ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was two-fold: (a) to explore students’ experiences and learning in physical education and youth sport, and (b) to examine parents’ perceptions of their children’s experiences in physical education and youth sport. Phenomenological research method was employed in this study. The participants of this study included ten students, ages 12 to 15 and their parents (either father or mother). Data collection included phenomenological interviews, survey questionnaires, self-taken pictures of choice, and student diaries. Phenomenological analysis was used. This includes transcription, bracketing and the phenomenological reduction, listening to the interview for a sense of the whole, delineating units of general meaning, delineating another unit of meaning relevant to the research questions, clustering units of relevant meaning, determining themes from clusters of meaning, and contextualizing meaningful themes (Hycner, 1985). The findings of the study indicated students had positive thoughts toward physical education because they had fun and experienced feeling good about themselves. In spite of these positive views, students did not regard physical education as a learning environment. They had a separate perception of what they did and learned in physical education. Unlike physical education, students considered experiences in youth sport to present learning
opportunities. In particular, students believed constructing a relationship with people, especially with their peers, in a youth sport program as a valuable learning opportunity. They learned social skills more in youth sport than in physical education. Students who involved in youth sport benefited from parents' psychosocial support including emotional support and informational support. Also, sibling relationships had an important influence on a students’ participation in youth sport both competitively and cooperatively. Finally, all students agreed that they liked youth sport more than physical education because of the level of learning, engagement or feeling free, and the involvement of the youth sports coach.

Parents stressed the importance of their children’s social development in school life. They believed physical education to be a part of total education and to contribute to the social learning process through cooperative activities such as team sports. Parents also believed that physical education represented a playing time rather than learning time. However, they understood that the nature of physical education changes depending on the grade level: in secondary level, parents believed physical education relies on health education and physical fitness test more than doing physical activities. Parents believed that youth sport experiences helped their children to learn a variety of life skills to promote social development including respect for other and cooperation, and to learn self-discipline such as patience and self-control applicable to their children's daily life. From parents' viewpoint, participation in a youth sport program provided an opportunity to interact with their children. Finally, parents believed that their children learned more in youth sport than in physical education because of the deeper understanding of one sport, children's choice of activities, and parental involvement.

INDEX WORDS: Student experience, Student learning, Parent perception, Parental support, Social development
STUDENTS’ AND PARENTS’ LIVED EXPERIENCES
IN PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND YOUTH SPORT

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Background

There is little doubt that the ultimate goal of education is successful student learning. Understanding how students learn is important to provide quality education. That is, a clear understanding of student learning is fundamental to the conduct of teaching, of school organization, and of research in education (Erickson & Shultz, 1992). Nevertheless, there is a dearth of research on student learning in the field of physical education. Instead, they have mainly focused on studying the teacher including teacher characteristics in connection to their beliefs, knowledge, behavior, competencies, feedback, instructional tasks and managerial tasks, and on instructional environments such as class size, facilities and equipment (Graber, 2001). In other words, physical education researchers concentrate mainly on outer factors such as teachers’ actions and values, school contexts, and motivational climate rather than the inner factors such as student learning (Solmon, 2003). Accordingly, researchers in the field of physical education ought to consider studying students and their learning as well as teachers and teaching for better understanding of learning and provision of quality education (Doyle, 1992; Solmon, 2003).

