physical education] was cut out of the curriculum...many of the children need it just for practice on how to play with classmates, something as basic as that....  
(#T8000, pg.34)

...I know she does dancing and teaches a lot of basic skills for different sports, and it all seems to be appropriate for the age level... but that's not what I think is most important about [Kelly]. I think she teaches the concepts of cooperation and responsibility... If a kid never learns to hit the ball [I think] that's okay with her, as long as they are accepted and accept others without feeling bad [about themselves]....  
(#T6000, pg.37)

In other words, it appeared that these teachers considered the physical education program a valuable part of the Sunny Brook curriculum because Kelly taught student responsibility, compliance, and good behavior -- all of which were highly regarded by professionals at the school.

Although the classroom teachers at Sunny Brook School were particularly well disposed toward the managerial agenda of Kelly's program, they placed less significance on the subject matter of physical education as an important part of the overall school curriculum. The result could be likened to a double-edged sword in that they liked the way she managed her classes and made the students "toe the line",

even though this was a way of saying they did not fully understand nor care about what was actually being taught in the program (other than good behavior).

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION

The general purposes of this chapter are to provide a synthesis of the findings from this study and to relate those findings to the concepts discussed in the current literature. Specifically, the first section of this chapter will include a summary of several perspectives -- those of the parents, physical education teacher, classroom teachers, and the principal at Sunny Brook School. In the second section, the constructs of effective communication processes as well as perceptions are discussed in relation to the data collected. Finally, implications for theory and practice, and a brief discussion of the limitations of the study are followed by my personal reflections on the process.

#### A Summary of the Findings

In the pages that follow a summary of the parents', teachers', and principal's perspectives will be explained. I will begin with a report of the parents' perspectives as they were the primary focus of this case study.

#### The Parents' Perspectives

A number of parents with fifth grade children at Sunny Brook School reported knowing "nothing at all" about their child's fifth grade physical education program. Those parents who reported having "some information" typically acquired this information from an indirect source (their children) and infrequently. The amount of detailed

information provided by the child was dependent upon both the interest and persistence of the parent and the ability of their child to respond to oral questions. Consequently, many parents operated with information that was outdated, indirect, inaccurate, or incomplete. As a general rule, parents did not attempt to contact the physical educator (directly) for better information regarding their child's physical education program.

One of the major research questions of this study was structured around the degree to which parents' past experiences influence their current perceptions of or dispositions toward their child's physical education program. In that regard, the evidence is mixed. It is unclear in that there was no linear relationship apparent between parents' own experiences and their current perceptions of or dispositions toward their child's program. Rather, such connections were mixed. Some parents with negative personal experiences reported positive dispositions, while other parents with negative experiences reported neutral or indifferent dispositions toward their child's program.

Nevertheless, what was clear is that all parents drew on their own recollections of physical education classes to fill in the gaps where they lacked information about their child's program. This was particularly true of the parents who had attended Sunny Brook School as children. They made



the assumption that the physical education program had not changed in the 20-30 years since they had attended. Hence, parents were unlikely to seek information about their child's fifth grade physical education program, because they relied on what they thought they already knew about the program.

While parents were not directly asked about purposes of physical education, it is evident from close review of the transcripts that most parents believed physical education class was simply a time when children could play games. Even with this underlying belief about the nature of the program, 25 of the 27 parents interviewed reported that their attitude toward their child's program was positive. Parents expressed those positive feelings, however, because they believed it was a "nice break from the academic subjects".

Physical education was perceived by parents as less important than the academic subjects. In addition to the influences of their past experiences and current beliefs that physical education classes did not include any form of significant student learning, parents received several other signals from the school about the importance placed on physical education.

Some parents mentioned the school's grading system -- S, N, U grades for art, music, and physical education and A, B, C grades for academic subjects -- as a signal of physical

education's lesser value. Other parents noted that physical education was omitted from the PTO list of possible ways that parents could become involved at Sunny Brook, again indicating unimportance. Some parents commented on the format for Open House as symbolizing (to them) that the physical education program did not produce evidence of student learning, but of only student enjoyment. Finally, the amount and type of information that the parents received about Kelly's program was infrequent and less meaningful when compared to the information received about their child's academic progress. These subtle signals from the school reinforced parents' existing notions that physical education was not an important subject in the curriculum.

#### The Physical Education Teacher's Perspective

Parents' notions about the relative unimportance of physical education were reinforced by Kelly. She made no effort to provide accurate information regarding program scope or sequence. Kelly extended no public invitation for parents to seek information, observe classes, or get involved in any way with the physical education program (as distinct from special school-wide events) at Sunny Brook School. The only interaction that Kelly had with parents took place infrequently during occasional parent visits to the school or with parents who called to question their child's physical education grade.

Kelly's lack of communication and interaction with the parents as a group arose from her own confusion, apprehension, and unresolved tensions regarding the sensitive issues surrounding relationships between school and parents. Her situation was complicated by a noticeable absence of discussion with her colleagues at Sunny Brook about the topics of communication between parents and teachers and parental involvement in the educational work of the school. Not only did she function without guidance from her principal and the other teachers in the building, she also had acquired no understanding of the issues related to parent/school relationships in her preservice preparation program. Kelly wanted support from the parents, but she was ill-equipped to get it and felt ambivalent about the role that parents should play in her program. No one helped her think about this situation, so she remained without any serious plan for action.

Kelly did not attempt to provide parents with accurate information because she knew it would take an enormous amount of time and energy without guarantee that the effort would help her program in the end. Kelly had the sophistication to realize that her current situation with regard to home/school communication could not be significantly improved by instituting a simple monthly newsletter. She recognized the powerful effect that parental history had on their perceptions. She also knew

that the effectiveness of written material sent home was undercut by the fact that some was undelivered, and much was unread or misunderstood.

On the surface we see a physical education teacher who has developed a quality program and who is respected and supported by the principal, teachers, and children at Sunny Brook School. Parents also expressed a generally positive disposition despite the fact that they were generally uninformed and disinterested in their child's physical education program. A closer look, however, reveals a different picture.

Kelly has developed workplace behaviors, and, to some extent, shaped her physical education program, in order to survive in the hostile environment created by the perceptions of physical education held by other school personnel. By assiduously performing duties "above and beyond" her contractual obligations, and by incorporating (and aggressively publicizing) the organizational values of student compliance and responsibility as a featured component of her program, she has cultivated the approval of adults in the school culture. That this has succeeded at a personal level is testified to by the fact that she is well liked by her colleagues and with good reason, she feels valued by them.

There is no evidence, however, that the same social strategy has altered the relative position of her subject



matter (or her program as a vehicle for the transmission of that subject matter) in the eyes of her colleagues. For example, she has continued her emphasis on skill development in class, but she allows that aspect of her program to remain almost invisible to her colleagues -- possibly because she realizes (whether consciously or not) that the teachers do not understand that aspect of the program, and really do not regard her subject matter as a serious part of the educational agenda at Sunny Brook School. To forward the proposition that students must learn movement skills in physical education classes would collide head-on with prevailing school norms -- providing consequent reminders for Kelly of the marginal position occupied by her subject and, in the ultimate sense of true membership in a community of teachers, of the marginal position occupied by herself as well.

Finally, one can interpret Kelly's performance of additional behaviors in one of several ways. That is to say, on some level (as discussed above) she may sense the marginality of her subject matter and in response, focus some of her energies on other duties that her colleagues will regard as significant contributions to the school. Another way to interpret Kelly's behavior, however, is to conclude that she simply is doing what she believes an

effective and energetic teacher should do in any school -- whatever it takes to create the best learning environment possible.

#### The Classroom Teachers' Perspectives

Unlike Kelly, the classroom teachers communicate with the parents regularly and with regard to a variety of topics (i.e, academic progress, behavior, exchanging advice on how to deal with the child). This communication (most often initiated by the teacher) is usually two-way (in person or on the phone) and through it, these teachers are able to develop relationships with parents of the children they teach. The communication occurs regularly; sometimes it involves a problem, other times it does not.

It was customary for the classroom teachers to terminate their associations with the parents at the conclusion of the school year. With the beginning of each school year came a new class of students and a different group of parents with whom to get acquainted. Several classroom teachers, however, remarked that they continued interactions (on a less frequent basis) with some of the parents even after their child moved up a grade level and that ultimately, friendships emerged from their continued, long-term interactions with those parents.

The classroom teachers, as a general rule, stated a certain appreciation for those parents who were willing to become involved at Sunny Brook. While individual teacher

perspectives varied, the consensus was that parents who wanted to visit the school and interact with the teachers and students should do so in positive, supportive, and socially appropriate ways. The classroom teachers approved of the principal's publicly espoused boundaries for parental involvement and believed that parental involvement (in a limited sense) was beneficial to the development of the children.

While all teachers agreed that parents should be involved at their child's school, they also expressed varying degrees of ambivalence toward the extent to which parents should be involved at Sunny Brook. My suggestion that parental involvement could take place on a deeper level than simply baking cookies, making copies for the teacher, or chaperoning field trips was met with considerable reservation by some teachers. Any parental attempt to criticize or challenge teacher authority was viewed by the classroom teachers as "overstepping the boundaries" and consequently inappropriate.

#### The Principal's Perspective

The principal provides a consistent and very public message that there are certain boundaries for parental involvement. The "off limits" behaviors include actively contesting grades, challenging teaching methods, or suggesting that the curriculum isn't exactly what the

children need. Further, there are formal mechanisms in place at Sunny Brook through which parents learn the boundaries.

Through a written invitation sent out at the beginning of the school year, parents are invited to get involved in their child's school. The invitation includes a list from which parents choose the ways in which they can help. For example, parents may choose to bring refreshments for class parties, provide general assistance (often clerical) to a classroom teacher, or provide assistance in other classroom projects. Providing assistance to the special subject teachers, however, is not an option for parents.

The principal, along with teachers and the PTO leaders, believes there is a potential role for each parent at the school, regardless of their outside commitments (i.e., job, other children, other community activities). If parents did want to play a more central role in the classroom, or to question the authority of any school staff member, that is off limits. Regardless of their choice about level of involvement, it must be positive and must not contest the existing structures, policies, procedures, curriculum or instructional activities of the school; otherwise, the principal views such parental behavior as detrimental.

This situation has worked particularly well for the principal whose power is legitimized by many of the parents, possibly because Jim was formerly their sixth grade teacher.



Parents who attended Sunny Brook as students, therefore, have a long-standing perception of Jim as a trustworthy and competent teacher, and thus considerable confidence in his ability to provide their children with a quality educational environment. It may be that this explains why many parents readily accept the boundaries Jim so publicly and consistently presents.

The teachers also seem to respect Jim a great deal. He has been there a long time and has been consistent in his management style. The teachers (for the most part) also have been in the building for a number of years. All of these conditions have resulted in a very comfortable way of operating. Jim sets out the boundaries for parents and chastises them when necessary. Parents have become conditioned to think of their role at the school not as partners, but as subordinate clients. So far as I could ascertain, the limits of legitimate professional authority for teachers and school administrators were never discussed, much less tested.

#### Concluding Observations

What causes the principal's and teachers' feelings of ambivalence about the extent to which parents should be involved in their child's school? While the principal and teachers advocate the ideal of parental involvement because

of the potential benefits for the children, the extent to which parents are actually involved at Sunny Brook School is markedly limited.