In the field of physical education, theories of learning were dominated by tenets of mediating variable paradigm that focus on maximizing Academic Learning Time (ALT-PE). However, recently, the physical education curriculum benefit from the application of the constructivist approach to student learning (Kirk & Macdonald, 1998). Constructivism is a
learning theory developed from the works of Lev Vygotsky, Jerome Bruner, Howard Gardner, and Nelson Goodman (Fosnot & Perry, 2005). In previous learning theories, the major role of learners was to acquire a body of information constructed in the past. However, a constructivist perspective encourages learners to construct their own meaning through their concrete experiences making learning a meaning-making process that occurs through active cognitive reorganization. Especially from a constructivist perspective, learning occurs through interaction with others, making physical education curriculum critical to the promotion of students’ self-awareness, independence and cooperation, and helping students learn to accept responsibility, express ideas, and create relationships (Sherman, 2002). Based on the constructivist perspective, some scholars in the field of physical education studied students’ learning: students’ social experiences (Suomi, Collier & Brown, 2001), students’ engagement in school and physical education (Cothran & Ennis, 1999), students’ goal settings (Dyson, 1995), biographical learning (Christensen, 2007), community learning (Mary & Steve, 2006; Cutforth, 2000), cooperative learning (Dyson, 2002), situated learning (Kirk & Macdonald, 1998), and learning strategies (Misner & Arbogast, 1990; Anderson, 1999, Sherman, 2002).

However, despite the efforts to understand student learning from constructivist perspective, there is still a lack of study about students’ own perspectives on their learning. Students are educational theorists actively interpreting and influencing the learning environment (Nicholls, 1992). Thus, we need to understand students’ educational theories, as they are active class members and their perceptions of teaching determine their engagement and learning (Cothran, Kulinna, & Garrah, 2003). As mandatory state requirement for physical education have been reduced or eliminated across the country in spite of increased awareness of the importance of physical activities (NASPE & AHA, 2006), physical educators need to understand
how students perceive physical education in terms of attitudes, values and obstacles in order to survive.

In addition, a clear understanding of students’ subjectivity is required to know if students learn to judge and reason as well as acquire factual information (Erickson & Shultz, 1992). Many learning theories assume that there is a body of knowledge to be taught and learned from the perspective of teachers or researchers (Boud, Cohen & Walker, 1993). However, from a constructivist perspective on learning, students may construct a different subjective world, although they may encounter standardized curriculum, instruction and assessment (Erickson & Shultz, 1992). In other words, the instruction experienced by the learners may be different from intended instruction (Wittrock, 1986). Thus, the perspectives and voices of students themselves are important in order to understand their learning, and these have to be considered in the research on teaching, learning, and curriculum (Erickson & Shultz, 1992). Students’ voices and perspectives are excluded in many physical education studies, although understanding of students’ learning and experiences with their viewpoints could provide insights into how the curriculum and instruction are received (Dyson, 1995). As Cothran and Ennis (1999) noted, “This lack of information about students’ perspectives greatly reduces physical educators’ ability to design intervention and reform efforts to increase students’ engagement” (p. 236). Also, students have been provided with minimal opportunities to develop their voices and critical awareness of their own ends and means as well as their capacities for learning, basically due to traditional conceptions of the role as students and traditional research techniques (Erickson & Shultz, 1992). There is a paucity of research on students’ own voices of their experiences in physical education. Therefore, it is necessary to understand students’ learning from their own viewpoints based on constructivist perspective. The primordiality of the pedagogy of physical
education is much less something we can discover, construct, or identify by naming or conceptualizing it. Rather, the very idea of primordial signifies that the pedagogy of physical education is something that must be brought back, recalled, or recollected from original experience (Manen, 1990).

From a constructivist perspective, one assumes that learning is not just transmission of a body of knowledge from a teacher to students. Rather, learners themselves engage in meaning-making process so that one cannot overlook learners’ experiences because they can construct their own meaning only if their experiences are engaged. Dewey (1938) discussed that all principles become concrete only through their application, that is, learners’ meaningful experience. Thus, learning to him does not seem to be different from a development within, by, and for experience. Learning occurs through active and effortful information processing by students who perceive and interpret teachers’ instruction (Wittrock, 1986). We may not conclude that experience itself is the same with learning. However, if we think of experience not simply as an event that happened, but as an event with meaning, then the concept of experience steps closer toward learning. Also, based on the constructivist perspective, experience is required for learning and every experience is potentially an opportunity for learning (Boud, Cohen & Walker, 1993). Therefore, it is also needed to examine student experiences in order to understand student learning.

Three types of learners are emphasized in constructivism: the active learner, the social learner, and the creative learner (Perkins, 1999). To nurture these types of learners, physical educators should teach students to have responsibility for their own learning. Dewey (1938) discussed that the role of traditional education was to transmit bodies of information to new generation. On the contrary, progressive education aims at preparing learners for future
responsibility by means of acquisition of the organized bodies of information. That is, the purpose of progressive education should be making learners have responsibility for their own learning in order to prepare future experiences. A way to develop students’ own responsibility for learning is to increase their ability to extend their learning in physical education to broader life experiences. Azzarito and Ennis (2003) argued that students’ learning is supported by their sense of connection to the community and to real world experiences. In this sense, youth sports research is important in the field of physical education because students’ participation in a youth sports program is one of the real life situations that they can connect with their learning in physical education. In reality, as Dewey (1938) suggested teachers should utilize the local communities as educational resources, many scholars have insisted that a way to connect learning in physical education with life experience is to utilize community resources such as sports camps or youth sports programs (Cutforth, 2000; Wright, 2000; Kirk and Macdonald, 1998; Misner & Arbogast, 1990). In addition, in the field of physical education, school-based research is dominant, although students’ learning occurs not only in school but also in family and community. The researchers have concentrated only on how teachers affect students in school context. Therefore, physical education researchers need to analyze students’ experiences in the whole cultural context such as family, community, and friends as well as in the classroom environment.

Adolescents’ and children’s participation in youth sports programs is considered to be a valuable and meaningful activity in the United States. Indeed, statistical data indicate that a large number of youngsters participate in youth sports programs (Leonard, 1998; Ewing & Seefeldt, 2002; Seefeldt & Clark, 2002). In addition, adolescents’ and children’s participation naturally leads to parents’ involvement in youth sports programs. Therefore, participation in youth sports
programs has become socially and culturally important life activity for both adults and youngsters in the United States. With this social context, there has been a great increase in the amount of research conducted in youth sports settings (Smoll & Smith, 2002). However, compared to the studies performed in physical education settings, there is a relative lack of research on the students’ learning process and their own experiences in youth sport settings. Rather, some studies have focused on motivation, preference, and the physical and mental benefits of students’ participation in youth sports programs (Ewing & Seefeldt, 2002; Chambers, 1991; Martin, Dale, & Jackson, 2001). In these studies, youth sports settings were used not as a context but as an intervention. Those studies focused on the results of students’ participation rather than on the processes of their experiences in a youth sports program. Consequently, “children were simply vehicles for measuring outcomes” (Graue & Walsh, 1998, p. 2). Therefore, it is necessary to understand a youth sports program as context and to reveal students’ real experiences and perspectives. In addition, connecting youth sports program to the physical education context will help physical educators understand students’ holistic learning processes in their lives.

Again, from a constructivist perspective, learning is the process of how students construct realities and meaning through interaction with others in culture. Thus, students’ learning occurs not only in school but also in family and community. In this sense, parents play a crucial role in students’ learning because children spend a large portion of time with their parents, and those parents are highly involved in children’s experiences (Fredricks & Eccles, 2004). Parents are important teachers and social referents for children (Raudsepp, 2006). Thus, many educators encourage parents to participate in the educational process because they believe that parental involvement plays a critical role in their children’s education (Wilkinson & Schneck, 2003).
Many empirical studies have revealed that parental involvement produces positive outcomes for students in terms of learning and academic achievement in many subjects (Green & Walker, 2007; Anderson & Minke, 2007). The starting point of parental involvement may be their perceptions of, or beliefs about school subjects and educational topics. Therefore, it is essential to understand parents’ perceptions or beliefs on education because they influence educational policy and the particular nature of schooling (Sheehy, 2006). Another reason why physical educators need to know parents’ perceptions or beliefs is that children’s perceptions of their parents’ beliefs are significantly related to children’s own beliefs about their sport involvement (Brustad, 1996). Despite this importance, there is little literature related to parents’ perceptions of, or beliefs about their children’s experiences in physical education classes. Likewise, parents’ perceptions of youth sports programs have not been examined. Yet, parents have more direct impact on their children’s participation in youth sports programs than in physical education classes because they play a variety of roles as a coach, chauffeur, financier, spectator and cheerleader in a youth sports program (Fredricks & Eccles, 2004). Thus, it is necessary to examine parents’ perceptions of their children’s experiences both in physical education classes and in youth sports programs.