The reality is that working within a school is a demanding job in which teachers are consistently scrutinized by insiders and outsiders alike. In addition, teachers must operate within a system that is hierarchical and in which they have little control over the decisions that powerfully influence their professional lives in an ongoing way. In this system, their classroom becomes a sanctuary in which they have the power to make at least some decisions that directly influence daily events. In that regard, to ask teachers to invite (or allow) parental involvement in deeper issues of pedagogy and curriculum, is to ask them to put at risk their small amount of control -- without promise of clear benefit. It is little wonder then that teachers have reservations about the issue of parental involvement.

In addition to her feelings of ambiguity with regard to the extent of any parental involvement, Kelly alone faces the additional challenge of overcoming powerful biases (held by teachers, administrators, parents, and perhaps even herself) with regard to the relevance of physical education in general (and motor skill development in particular) as a part of the overall school curriculum. The professional isolation (both from other classroom teachers in her building and from other physical education teachers in the

system) that Kelly experiences leaves her to attempt resolutions without the benefit of collective wisdom and shared struggles.

The larger issue at work here is the school as a social institution in which intellectual development of the children is valued as the correct business of education, while all other forms of development are judged in relation to it. The special subjects (physical education, art, and music), when evaluated by those norms, are found lacking and consequently are viewed as peripheral and inferior.

A closely similar example of the challenges facing Kelly was recorded in an earlier paper by Griffin and Locke (1986). They described and analyzed the professional lives of seven physical education teachers and found isolation to be one of several common themes among their experiences. This isolation often was interpreted by the teachers as autonomy, and thus was defended even though it "was achieved at the expense of collegueship and support" (pg.58) -- thus leaving them to resolve professional issues with limited support and few resources.

Given the data presented in Chapter 4 and the summary of various participants' perspectives addressed in the introductory pages of this chapter, we now arrive at an analysis of the findings with regard to communication



patterns between parents and the physical education teacher (and the effect of those patterns on the formation of parental perceptions) at this case study site.

### The Communication Process

The extent and nature of school/parent communication existing at Sunny Brook appears to be a factor influencing parents' perceptions of their child's physical education program. Cooper's framework (1988), introduced in Chapter 2 (Review of Literature), suggests that the components involved in the communication process interact in complex, dynamic, and ongoing ways. Communication influences perceptions and dispositions only when the components operate in particular ways. The intent to communicate is an insufficient guarantee that it will be accomplished -- or that it will have a predictable effect.

Using Cooper's (1988) framework, the communication process may involve up to six components: (a) interactants, (b) messages, (c) channels, (d) feedback, (e) noise, and (f) environment (see Chapter 2). In the subsequent paragraphs, the communication process that occurred between the parents and the physical education teacher will be discussed and the patterns in physical education will be compared to the communication process that occurred between the parents and classroom teachers at Sunny Brook School.



## Parents and the Physical Education Teacher

The data from this study indicate that the interactants currently communicating about the physical education program at Sunny Brook are the children and their parents. These two interactants have different levels of understanding about the physical education program, as well as different abilities in communicating that understanding. On the one hand, nearly all of what children have to say describes particular events in terms of good, bad, happy, and sad. On the other hand, if the parent is to learn anything further about the events (or the wider program) they often must interpret those affectively loaded messages in terms of underlying factual information. This requires considerable guesswork, invites "filling in" from previous personal experiences, and produces an imbalance in terms of levels of interaction that disrupts the entire process of communication.

The messages communicated between the parents and their child are typically concerned with what the child liked or didn't like or with what happened in a particular class. Because most of this information is not concerned with learning, or with what parents consider academic content, such exchanges often are regarded by the parents as inconsequential to their hopes and dreams for their child's future success in school -- or in life. Nothing that Kelly

did altered this impoverished flow of information regarding the content or processes involved in teaching and learning physical education.

The channels through which parents transmit and receive information, whether oral, as in the case of conversing with their child, or written, as in the case of writing a note to excuse their child from physical education class, are indirect. There is no opportunity for messages to be received through direct encounters -- parents do not visit the gym to see and hear for themselves, and they do not talk with Kelly about the program or teaching processes. Thus, verbal and nonverbal feedback are nonexistent. In this situation, the child, the parent's past experiences, and the personal biases of the parents often serve as noise, which may distort or obscure the messages that parents receive about Kelly's program.

In sum, the nominal interaction that was occurring between Kelly and the parents of fifth grade children at Sunny Brook fell significantly short of the ideal for effective communication as Cooper (1988) described it. "Communication is a relationship we engage in; it is not something as simple as sending and receiving messages." (Cooper, 1988, pg.3) Rather than attempting to establish a process of communication with the parents herself, Kelly relied on the children to transmit information about the physical education program. She hoped the parents would

find out through conversations with their children that students were learning something valuable in their physical education classes. In reality, however, the children unknowingly interfered in profound ways with the accuracy of the message that Kelly intended.

Not only were Kelly's intended messages about her program severely distorted, but there was no ongoing dialogue between herself and parents. While classroom teachers taught a particular student for one school year, Kelly taught that same student for seven years -- placing Kelly in a unique and potentially advantageous position to initiate and then maintain and develop extended contacts with the parents. Kelly, however, chose not to approach parents. The consequence of this situation was a missed opportunity to build long-term relationships with the parents that in turn might have improved their perception of the physical education program as well as their willingness to support it.

#### Parents and the Classroom Teachers

In contrast, the classroom teachers all reported communicating with parents regularly. Some of the parents perceived the classroom teachers as having valuable insights regarding their child because of the amount of time children spend in the classroom. With both interactants being adults, the parents perceiving the teachers as knowledgeable about their child, and the teachers generally being willing



to have parents involved (a mutual respect for the contributions of both parties) -- the process of communication was enhanced.

The messages from the classroom teachers occurred frequently, were delivered both verbally and in writing, were specific to each child, and were consequently meaningful to parents. Those messages conveyed information about the child's academic progress, study habits, and behavior in the classroom -- matters of perceived importance for parents whose intent was for their child to succeed in school (an accepted prerequisite for the college education which nearly all held as the ultimate goal).

The channels through which the classroom teachers and parents transmitted and received information were written, verbal, and face-to-face -- each providing different sensory input. Through the use of these various channels, there was also the opportunity for feedback to occur both verbally and nonverbally between teachers and parents. That is, when parents and teachers interacted on the phone or in person, there was the opportunity for dialogue regarding what was being said and the perceived reactions to that content.

Teachers did refer to the noise that sometimes limited the communication process between teachers and parents at Sunny Brook School. Several teachers noted such specific barriers to effective contact with parents as (a) written notes that were often misread or misunderstood by parents,



and (b) misunderstandings that were consequent to the fact that some parents are fearful of teachers and schools because of their own experiences as children. Barriers specific to teachers also were mentioned, such as (a) hurriedly written notes to parents that did not accurately express the intended idea, and (b) teachers (often novices) whose insecurities prevented them from actively cultivating relationships with parents which could sustain the free exchange of information.

To diminish the effect of this noise, teachers frequently preferred to contact parents through direct means (telephone and face-to-face conferences). They consequently tried to make parents feel comfortable during interactions, and used flexible, and sometimes creative, scheduling to provide maximum opportunity for all parents to maintain contact with the school.

In effect, what the classroom teachers did was create, regularly, a variety of different opportunities to personally engage parents in the communication process. Their stated purpose in doing this was to develop and maintain a relationship with the parents from which the children would ultimately benefit. It was the responsibility of the parent, then, to choose the extent to which they wanted to participate in that process.

With regard to the dynamic communication process discussed by Cooper (1988), what occurred in the classroom

regularly was not what transpired in the gym. Where the classroom teachers regularly communicated with parents through a variety of direct channels (such as written, verbal, and face-to-face) that provided an opportunity for dialogue, information about Kelly's program was transmitted to the parents infrequently and indirectly (such as through the occasional stories of the students). In addition, the content of the messages that were exchanged between parents and the classroom teachers was perceived by the parents as meaningful because those messages were concerned with their child's academic progress, study habits and behaviors in the classroom, while the information concerning proper attire for physical education and their child's physical education class schedule (transmitted by Kelly at the beginning of the year) was perceived as trivial.

#### Parental Perceptions of Sunny Brook Physical Education

Data from this study reveal several factors that contribute to the development of parents' perceptions of their child's physical education program. Patterns identified through coding categories showed similarities to earlier work done regarding the three components of perceptions (attributive, expectancy, affective) by Warr and Knapper (1968) (see Chapter 2).

From the parental responses to questions regarding their knowledge of their child's physical education program, it was evident that they assigned certain characteristics to

the program. The determination of such characteristics corresponded with Warr and Knapper's (1968) component of perception called the attributive. For the most part, parents described their child's physical education classes as consisting of basic warm-up exercises, followed by playing games or sports. Physical education often was portrayed as being a social time when parents thought their children could have fun while exercising.

Sometimes parents initially ascribed an atmosphere of fun to physical education, but further thought apparently triggered memories of negative personal experiences and, in some cases, perhaps a projection (of those past experiences) forward in time to their child's current physical education program. In consequence, it was common for those parents to display increasingly negative attitudes toward physical education as the interview progressed.

In the end, a substantial number of parents (17) expressed at least some expectation that students would be publicly humiliated (as they had been or had witnessed); that there was an absence of student learning; that the athletes were favored by the teacher; or the classes were generally boring, repetitive, and meaningless to their children. These expectations that parents had for their child's physical education classes resemble the **expectancy** component of perception outlined by Warr & Knapper (1968).



In addition to the various expectations about what the students would encounter in physical education classes, parents disclosed feelings (such as embarrassment, physical pain, and emotional distress) which they associated with those classes. Such feelings were referred to by Warr and Knapper (1968) as the affective component of perceptions.

These three components (attributive, expectancy, and affective) illustrate the point that parental perceptions of physical education originated from their own previous encounters and that those encounters powerfully influenced parental perceptions of their child's fifth grade physical education program at Sunny Brook School.

#### Implications for Theory: Reflections from the Literature

The information presented in this section represents a comparison of the results of this study to the current ideas represented in the literature on parent attitudes toward physical education as well as some of the current literature on the relationships between parents and schools (see Chapter 2). The ideas expressed in current research are typed in bold, and are followed by a short narrative that links the results of this study to those ideas. This is not intended to be an exhaustive list of current ideas or results. Rather, the concepts that provided a link between my study and the literature were selected.



## Research on Attitudes Toward Physical Education

Generally speaking, parents express favorable attitudes toward physical education (Poitras, 1984; Gillam, 1986; Stewart & Green, 1987; Pritchard, 1988; Loper, 1989). The idea stated above is supported by research reports in which the generic term of "physical education" was used. In many cases, the authors did not specify a grade level or a specific program. In this study, however, parents were asked to express their general attitude toward a particular physical education program in which their child participated.

Twenty-five of the 27 parents interviewed indicated, in response to a direct question, that their attitude toward their child's fifth grade physical education program was generally positive. There were no consistent patterns in the data (from either the interviews or the background questionnaire) indicating that parental attitude was influenced by demographic considerations such as age, gender, household income level, level of education completed, personal exercise habits, or number of children. In other words, parents with differing demographic characteristics reported their attitude toward their child's physical education program as generally positive.

Other factors such as (a) parents' current level of involvement in their child's school; (b) the amount of information parents had regarding the physical education

program; or (c) parents' emotions about their own past experiences in physical education -- could not be directly connected to their indication of a generally positive attitude toward their child's physical education program. This disposition may have sustained its generally positive flavor simply because of the broadly positive place that sport, exercise, and school children's play activities have in the culture.

It is important to note, however, that several parents indicated their child's reactions to the physical education program had at least some impact upon the parent's attitude. That is, if their child did not complain on a regular basis about the physical education program, then the parents assumed the child to be generally satisfied. As a result, the parent was satisfied. The extent of that impact appeared to depend upon the parents' perception of the credibility of their child's comments with regard to physical education class.

The prevailing expression of a generally positive view of physical education may have yet another source -- one within the dynamics of the interview process itself. During the second interview, parents were asked to choose among positive, negative, or indifferent as descriptors of their attitude (or to designate any other word that they thought would accurately depict how they felt about the program). They simply chose a word, but were not explicitly asked to

elaborate on that choice. While all parents responded to the question, several parents commented that it was difficult for them to make a judgment about a program that they knew so little about. Hence, it is possible that some parents responded positively because they did not want to appear critical without substantial reason.

Further, when parents were asked to talk about physical education, rather than specify a simple general evaluation of physical education, the content of their remarks was substantially more negative than positive. The possibility that some of those negative experiences would color dispositions toward the present program, was clear and in some cases, certainly had happened.

Adults are generally critical of the physical education programs they experienced in schools (Snyder & Sprietzer, 1983). The parents interviewed for this study had a wide range of experiences in physical education programs. Some parents participated in a K-12 physical education program, some parents participated in a 9-12 physical education program, and some parents had no childhood experiences in a physical education program. Likewise, there were various viewpoints about the degree to which they enjoyed physical education classes. That is, several parents enjoyed certain aspects of physical education and did not enjoy others. Numerous parents did not enjoy any aspect of their physical



education program. Only a few parents expressed positive feelings about their physical education classes.

Regardless of their level of enjoyment, most parents reported learning "nothing" in their physical education classes -- at the least, physical education contributed nothing that they could identify or count as valuable. Sportsmanship and the rules of some sports were reported by a few parents as being learned in physical education classes, but those were not highly valued by the participants. Instead, parents wished they had been treated with kindness and compassion while being taught the basic skills for leisure activities (e.g., tennis, golf), and the importance of fitness in leading a healthy adult life. In essence, any positive memories of these parents in physical education classes were overshadowed by prevailing sentiments such as feelings of boredom, degradation, frustration, failure, and physical pain.

Parents, teachers, and administrators think that physical education programs should include an emphasis on fitness development and social interaction skills (Gillam, 1986; Loper, 1989; Pritchard, 1988; Stewart & Green, 1987). Parents frequently suggested that teamwork and sportsmanship should be emphasized in their child's physical education program at Sunny Brook School. A few parents recommended the inclusion of fitness activities, but a variety of sport related activities were mentioned most often by parents as



important aspects of a good physical education program. All parents indicated that they thought physical education should be offered more often and the program should include a variety of fun activities that would make a lasting positive impression on their children.

The classroom teachers also frequently praised Kelly's program because of her emphasis on student self-responsibility, student self-esteem, and student respect for the feelings of other students. Teachers viewed this aspect of Kelly's program as most important because (a) they could understand it, (b) they cared about these values, and (c) it reinforced what they were doing in the classroom. Several teachers reported having some knowledge and understanding of the skill development objective in Kelly's program; as a general rule, however, classroom teachers thought it was of little importance.

The principal placed the most emphasis on skill development in physical education. He did so, however, purely in terms of skills and fitness as means -- as adjuncts to academic learning (which he clearly regarded as the primary business of the school). From Jim's perspective, developing the physical dimension of the children would aid them in accomplishing more academically.

#### Research on Parents and Schools

Parents prefer to learn about schools through their children; nevertheless, the practice of utilizing elementary

students (as a solitary method) to transfer specific information from the teachers to the parents invites distortion of that information (Blase, 1987; Cattermole & Robinson, 1985; McLaughlin, Owen, Fors, and Levinson, 1992; Sloan, 1973). The parents interviewed for this study relied on their children as a means of acquiring information regarding the physical education program at Sunny Brook School. The information provided by the child was sporadic and directly related to that child's preferences. As stated in Chapter 4, the end result of this practice was a severely distorted message about what had occurred on any given day in physical education class.

For many parents their child was not only the primary source of information about the physical education program, but the most credible one as well. In fact 13 parents responded that if they really needed to know something about the physical education program, they believed their son or daughter would provide the most accurate and dependable information. Only six parents indicated that they would ask Kelly for information while eight parents would either call the office or speak with other parents if they wanted specific information about the physical education program.

It also should be noted that Kelly relied on the children as a way of communicating with the parents about her program. Kelly thought that if she provided a quality learning experience for the children, then they would

discuss those experiences with their parents. In doing so, Kelly believed that the parents would become more knowledgeable about and (subsequently supportive of) the physical education program at Sunny Brook.

By relying on elementary children as a single means through which Kelly communicated with parents, she inadvertently allowed sporadic, meaningless, and misleading information to be transferred. This resulted in an opportunity for the parents to either fill in the gaps with their own experiences, dismiss the information as insignificant to their child's success in school, or remain uninformed -- all of which contributed to a general unwillingness to seek information about the physical education program and a general lack of parental support for it.

The problematic nature of relying upon elementary children to pass on information accurately that will either influence or inform their parents in a significant way was recorded most recently in a study by McLaughlin, Owen, Fors, and Levinson (1992). They described information transfer patterns from sixth grade classrooms in 21 schools to the home and found that "educating a child does not ensure that the family will become educated as well" (pg. 161). They subsequently assert that "some school children cannot be 'message bearers' unless they are given the skills of assertiveness in communicating ideas to overcome parental



lack of permission, lack of social support, or to get the parent's attention. Even an enthusiastic teacher, an innovative curriculum, and a creative educational technique probably will not be able to overcome an uninvolved, or hostile, parenting style" (pg. 161).

Parents' attitudes about schools and their decisions to be involved are at least partially related to what they know about the schools (Ames, Khoju, & Watkins, 1993; Cattermole & Robinson, 1985; Epstein, 1986; Lareau, 1987; Leitch & Tangri, 1988). The prevalent understanding among the parents was that the principal and the teachers wanted parents to get involved at Sunny Brook School. In my conversations with them, most parents indicated that (a) they felt welcomed at Sunny Brook, (b) their child enjoyed school, and (c) that a unique feeling of happiness existed among both students and faculty. This unique feeling was most often referred to as the "magic" of Sunny Brook. In fact, six parents commented that they had relocated their families (to a certain section of High Bluff) for the specific reason of having their child attend Sunny Brook School.

Most of what parents knew about the school primarily was gleaned from the PTO monthly newsletter, occasional glimpses of homework papers, and limited questioning of their children. Other sources of information reported by the parents were parent/teacher conferences, report cards,



phone conversations with teachers, school events, PTO meetings, and conversations with other parents. Through these sources, parents received a continual stream of information about the school and their child's progress that enhanced their familiarity with the general operation of the school.

All parents expressed a generally positive attitude toward their child's school, and appeared to be generally informed with regard to school events and their child's progress; even so, there was no clear relationship between those two factors and their current level of involvement. In response to a direct question, 13 of the 27 parents indicated that they were moderately to greatly involved at Sunny Brook School, while 14 said they were not really involved or not at all involved. In addition, half reported being happy with their current level of involvement while the other half reported wanting more involvement but simply could not add anything else to their already complicated lives.

Regardless of their level of involvement, all parents had positive comments about the PTO list (for obtaining parental involvement) sent home at the beginning of the year. Most parents indicated that by having different items to choose from, they felt they were able to make a contribution to their child's school that would also accommodate their active schedules.

Several factors -- (including but not limited to) (a) other commitments, (b) comfort level at PTO meetings, and (c) their child's feelings -- influenced the degree to which parents were involved at Sunny Brook School. For example, parents talked about the increasing complexity of their lives and how that factored into their level of involvement.

Three of the 27 parents interviewed had only 1 child, the rest had 2 or more school-age children. Parents discussed the energy and time commitment involved in maintaining a household, accommodating their children's extracurricular interests, and maintaining some form of employment. Most parents felt they could be involved in their child's education by helping with homework (or at least providing a space in which to do the homework) and by attending school-wide events. For many parents, any commitment beyond the aforementioned was a logistical impossibility.

A second factor mentioned as influencing involvement was the comfort level that parents experienced at PTO meetings. This specific factor has not been previously mentioned in the literature, yet it appeared to be significant for some parents as they attempted to become involved with the school. Seven parents reported that they had attended PTO meetings when their child first enrolled at Sunny Brook School, but they felt uncomfortable, somewhat unwelcomed, and generally overlooked when volunteering to

help. All seven reported attending at least two PTO meetings before giving up and dropping out. While the PTO rhetoric was inviting, these parents observed that the same parents did the majority of the work, that the PTO was not willing to use other parents as major contributors, nor was the PTO open to new ideas -- unless they were suggested by a "PTO groupie".

A final factor that contributed to parents' level of involvement was their child's feelings. Some parents reported that their children wanted them to be involved with the school (e.g., help out in the classroom, or chaperone field trips) while others reported that their children would be comfortable with having the parent show up only for certain after-school events. The general response from parents was that if their child did not want them to be involved at the school (during the day), then the parents respected those wishes.

#### Research on Relationships Between Parents and Teachers

Teachers perceive that relationships with parents are typically characterized by distrust and hostility. To handle the problematic nature of such relationships, teachers often develop methods to deal with critical and intrusive parents (Becker, 1980; Blase, 1987; Lortie, 1975; McPherson, 1972; Palermo, 1990; Waller, 1932). There is no direct evidence to suggest that the classroom teachers at Sunny Brook perceived relationships with parents as being



unusually dubious or malicious. Like the teachers in similar studies, however, the teachers (and principal) at Sunny Brook developed particular strategies to handle confrontations with parents.

For example, the teachers attempted to establish a positive tone with the parents early in the school year. This was typically accomplished on a personal level and occurred through a variety of means such as pleasant facial expressions during face-to-face interactions, telephone conversations containing teacher encouragement and empathy, or written notes expressing optimistic messages. Individual teachers elected to use any one or several of these methods for initiating communication with and relationships with the parents. In fact, several teachers believed that a single, affirmative interaction at the beginning of the school year would influence their continued relationship with that parent in a positive way. Their actions are consistent with those reported in the current literature.

In addition, the classroom teachers (and principal) continually reinforced this initially optimistic tone throughout the year as an espoused way of preventing confrontations. Some elected to send carefully written messages to parents that would most likely be accurately understood, while other teachers preferred to use prudently timed telephone conversations and conferences as a way of maintaining the positive tone of their relationships.



If a conflict occurred, teachers (and Jim) generally thought it was exacerbated by a parent's confusion brought about by their misinterpretation of the teacher's message -- a prominent issue also reported in an earlier study by Blase (1987). As far as I could ascertain, the prevailing sentiment (among the classroom teachers and Jim) with regard to dealing with distraught parents was to "nip it in the bud" -- before the issue was blown out of proportion.