In summary, research on students and parents as well as teachers is important in order to understand students’ learning and to provide quality physical education programs. Under the assumption of a recent learning theory, constructivism, learning is the process of constructing meaning and reality through interaction with others. Thus, it is essential to examine how students construct their meaning in physical education classes, which means their learning process. In addition, youth sports research in relation to physical education is important because students’ participation in a youth sports program is one of real life situations that they can connect with
their learning in a physical education class. Physical education researchers have not paid attention to the connection of two different physical settings. Therefore, it is needed to find out how students make meanings in two different settings and how they connect them with each other for holistic understanding of students’ learning. Finally, little attention has been paid to parents, although they directly influence children’s experiences and their learning in physical activity settings. Thus, it is also necessary to analyze parents’ perception of two different settings, which will influence their children’s experiences.

This study allows physical education teachers, youth sport coaches and researchers in both areas to better understand students’ and parents’ experiences in, and perspectives on physical education and youth sports, which would better enhance the provision of quality education through physical activities.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was two-fold: (a) to explore students’ experiences and learning in physical education and youth sport, and (b) to examine parents’ perceptions of their child’s experiences in physical education and youth sport. The specific research questions are as follows: (a) What are students’ experiences in school physical education and the youth sport program? (b) How do students perceive those experiences in terms of their learning? (c) How do parents perceive physical education and youth sport, and their children’s experiences in these two settings in terms of their children’s learning?
Understanding students’ learning and learning process

Learning has been understood in various ways through the lenses of diverse disciplines such as psychology, philosophy, anthropology, and linguistics. In particular, contemporary psychology contributes to educational development through revealing how the human mind and learning work. Research works in psychology produced many learning theories that provide various perspectives on student learning. Early psychologists, namely behaviorists, considered learning simply as the acquisition of new behavior (Phillips & Soltis, 2004). Later psychologists changed to focus on how the learner’s nerve system organizes information acquired through perceptual mechanisms such as eyes, ears, and other senses (Phillips & Soltis, 2004). In this field of psychology, the mind is conceived as a computational device that is concerned with information processing. Education based on this viewpoint focuses on ways in which students organize and use information, pointing to “learning as primarily a process of active cognitive reorganization” (Cobb, 2005, p. 40). In addition, based on education couched under the psychological paradigm of maturationism, learning is dependent on the developmental stage of the learner, which results from a natural unfolding of innate biological programming (Fosnot & Perry, 2005). In this content, the educator’s role is assumed to be on the preparation of an enriched and developmentally appropriate learning environment.
Recently, the theory of constructivism is used to understand student learning. Works of Jean Piaget, Lev Vygotsky, Jerome Bruner, Howard Gardner, and Nelson Goodman exemplified the theory of constructivism (Fosnot & Perry, 2005). From this theoretical perspective, the mind is located in individual-in-social-action, and learning becomes a process of enculturation into a community of practice (Cobb, 2005). From constructivist perspective, the focus is on how the human mind creates and transforms meanings in cultural communities (Bruner, 1996). In this learning theory, knowledge and skills are perceived as carrying different meanings in students’ viewpoints (Chen, 1998). Thus, many educational researchers who study how students construct meaning in learning environments consider human psychological processes to be acquired in mediating one’s interactions with others, and with the physical environment through culture and its central medium, language (Cole, 1998). Under constructivist education, learning centers on how students construct their realities and meanings to adjust them to their cultures through interactions with others. In this sense, there are two tenets of constructivism: (a) an individual constructive perspective on learning, which focuses on how individuals construct knowledge and on the ways individual knowledge changes over time, (b) a social constructive perspective on knowledge views, which knowledge as socially constructed. That is, cultural knowledge and socially shared beliefs are created and recreated through social interaction (Rovegno & Bandhauer, 1997). Crotty (2003) made a distinction between them as constructivism focusing on the meaning making activity of the individual mind and constructionism focusing on the collective generation and transmission of meaning. Likewise, Cobb (2005) expressed it as the cognitive constructivist perspective and the social constructivist perspective.