To reiterate, while there was no direct evidence to indicate that the teachers at Sunny Brook perceived relationships with parents as being typically hostile or distrustful, there were indications (from both formal and informal conversations with them) that relationships with parents had the potential of becoming negative. Both the classroom teachers and the principal at Sunny Brook used a deliberate process for developing and maintaining positive relationships with parents as well as a strategy for handling complaints as quickly as possible.

#### Limitations of the Study

With regard to the limitations of this study, several points are notable. Only one third of the parents with fifth grade children attending Sunny Brook School at the time of the study volunteered to be interviewed. Of those volunteers, only four were male participants, thus providing data primarily indicative of a female perspective.

Several minor technical problems also were revealed as I carried out the study. For example, the length of the interview guide used with the principal may have decreased the quality of data derived from questions in the second half of the interview. In addition, neither the teachers nor the principal were questioned about their own past experiences in school physical education classes -- a factor which undoubtedly affected their perceptions of physical education, as it did for the parents. With hindsight, I realize I that this might easily have been included in the study design as an interesting supplement. Given those limitations and second thoughts, however, the design seemed wholly adequate for responding to the research questions set forth in the original proposal.

Finally, there are certain limitations of the case study itself as a type of research. That is, beyond the unique elements of Sunny Brook itself (i.e., Jim, the classroom teachers, Kelly, and her physical education program), it is important to remember that the school is imbedded in a community also defined by distinct characteristics such as social class and other population characteristics. Recent studies (Blase, 1987; Herley-Hogan, 1990; Lareau, 1987; Palermo, 1990; Wilson et al., 1983) have made clear that parent perceptions and expectations will differ widely according to context-specific factors such as

race, class, and politics, thus making it inappropriate to extend broad generalizations from a case study such as this.

#### Implications for Practice

While there are no simple solutions to the complex issue of communicating with and developing relationships with parents, several points are clear. Increasing the volume of written notices will do little to improve communication or parental perceptions; rather a variety of communication techniques must be used. All efforts to get the support of parents should be based on the idea that communication is a two-way, ongoing, and dynamic process that influences perceptions.

In addition to the influence of communication, personal biases and past experiences shape perceptions in a powerful way. The information that is delivered to the parents must be meaningful to the parents and must arrive through credible sources on a consistent basis in order to diminish the effect of those biases and past experiences. Some possible methods for providing accurate information about the physical education program are (a) articles in the PTO newsletter or local press; (b) greeting and conversing with parents at Open House; (c) providing parents with tips on how they can help their child at home; (d) making programmatic information available in a personal and specific way; (e) developing periodic assignments that children can complete with their parents; and (f) providing

child-specific, skill feedback regularly. Regardless of the routine developed, one thing is certain -- a combination of different methods for informing parents is necessary.

Finally, in this situation, Kelly needs to develop a network of professionals to provide frequent support and to help her sort out unresolved issues regarding communication with parents, parental involvement, and support. Once those issues are sorted out, Kelly (with input from others) can begin to formulate a serious plan for action and as a result, begin to dissolve the misconceptions about her program.

On a broader level, the time has come to take seriously the issue of parental communication, involvement, and support as they are critical to the survival of public school physical education. In that regard, we need to prepare teachers to communicate effectively with parents, to develop relationships with parents and, to deal with the conflicts that most certainly will arise as a result of those relationships.

To prepare teachers adequately for the challenges they will face, university professors need to do more than simply provide lip service to these issues. We need to provide opportunities for physical education teachers (both preservice and inservice) to use various ways of publicizing their program, practice effective communication skills (e.g., active listening, body language, sending clear



messages) for establishing relationships, and rehearse the skills necessary to resolve conflicts successfully.

### Personal Reflections on the Process

As a final piece of this document I will include some of my reflections on the process of conducting my first major qualitative research study. The points I will make include some factors (positive and negative) that ought to be considered by anyone embarking on a case study, as well as my candid recollections of interacting with parents as research participants.

#### Factors to be Considered

To begin, the first factor to be considered when conducting a case study is timing. Timing is everything, not only with parents but with the school personnel, and the school principal. There are occasions when any request that requires additional investment is unwelcome -- or impossible to accommodate. The timing of an interview is particularly important. If I am tired or a parent is tired or preoccupied, then it is better to reschedule than forge ahead.

Second, expect to be influenced in some way as a result of the research process. I have grown both personally and professionally as a result of the dissertation process. Through it, I have personally learned to believe in myself and my abilities to handle delicate situations. This ability was testified to by the fact that during the data

collection phase I interviewed 27 parents and 10 teachers -- not one person called the school to register a complaint. I have practiced patience (in terms of gaining access to the school and to parents) and have learned to recognize the right moment to proceed when it arrives -- knowing that it will come and that it was well worth the wait. Lastly, I have been reminded that consistent friendliness during each interaction, and a simple thank-you note after an interview, can make a world of difference.

I have grown professionally in terms of my understanding of the communication process between parents and teachers. I appreciate it for the delicate and complex process that it is and I can better understand the difficulties involved after listening to different perspectives on the same topic.

Third, consider the investment. One of the drawbacks is the length of time that it takes to complete a single case study. For example, it was almost two years from the time that I began gaining access to the school until I completed the study. In higher education, it may be difficult to survive if the institutional expectation is to "publish or perish". The length of time needed for completion, however, did not outweigh my own personal need for a quality product.

Another disadvantage is the amount of money and time invested, particularly with regard to transcribing the

interview tapes. This is a long and arduous task that is often delegated to a professional typist (a costly investment) but it must not be underrated. Add the time that I spent combing through the transcripts, listening to the tapes while reading the transcripts, making notes in the margins, and reviewing the information again and again, and you have an investment that must be questioned in terms of cost effectiveness.

On the other hand, face-to-face interviewing is valuable. It is a process in which there are numerous opportunities to ask questions, and clarify statements -- and, particularly helpful in illuminating otherwise ambiguous or misleading responses. I think this personal interaction makes for a more detailed and thoughtful response than occurs when simply filling out a survey. In addition to the interview, a general description of the setting is essential in understanding the context of the participant responses.

#### Candid Recollections

As I began to meet and interview the parents, I understood why most researchers had used surveys to acquire information from them -- for comfort, ease, and simplicity. Contacting parents, scheduling interviews and subsequently conducting the interviews was a delicate and complicated process.

The process of contacting parents began with the phone conversation which was often distorted by the parent speaking loudly to a child who was out of line (while I was attempting to explain the process), a dog barking incessantly in the background, or the sound of a doorbell followed by those familiar words, "could you hold on for a minute?" After the first few calls, I wrote out what I wanted to say and then shortened it considerably in anticipation of such interruptions.

Next came the scheduling of interviews. Most parents do not maintain a written schedule, so the typical response would be "oh, just any time that is good for you". This was followed by a suggestion from me and then a pause, "any time but then, I have aerobics". Again, this took some interpretation on my part. As soon as I learned that parents do not have fixed work schedules, I understood that the interviews would have to be scheduled around grocery shopping, hair appointments, dance lessons for the kids, various community events, the weekly "ladies" meetings and the like.

Some parents had unbelievably busy schedules (including full-time work, shuttling numerous children, exercise sessions, etc...) and it was a challenge simply to find a 60-minute period of time when they could stop to discuss any topic. Despite these challenges, 27 parents took the time to complete both interviews.



Conducting the interviews was yet another matter. I was often greeted by the household pet, followed by the owner. Since I love animals, the pets were invariably attracted to me and, in some cases, I am convinced that once the animal decided I was harmless, the parent made the same conclusion. My entrance into the dwelling was frequently followed by a brief tour of the home, and I was always offered a beverage. To make a long story short, while conducting interviews I admired a lot of homes, stroked numerous animals, made lots of small talk and consumed large amounts of coffee -- all in an effort to help each participant feel more at ease with me. I believe that by doing all of these things, I did make parents feel more comfortable with me and hence, they were able to share intimate feelings and memories more freely.

During the interview, the work was different but certainly just as challenging as making the initial contact, scheduling the appointment, and getting in the door. Now that I had presented myself in a nonthreatening manner and had the parent at a point where they were willing to talk, all I had to do was get them to talk about my topic. This was particularly difficult when I asked parents to comment on their child's physical education program (a topic they knew virtually nothing about). If a parent had little

information, their inclination was to talk about another topic. Consequently, I had to practice gently bring them back to commenting on the topic at hand.

Listening to parents discuss their past experiences in physical education classes was very moving to me personally. I truly attempted to understand what they had gone through -- in doing that, I observed the pain, embarrassment, and subsequent anger that arose. Because it was necessary to consciously monitor both my verbal and nonverbal reactions to their comments and recollections (to minimize the influence of my behavior on their responses), this was not an effortless process.

Through it all, I confirmed an earlier belief that people, for the most part, just want someone else to listen to them and value what they are saying -- doing so brings about great catharsis. While I could do nothing to change what had occurred some 20 to 30 years prior, this experience gave me a renewed awareness of the powerful and long-lasting impact that physical education teachers have on their students. It is an awareness I will certainly share with many students who are preparing to teach and teachers who are currently conducting classes.

## APPENDIX A

### PILOT STUDY ABSTRACT

The following is a description of the purpose, methods, and general findings of my comprehensive examination study. The purpose of this study was to describe parental perceptions of their child's sixth grade physical education program. Six parents (one male and five females) whose children all attended the same school agreed to participate in the study. The questions guiding the study were (a) What do parents know about their child's physical education program? (b) What are parents' visions for an ideal physical education program? (c) What are parents' evaluations of their child's current physical education program? and (d) What were parents' past experiences in physical education?

The primary sources of data were (a) a parent background questionnaire, (b) one formal, open-ended interview with each parent and the physical education teacher, and (c) observations of the sixth grade physical education class. A conceptual framework for understanding attitudes (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975) was used in analysis of the data.

The results indicated that parents received minimal information about their child's sixth grade physical education program. The information that parents did have, however, appeared to be vague and often inaccurate, perhaps as a consequence of being acquired through indirect sources

(such as their children and other parents). In other words, no direct contact with parents was attempted by the physical education teacher.

Moreover, there were no common themes among the personal school physical education experiences of each parent. Their experiences ranged from parents who attended Catholic school and had no school physical education to one parent who had K-12 physical education and played sports. In some cases, then, parents were making judgments about a subject they had never taken. These background experiences or lack of them appeared to be salient in the formation of parents' perceptions about their child's current physical education.

Overall, parents had little information about the program, had limited energy for talking about their child's physical education program, and they generally expressed neutral to slightly unfavorable opinions of it.

It was concluded, therefore, that several factors influenced parents' perceptions: (a) information, (b) communication, (c) invitation, (d) initiative, (e) their own personal experiences in physical education, (f) their child's response, and (g) the generally perceived marginal status of physical education. Each of these factors played a particular role in shaping the way these parents regarded their child's sixth grade physical education program.



## APPENDIX B

### ADDITIONAL READING LIST

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APPENDIX C

PARENT BACKGROUND QUESTIONNAIRE

Please send this questionnaire back to me as soon as possible in the envelope I have enclosed. Thank you.