Piagetian and Vygotskian approaches to learning and development initiated the constructivist learning theory. First, Piaget’s theory of cognitive development is a starting point
of the cognitive constructivist learning theory. As Piaget insisted that children actively construct knowledge by continually assimilating and accommodating new information, many scholars supporting the cognitive constructivist perspective agreed on students’ active role in their own learning (Slavin, 2009). According to Piaget, assimilation is the process of understanding a new object based on an existing patterns of behavior or thinking. Also, accommodation occurs when children need to modify those existing patterns of behavior or thinking in light of new information or a new experience. These two processes, assimilation and accommodation, create adaptation which leads children to a state of equilibrium, meaning a balance between what is understood and what is encountered. Children have an opportunity to learn and develop through assimilation and accommodation when their state of equilibrium upset.

In contrast, Vygotsky’s theory of social constructivist perspective emphasizes the socio-cultural nature of learning (Vygotsky, 1978). For Vygotsky, learning involves the acquisition of cultural meaning from instruction or information provided by others. For this social learning, children, first of all, need to learn cultural communication systems. Children internalize these cultural meanings so as to be able to think and solve the problems without others’ help. Two major concepts in Vygotsky’s notion of social learning are scaffolding, the assistance provided by more competent peers or adults, and zone of proximal development, tasks that children have not yet learned but are capable of learning at a given time (Slavin, 2009). In other words, children learn through receiving a great deal of support from others in the early stage of learning and then with diminishing support, they take increasing responsibility of their own learning. In addition, this learning process takes place only when children are working within their zone of proximal development.
In constructivism, learning occurs through learner’s active construction and reorganization of contents acquired by previously learned knowledge and experience (Ennis, 2007). That is, learners undergo profound conceptual change based on everyday experience in order for learning to take place (Vosniadou, 2007). Thus, it is important to understand learner’s conceptual change, which is a way a learner constructs and reorganizes knowledge. The conceptual change approach to learning began from Thomas Kuhn’s work on theory of change in the philosophy and history of science (Vosniadou, 2008). In the conceptual change approach, students’ knowledge is described as theory-like, and those theory-like structures go through the change when students encounter the incommensurable theory with what they hold in their lives. This basic concept of conceptual change approach is similar to Piaget’s assimilation and accommodation processes. However, the main difference between them is that conceptual change approach focuses on knowledge acquisition in specific subject-matter areas and on the notion of *domain-specific* knowledge. That is, most theories of learning such as Piagetian and Vygotskian approaches are *domain-general* focusing on principles, stages, mechanisms, or strategies that characterize all aspects of development and learning (Vosniadou, 2007). On the contrary, in the conceptual change approach, which is a *domain-specific* approach, distinct domains of thought are examined, and attempts are made to describe and explain the changes that take place in the content and structure of knowledge, with learning and development occurring within these domains (Vosniadou, 2007). In particular, many scholars in the area of science and mathematics education use this *domain-specific* approach to explain students’ learning in their domain.

As mentioned above, the basic assumption of the conceptual change approach is that domain-specific knowledge is organized in the form of theory (Vosniadou, 2007). Children construct their naïve theories through their common everyday experiences in the context of lay
culture (Vosniadou, 2007; Vosniadou, Vamvakoussi & Skopeliti, 2009). In this sense, emphasis in the conceptual change approach is placed on importance of social, cultural and educational environment as well as on cognitive change in the restructuring process (Vosniadou, Vamvakoussi, and Skepeliti, 2008). As children grow, they enrich their naïve theories when they encounter the commensurable theory in their lives, which is so called spontaneous conceptual change. This conceptual change takes place naturally with development and its process is simple, and uses bottom-up and additive mechanisms (Vosniadou, 2007). However, when children meet incommensurable theory in their school they need to restructure their naïve theories in order for learning to take place. For example, children may believe that the earth is flat based on their everyday experience. However, they need to reconstruct their theory of the earth in science class to understand and learn that science concept. This conceptual change, so called introduction-induced conceptual change is top-down, and uses radical, deliberate and intentional learning mechanisms (Vosniadou, 2007). These conceptual change approaches have been studied in the field of physical education, as well as in science and mathematics education.

Conceptual change and knowledge types in physical education

The first step to understanding students’ learning is to recognize how learning is processed and what kinds of knowledge are constructed within students’ mind. Cognitive psychology helps us understand the learning process by revealing changes in knowledge structure. Synthesizing many psychologists’ works, Ennis (2007) introduced three phases or levels of conceptual change in the field of physical education: enrichment, weak restructuring, and radical restructuring. At the first level, enrichment, learning occurs through elaboration of existing knowledge structures. New knowledge is added to or combined with prior knowledge in a relatively simple process as the learner gets new information or experiences. Simply experiencing a new sport skill may be
learning at this level. At the second level, *weak restructuring*, the learner repositions concepts to form different relationships, reshape the existing knowledge, or adjust prior understandings which may not fit coherently with the learner’s current conceptual framework. While playing badminton, for example, students may feel different in using their wrist from playing tennis. Thus, students need to modify their tennis movement for learning badminton skills. At the final level, *radical restructuring*, the conceptual structures change dramatically to handle new and/or conflicting understandings. Radical restructuring must occur for students to move to a new, more complex and theoretically stable level of understanding. In this level, students may be able to play badminton without reverting to tennis skills.

In addition to the conceptual change, four knowledge types of physical education have been explained: declarative knowledge, procedural knowledge, conditional knowledge and strategic knowledge (Dodds, Griffin, & Placek, 2001). Declarative knowledge includes knowing factual information, for example, being able to name player positions, understanding each position’s functions in team sports. Procedural knowledge is to understand how to do something including being able to use the proper skills. For example, learners have to be able to correctly position the body for sit-ups to maximize the use of abdominal muscles. Conditional knowledge requires understanding when and how to use particular declarative or procedural knowledge. For instance, it includes the level of warm-up and cool-down portions of a fitness workout. Finally, strategic knowledge is related to how to maximize the efficiency of acquiring other knowledge. Thus, it assists in performing, regulating, and evaluating the execution of the task.
A constructivist perspective in physical education

Constructivism is concerned with understanding students’ perception which influences their learning in physical education (Kirk & Macdonald, 1998). Thus, constructivist physical education researchers primarily attempted to study students’ experiences of the curriculum in two ways: (a) by studying student perceptions of or attitude toward physical education and (b) by studying students’ conceptualization of physical education (Anderson, 1999). Student perception and attitude research was conducted when researchers first started to apply the constructivist perspective to physical education. The underlying assumption of the student perception and attitude research is that students’ perceptions, attitudes, notions or knowledge of physical education directly influence their learning process (Luke & Hardy, 1999). That is, what the students feel and do is an important determinant in their learning process.