1. Your Age: (Please Check One) \_\_\_\_\_ 20-25 years  
\_\_\_\_\_ 26-30 years  
\_\_\_\_\_ 31-35 years  
\_\_\_\_\_ 36-40 years  
\_\_\_\_\_ 41-45 years  
\_\_\_\_\_ 46-50 years  
\_\_\_\_\_ 51-55 years  
\_\_\_\_\_ Other

2. Your Race: (Please Check One) \_\_\_\_\_ Asian  
\_\_\_\_\_ Black  
\_\_\_\_\_ Latino/Hispanic  
\_\_\_\_\_ Native American  
\_\_\_\_\_ /American Indian  
\_\_\_\_\_ White  
\_\_\_\_\_ Other

3. Your Gender: (Please Check One) \_\_\_\_\_ Female  
\_\_\_\_\_ Male

4. Your Occupation: \_\_\_\_\_

5. Please check the highest level of education that you have completed:

- \_\_\_\_\_ Elementary School  
\_\_\_\_\_ Junior High or Middle School  
\_\_\_\_\_ High School  
\_\_\_\_\_ Some College  
\_\_\_\_\_ College Graduate

6. Marital Status: (Please Check One) \_\_\_\_\_ Single  
\_\_\_\_\_ Married  
\_\_\_\_\_ Separated  
\_\_\_\_\_ Divorced  
\_\_\_\_\_ Living with Partner  
\_\_\_\_\_ Other

7. Occupation of Partner (if any): \_\_\_\_\_

8. Please check your approximate household income (per year):

- \_\_\_\_\_ less than \$9,999
- \_\_\_\_\_ \$10,000 - \$14,999
- \_\_\_\_\_ \$15,000 - \$24,999
- \_\_\_\_\_ \$25,000 - \$49,999
- \_\_\_\_\_ over \$50,000

9. Age and Gender (M or F) of children now attending \_\_\_\_\_ school.

Child #1 (Age)\_\_\_\_\_ (Gender)\_\_\_\_\_

Child #2 (Age)\_\_\_\_\_ (Gender)\_\_\_\_\_

Child #3 (Age)\_\_\_\_\_ (Gender)\_\_\_\_\_

10. Check the number of years during which your 5th grade child has attended any school in this district:

- \_\_\_\_\_ This year only
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2 years
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3 years
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4 years
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5 years
- \_\_\_\_\_ Other (explain)\_\_\_\_\_

11a. How often do you engage in **\*\*vigorous** exercise (other than your work)?

- \_\_\_\_\_ Never
- \_\_\_\_\_ Once a month
- \_\_\_\_\_ Twice a month
- \_\_\_\_\_ Once a week
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2-3 times per week
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4-5 times per week
- \_\_\_\_\_ More than 5 times per week

**\*\*Vigorous** means at least 15 minutes (or more) of continuous activity which causes you to perspire, to breathe more deeply, and which would leave you very tired if continued for more than one hour.



11b. Please list the activities that you most often do when you exercise.

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12a. How often does your 5th grade child engage in **\*\*vigorous** exercise outside of school? (This does not include simply going outside to play with friends unless it involves some kind of vigorous activity.)

- Never
- Once a month
- Twice a month
- Once a week
- 2-3 times per week
- 4-5 times per week
- More than 5 times per week

12b. Please list the activities that your 5th grade child most often does when he/she exercises.

---

---

13a. How often do you and your child engage in **\*\*vigorous** exercise together?

- Never
- Once a month
- Twice a month
- Once a week
- 2-3 times a week
- 4-5 times a week
- More than 5 times a week

13b. Please list the activities that you and your child most often do together.

---

---

**\*\*Vigorous** means at least 15 minutes (or more) of continuous activity which causes you to perspire, to breathe more deeply, and which would leave you very tired if continued for more than one hour.

## APPENDIX D

### WRITTEN CONSENT FORM FOR PARENTS

I. I am a graduate student at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst where I am conducting a study of parents and schools. I am particularly interested in communication between parents and their children's physical education teachers.

II. You are being asked to participate in two interviews. Each interview may be up to an hour in length and will be held at a time and in a place convenient to you.

The purpose of the first interview will be to find out (a) what you think is important for your child's education, (b) the information you have about your child's school, and (c) some of your own experiences in physical education. The second interview will be conducted within 3 weeks of the first interview and will concentrate on the information you have about (a) your child's physical education program and (b) your own ideas about what a "perfect" physical education program should include.

III. The interviews will be tape-recorded and later transcribed by myself or a professional typist. The tapes will be stored in a secure place and access will be limited to myself and the professors who are supervising my work.

In all written material and oral presentations in which I may use materials from your interviews, I will not use your name, the names of the people mentioned by you, the name of your child's school or school district, or the location of your home or place of work. Transcripts will be typed with pseudonyms substituted for all names. Every effort will be made to protect your anonymity.

IV. The information from this study may be used in the following ways:

- (a) my dissertation,
- (b) journal articles,
- (c) presentations to professional groups,
- (d) other purposes related to my work as a teacher educator.

V. While consenting at this time to participate in these interviews, you may at any time withdraw from the actual interview process. Also, you may withdraw your consent to have specific excerpts from your interviews used in any printed materials or oral presentations if you notify me

within one week following your second interview. Please call me at (413) 546-4570 if you have questions of any kind concerning your participation in the study.

VI. Once the study is complete, a summary of that study and its findings will be made available at the request of any parent or teacher who participated. In this material there will be nothing that identifies you by name with any opinion that you express in the interviews.

VII. In signing this form you are agreeing to the use of the materials from your interviews as indicated in IV. If I wish to use the materials in any way not consistent with what is stated in IV, I will contact you to explain and request your further consent.

VIII. No special compensation or free medical treatment will be made available by the University of Massachusetts if physical injury should occur in connection with this study.

In signing this form, you also are assuring me that you will make no financial claims for the use of the material from your interviews.

\*\*\*\*\*

I, \_\_\_\_\_ have read the  
(print name here)

above statement and agree to be interviewed under the conditions stated above.

\_\_\_\_\_ Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_ Date

\_\_\_\_\_ Signature of Interviewer



## APPENDIX E

### PARENT INTERVIEW GUIDE #1

Thank you for agreeing to talk with me. I want to talk with you and learn about your opinions and feelings on three topics (1) what you think is important for your 5th grade child's education (2) the information you have about \_\_\_\_\_ school in general, and (3) your own personal experiences in physical education. My goal is to understand communication between parents and the physical education teacher at \_\_\_\_\_ school. To do that, I need to find out what you know, how you found out, and what things helped you form your ideas and opinions.

This interview will take about one hour and during it I will be asking a series of questions. Please take your time when answering these questions. There are no right or wrong answers and everything you say will be kept confidential.

I will be tape recording the interview only to help me accurately remember what you say because I cannot write fast enough to get everything down on paper.

Before we begin, do you have any questions?

Let's begin with your thoughts and feelings about \_\_\_\_\_ school in general.

1. In your opinion, what is the purpose of an elementary school? Why do we make kids go to it?

Probe: What skills do you want your child to have when they leave the elementary school? In other words, what do you want them to be able to do?

2. Of those skills you just mentioned, which ones are most important? Give me some sense of what's more important or less important to you.

Probe: What school subjects do you think are most important in \_\_\_\_\_'s elementary education?

3. What hopes do you have for your child once they leave \_\_\_\_\_ elementary school?

Probe: Do you think they should finish high school?

Probe: When do you think they should get a job?

Probe: Do you think they should go to vocational school?

Probe: Do you think they should go to college?



4a. In what ways, if at all, do you usually send messages about anything to \_\_\_\_\_'s teachers?

4b. In what ways do teachers usually send messages to you?

5. How do you learn about what's going on at \_\_\_\_\_ school in general?

6. Which ways of finding out about the school have you found most helpful or useful?

7. This year, which teachers have you talked to or had notes from? (If parent mentions a teacher's name, also need their subject area)

Follow Up: Which teachers have you talked to or had notes from most frequently?

Follow Up: I would like to have an idea of what those messages are mostly about. Please describe several that are typical.

Probe: What types of things do you and the teachers talk about?

Probe: And what kinds of things do you get messages about when you get written messages?

8. In general, how would you describe the attitudes of the principal and teachers at \_\_\_\_\_ school toward parents?

Follow Up: What do you think is the attitude of the principal and teachers about you getting involved with the school? About visiting it or about helping out or about knowing what's going on?

9. In what ways, if at all, have you been involved at \_\_\_\_\_'s school?

Follow Up: Have you ever visited the school?

Probe: Would you describe yourself as greatly involved, moderately involved, or not really involved at all?

10. Are there specific things that keep you from being involved?

11. Are you satisfied with your level of involvement?

Probe: Would you like more?

12. Are there other comments about communication with the school or your involvement with \_\_\_\_\_ school that would help me to understand those things?

Now, I want to talk just a little about your own participation in sport activities that occurred in two places (1) regularly scheduled gym classes at school, and (2) after school activities (sports, intramurals, summer leagues, private lessons). Let's begin with your experiences in gym classes as a child.

1. Did you have any gym classes where you attended school? Can you tell me about what kind and at which school.

2. What was gym class like for you as a child?

Probe: What do you remember about gym class as a child? What was good about it? What was bad about it?

3. Can you remember any specific things that happened to you in gym class that stand out in your memory?

4. What were your p.e. teachers' attitudes toward p.e.?

Probe: Can you remember anything that they said that told you what their attitude was toward p.e.?

Probe: Did they act like it was important or unimportant?

Probe: Were they enthusiastic about it or not?

5. Can you describe something that you learned in gym class that you really remember clearly?

Probe: In general, what do you think you got out of p.e.?

6. What do you mainly want me to understand about your experience in gym class as a child? What should I mainly remember about your experiences?

Now, let's talk a little about your own participation in sport activities outside of school -- not in gym class, but in other places and at other times after school and outside of school, including during the summer or on weekends or on vacations.

1. What kinds of physical activities did you do (during your school years)?

Follow Up: I'm interested in both sports or teams you were on or just general recreation things like swimming or hiking or walking or riding a bike or working in the garden.

2. What was your favorite activity of those you mentioned? Describe what that was like for you. What was good about it? What was bad about it?

3. Can you describe something you got out of this after school activity?

4. What do you mainly want me to understand about your experience in after school sport activities? What should I mainly remember about your out of school physical activities as a child?

5. Is there anything else you can think of that would help me understand your experiences in school p.e. classes or after school activities?

Thank you for your time. You have been very helpful. We'll meet again in a couple of weeks to talk about your child's 5th grade physical education program -- what it's like now, what you want it to be. If you think of anything that you forgot to mention today, please try to remember, perhaps even jot down a note for yourself so you can add it next time. If you have any questions, comments, or concerns about my study please contact me. My phone number is on the consent form I gave you earlier.



APPENDIX F

PARENT INTERVIEW GUIDE #2

This interview will take about one hour and during it I will be asking a series of questions. Please take your time when answering these questions. Remember that there are no right or wrong answers and anything you say will be kept confidential.

I will again be tape recording the interview only to help me accurately remember what you say because I cannot write fast enough to get everything down on paper.

Before we begin, do you have any questions?

\*\*\*\*\*  
NOTE: The first part of this interview is devoted to allowing the parent to add anything forgotten in the first interview and for probing any ambiguities and/or themes in the transcript.  
\*\*\*\*\*

Last time we talked about your opinions concerning \_\_\_\_\_'s school and the different ways you find out what is happening there. We also talked about your own experiences in physical education and sports as a child. Is there anything you thought of or remembered since that interview that you could add or want to clarify for me?

During our last interview you talked about \_\_\_\_\_, that was very interesting to me and particularly helpful, would you please talk a little bit more about that? I want to hear more about that.

Could you explain more about what you meant when you talked about \_\_\_\_\_, I want to be sure that I understood what you meant.

\*\*\*\*\*  
(These basic questions will be repeated, with variations of wording, as many times as necessary to cover the ambiguities and/or themes from the first interview.)  
\*\*\*\*\*

As I explained last time, the focus of this second interview is to talk about \_\_\_\_\_'s 5th grade physical education program. Lets begin with the information that you have about the program.



1. Talk to me for a few minutes about what you know (or the information you have) about \_\_\_\_\_'s 5th grade physical education program.

Probe: What I need to know is what you know about that program and the p.e. classes that \_\_\_\_\_ goes to.

(If parent doesn't follow after first 2 questions, then I'll mention for example Just talk about things like # of times/week; teacher's name; activities covered; goals)

2. How did you find out about physical education at \_\_\_\_\_ school? Who told you, when did you learn about what happens there?

Follow Up: Have you ever discussed what happens in p.e. with

Other parents?

The principal?

Other teachers at the school?

\_\_\_\_\_ (their child)?

2a. Are there times when you interact face-to-face with the p.e. teacher?

If so, where would this take place?

Probes (if not mentioned):

Parent/Teacher Conferences?

Parents' Night?

PTA Meetings?

Gym Shows?

Athletic Events?

School Board Meetings?

2b. What kinds of things do you and the p.e. teacher talk about when you talk?

Probe: Please describe an example of talks you've had with the p.e. teacher.

2c. About how often do you communicate with the 5th grade p.e. teacher?

2d. How effective do you think this communication with the p.e. teacher has been?

2e. Have you ever read about the p.e. program at \_\_\_\_\_ school or received any written material

at a p.e. meeting?

At a PTA meeting?

In a newspaper?

In any material that \_\_\_\_\_ brought home from school?

At parents night?

3. What do you consider to be the most accurate (reliable) source of information about the p.e. program?

Follow Up: If you really needed to know what was going on in gym who would you ask?

4. What messages or invitations have you received from the p.e. teacher about helping out or being involved or supporting the p.e. program at \_\_\_\_\_ school?

Follow Up: Any informal, casual things or any formal notes, phone calls?

5. What messages or invitations have you received from the principal about helping out or being involved or supporting the p.e. program at \_\_\_\_\_ school?

Probe: Any informal, casual things or any formal notes, phone calls?

6. Please describe to me some of \_\_\_\_\_'s reactions to physical education class.

Follow Up: How do you think \_\_\_\_\_ feels about p.e. classes overall?

7. What type of relationship does your child have with the p.e. teacher?

Probe: How do they seem to get on with each other?

Follow Up: How does \_\_\_\_\_ feel about the teacher?

Follow Up: How do you think the teacher feels about \_\_\_\_\_?

8. How does what you know about your child's p.e. program compare to what you know about your child's other programs in school (like English or Math)?

Probe: Do you know more or less?

Follow Up: Do you get the same kind of information?

Follow Up: Is what you know about p.e. about the same or different from what you know about other subjects?

We've been talking about the information you have about your child's p.e. program, now let's talk about your ideas about a perfect p.e. program.

1. What do you think should be included in a perfect p.e. program for children of \_\_\_\_\_'s age?

(If parent mentions goals, then I ask about activities or vice versa.)

Probe: What should be the goals of a perfect 5th grade p.e. program? What would students learn?

Probe: What activities should be included in a perfect 5th grade p.e. program? What would the students be doing?

2. Where or how do you think you got your ideas about what a perfect p.e. program should be? What was it that influenced you most?

At the beginning of the interview you told me the information you have about your child's p.e. program (what you know about it). Then you talked about your ideas for a perfect p.e. program. Now, I'm curious to hear about specific places where the current program does not measure up to your standards.

1. In other words, what in your opinion are things which could be improved?

2. Are there places where your child's p.e. program matches up exactly with your ideas about a good p.e. program? What would you say are the strengths of this program from your point of view?

3. Do you have anything else that you can think of that would help me understand your opinions about the p.e. program and about p.e. at \_\_\_\_\_ school?

Thank you again for your time. You have told me many interesting things about (a) your own experiences in p.e. and sports, (b) your opinions of \_\_\_\_\_ school and the p.e. program there, (c) your ideas about a good p.e. program, and finally about what things helped you form your ideas and opinions. You have been very helpful.



## APPENDIX G

### PHYSICAL EDUCATION TEACHER INTERVIEW GUIDE

I want to talk with you about your opinions and feelings on several topics (1) your p.e. program in general, (2) your 5th grade p.e. program, in particular, (3) the contacts you have had with parents of children in your classes, and (4) administrative support for your p.e. program. My goal is to understand as much as I can about your 5th grade p.e. program, and the interactions you have with parents.

This interview will take about one hour and during it I will be asking a series of questions. Please take your time when answering. There are no right or wrong answers and as we have agreed, everything you say will be kept confidential.

I will be tape recording the interview only to help me accurately remember what you say because I cannot write fast enough to get everything down on paper.

Before we begin, do you have any questions?

Let's begin with your K-6 p.e. program in general. Talk to me about the curriculum you are using. Who developed it? What's included in it? How does it work?

Follow Up Questions (if not included in 1st response):

Is it a standard curriculum developed for the district or did you develop it yourself?

How long has the curriculum you're using now been in operation?

Do you have specific, sequential goals for each grade level? If so, what are they?

Now that I understand where the 5th grade program fits into your overall curriculum, I want you to talk with me specifically about the 5th grade physical education program.

1. What are your goals or objectives for the 5th grade physical education classes that you teach? In other words, what is it that you want students to learn?
2. What activities are included in your 5th grade program?
3. How would you describe your own attitude about your 5th grade p.e. program?



Probe: Would you describe yourself as greatly enthusiastic, moderately enthusiastic, slightly enthusiastic, not enthusiastic at all?

4. How would you describe the social climate in your 5th grade classes this year?

Follow Up: How would you describe your relationships with the students?

Follow Up: How would you describe their relationships with each other?

5. For you, how important is it to get children to like what they do in physical education?

6. Is there anything else you can think of that would help me understand the 5th grade p.e. program at \_\_\_\_\_ school?

We have talked about your goals for this program and what you are trying to accomplish. Now, I would like to hear about your contacts and interactions with parents.

1. In general, what degree of involvement (participation) do you think parents should have in an elementary school physical education program?

Probe: Why do you feel that way?

Probe: Have you always felt that way?

2. What was your parents' involvement in your p.e. program?

3. What sort of ideas about parent involvement were suggested in your own undergraduate or graduate training?

4. What sort of ideas about parent involvement were suggested by colleagues at this or any other school?

5. What kinds of ideas about parent involvement were suggested by the administration at this or any other school?

6. How much involvement (participation) do you think parents should have in your p.e. program at \_\_\_\_\_ school?

7. Have you always felt this way about parents and their involvement in physical education here at \_\_\_\_\_ school?

Follow Up: Please describe for me specific events that reinforced or changed your ideas about parents' participation in p.e..

8. Is there anything else you can think of that would help me understand your beliefs about parent participation in p.e.?

9. Talk to me about the ways you typically get information to parents about the 5th grade p.e. program.

List of Probes (if these are not initially mentioned):

PTA Meeting?

Local Newspaper?

Parents Night?

Parent/Teacher Conferences?

School Newsletter?

P.E. Newsletter?

Gym Shows?

10. Are there times when you interact face-to-face with parents?

Follow Up: If so, where would this take place?

Probes (if not mentioned):

Parent/Teacher Conferences?

Parents' Night?

PTA Meetings?

Gym Shows?

Athletic Events?

School Board Meetings?

Follow Up: What kinds of things do you and the parents talk about when you talk (on the phone or in person)?

Probe: Please describe an example of talks you've had with parents.

Follow Up: What kinds of things do you write about when you send written information to parents?

Probe: After the interview, could you show me examples of written information sent to the parents?

11. How do parents get information to you?

12. About how often do you communicate with parents?

13. How effective do you think this communication with parents has been?

14. Have you ever asked (invited) parents to support your 5th grade p.e. program?  
get involved in any way with the 5th grade p.e. program?  
help out in gym class ?  
give their opinions about the 5th grade p.e. program?

Follow Up: If so, how did you go about asking? What did you ask for? What were the parents' responses?

15. Do you think that parents greatly support, moderately support, slightly support, do not at all support your 5th grade p.e. program?

Follow Up: (If none of the above) Do you think that parents feel indifferent about or oppose your 5th grade p.e. program?

Follow Up: Please describe something that happened to influence your answer. Something that really showed you how parents felt about the program.

16. If you could make it happen, in what ways would you like to have more support from parents?

Follow Up: Do you have any ideas for getting more support in the future? Please describe them.

Follow Up: In your opinion, are there any roadblocks or barriers to getting more support for your p.e. program? If so, what are those barriers?

17. Is there anything else that you could tell me that would help me understand your interactions with parents or your opinions about the ways you want them to support your p.e. program?

We have talked a lot about your program and the different ways you communicate with parents. For the final component of this interview, I want you to talk about how your principal (or other teachers) supports or doesn't support your p.e. program and the interactions you have with parents.

1. How would you describe the attitudes of the principal and other teachers about the p.e. program at \_\_\_\_\_ school?

Follow Up: Can you remember specific things that were said or things that happened to let you know how they felt about p.e. at \_\_\_\_\_ school?

2. In what ways do the principal and other teachers support the p.e. program at \_\_\_\_\_ school?

3. In what ways do the principal and other teachers fail to support the p.e. program at \_\_\_\_\_ school?



4. In what ways would you like to have more support from the principal and other teachers?

Follow Up: What ideas do you have for getting their support?

Follow Up: What barriers or roadblocks, in your opinion, prevent getting their support for the p.e. program at your school?

5. What messages do you get from the principal about sending information to parents?

Follow Up: Inviting parents to help out in gym class?

Follow Up: Involving parents in the p.e. program at your school?

6. Is there anything else you can remember that will help me understand your opinion of how the principal and other teachers view the p.e. program and contact with parents at \_\_\_\_\_ school? How should I remember what you have told me about this?

Thank you for your time. You have been very helpful! You have told me many interesting things that help me to understand your p.e. program and the way you communicate with parents. I will see you next week when I observe the 5th grade p.e. class. If you think of anything that you forgot to mention today, please try to remember or write it down so you can tell me the next time I'm here. If you have any questions, comments, or concerns about my study please contact me. My phone number is on the consent form I gave you earlier.



## APPENDIX H

### INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR OTHER TEACHERS

Thank you for agreeing to talk with me. I want to talk with you and learn about your opinions and feelings on three separate but related topics (1) parent involvement in schools, (2) the contacts you have had with parents of children in your classes, and (2) the physical education program.

This interview will take about an hour and during it I will be asking a series of questions. Please take your time when answering. There are no right or wrong answers and, as we have agreed, everything you say will be kept confidential.

I will be tape recording the interview only to help me accurately remember what you say because I cannot write fast enough to get everything down on paper.

Before we begin, do you have any questions?

Let's begin with your opinions about parent involvement in schools.

1. In general, what degree of involvement do you think parents should have in an elementary school?
2. How much involvement do you think parents should have at \_\_\_\_\_ school in \_\_\_\_\_ (subject matter)?

Probes: Should they be informed?  
Should they help their child out at home?  
Should they visit regularly?  
Attend school events?  
Organize & carry out fund raisers?  
Should they be invited to help out in classrooms?

3. Have you always felt this way about parents and their involvement in \_\_\_\_\_ (subject) here at \_\_\_\_\_ school?

Follow Up: Would you please describe for me a specific instance that reinforced or changed your ideas about parents' participation in \_\_\_\_\_ (subject)?

4. What's your general sense of the parents' willingness to be involved in some way in \_\_\_\_\_ (subject) at \_\_\_\_\_ school?

Follow Up: In what ways do you think they want to be involved?  
Informed?  
Help their children at home?  
Visiting regularly?  
Attending school events?  
Helping out with fund raisers?  
Helping out in classes?

5. In your opinion, what are some of the barriers to parent involvement in \_\_\_\_\_ (subject) at \_\_\_\_\_ school?

6. In your opinion, what are some of the things (conditions) that facilitate parent involvement in \_\_\_\_\_ (subject) at \_\_\_\_\_ school?

7. Is there anything else you can think of that would help me understand your beliefs about parent participation in \_\_\_\_\_ (subject matter)?

We have been talking about your beliefs regarding parent involvement in schools. Now, I would like to hear about your contacts and interactions with parents.

1. Please tell me about the ways you typically get information to parents about your \_\_\_\_\_ program.

List of Probes (if these are not initially mentioned):

PTA Meeting?

Local Newspaper?

Parents Night?

Parent/Teacher Conferences?

School Newsletter?

School Board Meetings?

Special \_\_\_\_\_ (subject) Event?

2. Are there times when you interact face-to-face with parents?

Follow Up: If so, where does this take place?

Follow Up: What kinds of things do you and the parents talk about when you talk?

Probe: Please describe an example of talks you've had with parents on the phone or in person.

3. What kinds of things do you write about when you send written information to parents?

4. How do parents get information to you?

5. About how often do you communicate with the parents of the average pupil in your classes?

6. How effective do you think this communication with parents has been?

7. Is there anything else that you could tell me that would help me understand your interactions with parents?

Before we begin to talk about your opinions concerning the physical education program at \_\_\_\_\_ school, I want you to talk briefly about your opinions on the importance of p.e. in the school curriculum. How would you rank the importance of p.e. in relation to other school subjects?

1. What do you know about the p.e. teacher's goals for the 5th grade p.e. program at \_\_\_\_\_ school?

Follow Up: What does she or he want students to learn?

2. What information do you have about the particular activities that children do in the 5th grade p.e. program at \_\_\_\_\_ school?

Follow Up: What are the students doing in class this week?

3. How do you usually find out about the goals and activities?

Conversations with the p.e. teacher? Visits to the p.e. class? From other teachers? From students? From the school secretary? From parents?

4. Please describe an example of a time when the p.e. teacher invited you to attend/observe/help out with any classes.

5. Please describe for me the ways, if at all, you have collaborated with the p.e. teacher on any school projects.

Probe: Who initiated the collaboration?

6. Please describe any instances where you knew other teachers collaborated (worked together) with the p.e. teacher on any school project.

7. Please describe the ways you are discouraged or encouraged to collaborate with the p.e. teacher on any school projects.

8. How does what you know about the p.e. program compare to what you know about the other special subject programs (like music and art) at \_\_\_\_\_ school?



Probe: Do you know more or less?

Probe: Do you get the same kind of information or is it different?

9. How does what you know about the p.e. program compare to what you know about other programs (like math, English, science) at \_\_\_\_\_ school?

10. Can you tell me anything else that would help me understand what you know about the 5th grade p.e. program at \_\_\_\_\_ school?

We've been talking about the information you have concerning the p.e. program at \_\_\_\_\_ school, now let's talk about your ideas about a really good p.e. program.

1. What should be the goals of an outstanding 5th grade p.e. program? What would students learn?

2. What activities should be included in an outstanding 5th grade p.e. program? What would students be doing?

3. What parts of the p.e. program at \_\_\_\_\_ school are the best?

4. In your opinion, what could be improved in the present p.e. program at \_\_\_\_\_ school?

For the final part of this interview, I want you to talk about how you believe the p.e. teacher gets support or encouragement or discouragement from parents at \_\_\_\_\_ school.

1. Do you think that parents greatly support, moderately support, slightly support, or do not at all support the 5th grade p.e. program at \_\_\_\_\_ school?

Follow Up: Please describe an example of a situation when this degree of support was evident to you.

2. (If none of the above) Do you think that parents feel indifferent about or oppose the 5th grade p.e. program at \_\_\_\_\_ school?

Follow Up: Please describe an example of a situation when their indifference or opposition was evident to you.

3. Is there anything else you can remember that will help me understand your opinion of the p.e. program at \_\_\_\_\_ school?



Thank you for your time. You have been very helpful! You have told me many interesting things that help me to understand the way you communicate with parents and your opinions about the p.e. program. If you think of anything that you forgot to mention today, please try to remember or write it down so you can tell me. If you have any questions, comments, or concerns about my study please contact me. My phone number is on the consent form I gave you earlier.

## APPENDIX I

### PRINCIPAL INTERVIEW GUIDE

Thank you for agreeing to talk with me. I want to talk with you and learn about your opinions and feelings on three separate, but related topics (1) the policies and procedures at \_\_\_\_\_ school for communicating with and/or involving parents, (2) the physical education program, and (3) your sense of parental opinions about the physical education program.

This interview will take about an hour and during it I will be asking a series of questions. Please take your time when answering. There are no right or wrong answers and as we have agreed, everything you say will be kept confidential.

I will be tape recording the interview only to help me accurately remember what you say because I cannot write fast enough to get everything down on paper.

Before we begin, do you have any questions?

Let's begin with the formal policies and procedures at \_\_\_\_\_ school for communicating with or involving parents.

1. Can you tell me, first of all, are there any formal policies (or goals) at \_\_\_\_\_ school for interacting (communicating) with parents? If so, what are they?
2. Are these policies recorded anywhere? May I look at a copy after the interview?
3. How do teachers and other school personnel find out about these policies?
4. How often would you say these policies are talked about formally or informally between you and the staff?
5. Can you tell me things that you do to let the staff know your opinion about these policies?
6. Are there things that you do that would let parents know how you feel about their involvement or visitation to the school?
7. In what formal ways do school personnel (you & teachers) typically get information to or communicate with the parents?

Follow Up: Are there any particular channels or approval processes through which information must pass before it goes to parents?

8. How long have these procedures been in place at \_\_\_\_\_ school?

9. In what other ways (informally) do you make efforts to develop positive relationships with parents?

We have talked about the formal and informal ways that you and the \_\_\_\_\_ school staff communicate with parents. Now I want you to talk a little bit about your own opinions about parent involvement in schools.

1. In general, what degree of involvement do you think parents should have in a school?

2. How much involvement do you think parents should have at \_\_\_\_\_ school?

Probes:

Should they be informed?

Should they visit regularly?

Attend school events?

Organize & carry out fund raisers?

Should they be invited to help out in classrooms?

3. Have you always felt this way about parents and their involvement at \_\_\_\_\_ school?

Follow Up: If so, would you please describe for me a specific instance that reinforced or changed your ideas about parents' participation at \_\_\_\_\_ school?

4. What's your general sense of the parents' willingness to be involved in some way at \_\_\_\_\_ school?

5. To what extent do you think they want to be involved?

Probes:

Informed?

Visit Frequently?

Attend school events?

Help out with fund raisers?

Help out in the classrooms?

Serve on decision-making committees?

6. In your opinion, what are some of the barriers to parent involvement at \_\_\_\_\_ school?

7. In your opinion, what are some things that facilitate parent involvement at \_\_\_\_\_ school?

8. Are there any other things you could tell me that would help me understand either the formal policies & procedures for communicating with parents or your own opinions about parent involvement at \_\_\_\_\_ school?

Before we begin to talk about your opinions concerning the physical education program at \_\_\_\_\_ school, I want you to talk about your opinions on the importance of p.e. in the curriculum. How would you rank the importance of p.e. in relation to other school subjects?

1. What do you know about the p.e. teacher's goals for the 5th grade p.e. program at \_\_\_\_\_ school. What does she or he want students to learn?

2. What information do you have about the particular activities that children do in the 5th grade p.e. program at \_\_\_\_\_ school? What are the students doing in p.e. class this week?

3. How do you usually find out about the goals and activities? Probes:

School Curriculum?

Conversations with the p.e. teacher?

Formal meeting with the p.e. teacher?

Visits to the p.e. class?

From other teachers?

From students?

From the school secretary?

4. Has the p.e. teacher ever invited you to attend/observe/help out with any classes?

Follow Up: Please describe your response to his/her invitation.

5. How does what you know about the p.e. program compare to what you know about the other special subject programs (like art and music) at \_\_\_\_\_ school?

Follow Up: Do you know more or less?

Follow Up: Do you get the same kind of information or is it different?

6. How does what you know about the p.e. program compare to what you know about other programs (like English, math, science)?

7. Can you tell me anything else that would help me understand what you know about the 5th grade p.e. program at \_\_\_\_\_ school?



We've been talking about the information you have concerning the p.e. program at \_\_\_\_\_ school, now let's talk about your (vision of) ideas about a perfect p.e. program.

1. What should be the goals of a perfect 5th grade p.e. program? What would students learn?
2. What activities should be included in a perfect 5th grade p.e. program? What would students be doing?
3. Where do you think you got your ideas about what a good p.e. program should be like? What was the biggest influence on that?

You have told me the information you have about the p.e. program, then you talked to me about your vision of a perfect p.e. program. Now, I'd like to hear about specific places where the current p.e. program does not meet your expectations.

1. In other words, in your opinion, what things could be improved?
2. What parts of the p.e. program match with your ideas about a perfect p.e. program?
3. Have you ever spoken to the p.e. teacher about your positive or negative opinions?

Follow Up: If so, under what circumstances?

A year-end evaluation?

Informal talks?

Formal meeting?

Written evaluation?

4. Please describe the ways, if at all, that you support the p.e. teacher in her work in the gym.

5. Please describe one instance you remember when you encouraged the p.e. teacher to contact parents.

6. Please describe one instance when you encouraged the p.e. teacher to invite parents to help out in p.e. class.

7. Please describe one instance when you encouraged the p.e. teacher to get the parents to help out in the p.e. program.

8. Do you think that parents greatly support, moderately support, slightly support, or do not at all support the 5th grade p.e. program at \_\_\_\_\_ school?

Follow Up: Please describe an example of a situation when this degree of support was evident to you.

9. (If none of the above) Do you think that parents feel indifferent about or oppose the 5th grade p.e. program at \_\_\_\_\_ school?

Follow Up: Please describe an example of a situation when their indifference or opposition was evident to you.

10. Is there anything else you can remember that would help me understand your opinions about the 5th grade p.e. program at \_\_\_\_\_ school or your sense of parental opinions about the 5th grade p.e. program at \_\_\_\_\_ school?

Thank you for your time. You have been very helpful! You have told me many interesting things that help me understand the school policies and procedures for communicating with parents and your opinions about the p.e. program. I will observe the 5th grade p.e. class over the next several weeks. So, if you think of anything that you forgot to mention today, please tell me the next time I'm here. If you have any questions, comments, or concerns about my study please contact me. My phone number is on the consent form I gave you earlier.

## APPENDIX J

### INITIAL LETTER TO THE PARENTS

Dear Parent:

Deb Sheehy (a graduate student from the University of Massachusetts at Amherst) has inquired about conducting a study of the relationship between parents and schools as it relates to physical education. This study includes communication with the teacher, communication with the school, and parents' experiences in physical education and/or sports.

She has explained the study to us and we agree that it would produce valuable information. Approval by the school committee has been granted. For this reason, we have given her permission to contact parents of 5th grade children from Sunny Brook School. We must emphasize, however, that no parent is under any obligation to participate in this study.

As a parent of a 5th grade child, you are being invited to participate in two brief interviews. Each interview may be up to an hour in length and, if you agree to cooperate in the study, they will be held at a time and in a place convenient to you (If you wish, this can be in your own home).

No special knowledge or experience is required in order to be helpful in this study. All that you must have is a child in the fifth grade who has attended physical education classes this year at Sunny Brook School.

If you cooperate in the study, Ms. Sheehy will not use your name, the names of the people mentioned by you, the name of the school or school district, or the location of your home or place of work in writing or talking about the findings. No one at Sunny Brook School will be able to identify the source of information given during the interviews.

A \$10 reimbursement is available for child care costs if this would be needed to allow you the time to speak privately with Ms. Sheehy. This reimbursement will be provided by her and arrangements may be made at the time she contacts you if your response to this invitation is positive.

Because Ms. Sheehy would like to interview as many parents as possible, it would be helpful, though not necessary, if you and your husband, wife, or friend (if applicable) would agree to be interviewed together.

Please sign and fill out the enclosed form today and return it to your child's 5th grade physical education teacher tomorrow in the envelope provided.

---

Principal

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Physical Education Teacher



A STUDY OF PARENTS AND SCHOOLS

Please check one of the following choices (A, B, or C) and return this form (sealed in the envelope provided) to your child's 5th grade physical education teacher by Wednesday, February 12, 1992. Thank you.

\*\*\*\*\*

\_\_\_\_\_ A. I have read the letter and am willing to cooperate in this study.

\_\_\_\_\_ Signature of Parent or Guardian

\_\_\_\_\_ Telephone Number

\_\_\_\_\_ Please write down the time and days that are best to call you to schedule the interviews.

\*\*\*\*\*

\_\_\_\_\_ B. I have read the letter and would like more information before I can decide whether or not I agree to cooperate in this study.

\_\_\_\_\_ Signature of Parent or Guardian

\_\_\_\_\_ Telephone Number

\_\_\_\_\_ Please write down the time and days that are best to call you to discuss the study.

\*\*\*\*\*

\_\_\_\_\_ C. I have read the letter and do not want to cooperate in this study.

\_\_\_\_\_ Signature of Parent or Guardian

\*\*\*\*\*

\*\*Any comments regarding the study would be appreciated.



## APPENDIX K

### PREDISPOSITIONS OF THE INVESTIGATOR

Since the investigator is the primary research instrument in a qualitative study, the research product is influenced by both the personal biography and the ongoing interaction between the investigator and the participants. While it is not possible to eliminate either of these factors as sources of influence in data collection and data analysis, it is possible to surface and clarify some of the perceptions they produce and, through heightened awareness, limit their influence. Part of the process of limiting the researcher's biases is both acknowledging them before entering the field and then constantly confronting those sources of influence while in the field and, subsequently, while developing the study report. To the extent that it is systematic and public, the process of acknowledging and confronting personal history assumptions and expectations contributes to the perceived trustworthiness of the data. For this reason, it is important for readers to understand my initial perspectives on parents and parental involvement in physical education programs. By doing so, readers can better frame the picture presented in the case study report.

My interest in the topic of perceptions of physical education and more specifically parents' perceptions of physical education was initiated by both my own experiences with parents and my observations of the ways in which other

physical education teachers interacted with parents. While my own experience has been that communicating with and getting parents involved in their child's education is challenging and at times difficult, I believe that both are rewarding and critical to the survival of physical education in the public schools. It is this belief that has motivated me to explore the communication patterns between home and the physical education teacher and the influence of those patterns on parental perceptions, support, and involvement. In short, I entered the study neither uncommitted nor dispassionate about the topic.

As a physical education teacher I believe that physical education is an important part of the elementary school curriculum. I believe it is essential for young children to have opportunities to learn a variety of motor skills and practice them in a supportive environment. Not only are motor skills important in a child's development, but (among other things) each child should develop an understanding and appreciation for the effect of exercise on one's overall health.

In my opinion, parents generally respond favorably to the broad objectives which rationalize physical education as a school subject, but many of them also have accumulated negative experiences in physical education and have developed highly critical beliefs about physical education as it exists in many schools. It also is my hypothesis that

their negative disposition about their child's physical education program often stems as much from their own personal experiences in the gym and a general lack of accurate information about the current program as it does from their children's responses to their own gym classes. In sum, I am convinced that clear communication with parents about the school physical education program in which their children are enrolled can contribute to a positive attitude, but the simple communication of information is not the only contributing factor to such dispositions.

I do hold one clear reservation about the effectiveness of school/home communication as a means of recruiting support. Before a physical education teacher can effectively communicate with parents to produce a positive image of what happens in the program, there first has to be the reality of a positive program. That is, the teacher has to have clear goals and objectives for the physical education program, has to have the ability to persistently create positive learning experiences for all children, and has to have created or acquired the logistic resources of time and material required to do the job. Given that reality, it has been my experience that consistency of communication about the program and persistent invitations to attend special events has paid off toward winning parental support and creating parental reinforcement of physical education with their children.



In addition, I perceive parents as having political power to determine at least some of what happens in schools. Parents serve on the school board, PTA, and other policy-making bodies. When it comes to the question of money, in many cases, parents within a particular school district have the power to resist or accept the eradication of programs in the face of fiscal problems. I believe that parents who know the facts about a sound physical education program, and who feel connected to it by some form of personal investment, will not accept elimination or reduction and can often rally the support of other people to their position.

It has been my observation that those physical education teachers who communicate with parents, hold high expectations for student learning, and create opportunities for parents to either spectate or participate in physical education sponsored events have programs that are relatively well supported and not at all marginal in the school community.

In teacher training programs, for the most part, I think that communicating with and recruiting the support of parents is a topic that is ignored. As a consequence, we are preparing teachers for work in a marginal subject without providing the knowledge and skills which might help them develop support for their programs. Not only is it our business to prepare effective physical education teachers,



but they must also be trained in the social and political skills required to sustain programs in which it is possible to be effective.

Admittedly this brief discourse does not reveal all of my assumptions about the role of parents in their child's education. Instead it provides a brief overview of the assumptions which seem most evident and most obviously relevant at the outset of the study. It will be the role of the peer debriefer to assist with the continued identification of and confrontation with these assumptions.

APPENDIX L  
 BASIC DEMOGRAPHICS OF THE PARENTS  
 (Data primarily taken from Background Questionnaire)

Parent #	Age	Gender	Occupation	Education
1002	36-40	F	Optician	College Grad.
1008	41-45	F	Housewife	College Grad.
1012	41-45	F	Bookkeeper	High School
1013	31-35	F	Medical Asst.	College Grad.
1014	31-35	F	L.P.N.	High School
1016	46-50	F	Teacher	College Grad.
2003	31-35	F	Housewife	High School
2006	31-35	F	Secretary	High School
2007	41-45	F	Library Asst.	Some College
2008	36-40	F	Bookkeeper	College Grad.
2009	36-40	F	Secretary	Some College
2010	41-45	F	Med. Tech.	College Grad.
2021	36-40	F	Med. Secr.	Some College
2024	41-45	F	Housewife	Some College
3006	36-40	F	Housewife	High School
3009	36-40	F	Drafter	College Grad.
3016A	36-40	F	Coordinator	High School
3016B	36-40	M	Contractor	High School
3012A	31-35	F	Sys. Designer	High School
3012B	31-35	M	Student	Some College
3017A	31-35	F	Clerk	High School
3017B	31-35	M	Counselor	College Grad.
3020	31-35	F	L.P.N. (stnt)	High School
4013	36-40	F	Designer	College Grad.
4018	36-40	F	Waitress	Some College
4023A	36-40	F	Supervisor	Some College
4023B	41-45	M	Electrician	Some College

BASIC DEMOGRAPHICS OF PARENTS (continued)

Parent	Partner	Income	Exercise	Attitude/PE
1002	Supervisor	25-49,000	1/month	Positive
1008	Manager	+50,000	2-3/week	Positive
1012	Designer	25-49,999	2-3/week	Positive
1013*	Self-Emp.	15-24,999	2-3/week	Positive
1014	Carpenter	25-49,999	Never	Positive
1016	Teacher	+50,000	2/month	Positive
2003	Buyer	+50,000	2-3/week	Neutral
2006	Plumber	25-49,999	4-5/week	Positive
2007	Director	+50,000	2/month	Positive
2008*	Maint.	25-49,999	2/month	Positive
2009	Carpenter	25-49,999	2-3/week	Positive
2010*	Teacher	25-49,999	Never	Positive
2021*	Self-Emp.	+50,000	2-3/week	Positive
2024	Painter	10-14,999	4-5/week	Positive
3006*	Manager	+50,000	2-3/week	Positive
3009	Not Appl.	15-24,999	2-3/week	Positive
3016A*	Contractor	25-49,999	Never	Positive
3016B*	Coordntr.	25-49,999	4-5/week	Positive
3012A*	Student	25-49,999	1/week	Positive
3012B*	Designer	25-49,999	Never	Positive
3017A	Counselor	25-49,999	4-5/week	Positive
3017B	Clerk	25-49,999	4-5/week	Positive
3020*	Repair	25-49,999	4-5/week	Positive
4013	Designer	+50,000	1/month	Positive
4018*	Not Appl.	9,999	1/week	Indifferent
4023A	Electric	+50,000	2-3/week	Positive
4023B	Supervisor	+50,000	2-3/week	Positive

NOTE: "\*" indicates attended Sunny Brook as a child.



BASIC DEMOGRAPHICS OF FIFTH GRADE CHILDREN

Parent	# of Children	Gender (5th)	Skill Level 5th grader	Attitude/PE 5th grader
1002	2	M	Medium	Positive
1008*	2	M	Medium	Positive
1012	3	F	High	Indifferent
1013!	2	F	Medium	Negative
1014	2	F	Medium	Negative
1016*	1	M	Medium	Positive
2003	5	M	Medium	Indifferent
2006*	3	F	Low	Positive
2007*	3	M	Medium	Neutral
2008!	3	M	Medium	Positive
2009*	3	F	Low	Positive
2010!	1	F	Medium	Positive
2021*	2	M	Medium	Positive
2024	3	F	Medium	Negative
3006*	3	F	High	Positive
3009	2	F	High	Positive
3016AB	2	M	High	Positive
3012AB*	3	M	Medium	Positive
3017AB*	2	F	Medium	Positive
3020	2	M	Medium	Positive
4013	2	F	Medium	Neutral
4018	1	M	Medium	Positive
4023AB	2	F	Medium	Positive

NOTE: "\*" indicates moderately involved at Sunny Brook.  
 "!" indicates between moderately and greatly involved at Sunny Brook.



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