Students’ perceptions of and attitudes toward physical education

Research on students’ perceptions of physical education revealed why students like or dislike physical education, and when students have a positive attitude toward physical education. Aspects that students found favorable in physical education included variety of activities, physical education teachers, competition, healthy life, and fun (Ryan, Fleming, & Maina, 2003; Couturier, Chepko, & Coughlin, 2005; Tappe & Burgeson, 2004; Aicinena, 1991). Ryan, Fleming, and Maina (2003) determined that students (83%) enjoyed a variety of activities in their physical education class. Solmon and Cater (1995) also revealed that kindergarten and first-grade students liked to exercise and do a variety of activities. Similarly, Couturier, Chepko, and Coughlin (2005) concluded that most students chose to participate in physical education because they liked to get out and move. The second reason why students liked physical education was because they liked the physical education teacher (Ryan, Fleming, & Maina, 2003; Solmon &
Cater, 1995). Students identified physical education teachers as the second most popular figure on campus and also indicated them to have been personally helpful to them (Aicinena, 1991). Their knowledge of physical education and physical skills are the most important factors which attract students (Ryan, Fleming, & Maina, 2003; Luke & Cope, 1994). Another factor that affected development of positive perspectives on physical education was competition. Couturier, Chepko, and Coughlin (2005) revealed that students like competitive team sports in the physical education classes. Interestingly, however, competition has both favorable and unfavorable aspects in students’ conceptions of sport. Lake (2001) found that competition was contained in negative conceptions of physical education. Also, in Luke and Cope’s research (1994), students complained that there was too much stress on winning in physical education classes. In short, attitude toward competition was a significant factor for student success in physical education (Dyson, 1995). The fourth positive perception was that physical education makes students healthier. Health benefit has the longest history in physical education. Many studies showed that physical education has contributed to public health (Tappe & Burgeson, 2004), and students perceive that physical education increases their health benefits (Couturier, Chepko, & Coughlin, 2005; Solmon & Cater, 1995). The final factor that brings out positive attitudes toward physical education is fun. A variety of studies found that students liked the physical education class because it was fun (Couturier, Chepko, & Coughlin, 2005; Ryan, Fleming, & Maina, 2003; Solmon & Cater, 1995; Aicinena, 1991). Fun or enjoyment is the most commonly recurring themes among students across the age range (Laws & Fisher, 1999).

Students had negative images of physical education as well: boring curriculum, waiting time and inconvenience of class preparation (Couturier, Chepko, & Coughlin, 2005; Solmon & Cater, 1995). Couturier, Chepko, and Coughlin (2005) found that students did not like doing the
same activities every year in physical education class. In addition, students felt it was inconvenient to change and shower for participation in physical education class. Through analyzing young children’s drawings, Solmon and Cater (1995) found that physical education meant following rules, waiting turns, and standing in line for children. Students also reported that they were not given safe environments or adequate time to learn skills (Portman, 1995), nor were they given the opportunity to learn culturally relevant activities (Ennis, 2000).

The results of descriptive research on students’ attitudes toward physical education provide useful implications for designing the physical education curriculum, planning physical education class and developing effective instruction. Also, students’ attitude toward physical education helps physical educators realize students’ need for positive engagement in physical education. However, such impromptu and superficial perceptions, whether positive or negative, do not create lasting personal meaning through student’s lives. In addition, it does not provide understanding of how their learning and learning process occur because even students who enjoy their classes may not be convinced they are learning anything (Cothran & Ennis, 1999). That is, attitude studies only describe students’ feeling about physical education instead of what they learned in physical education. Therefore, further in-depth understanding of students’ learning in physical education is essential to provide quality physical education.

*Conceptualization of meaning in physical education*

The construct of meaning of physical education consists of students’ perceptions of purposes that the content requires them to achieve (Chen, 1998). Dyson (1995) reported students’ personal goals in physical education: cooperating with others, challenging themselves, taking risks, having fun and learning motor skills. However, when students were asked about their personal goals, they tended to answer what the teacher wanted them to achieve
rather than what they wanted to achieve. It is well known that the goal of physical education is to promote students’ physical, cognitive, affective, emotional and interpersonal development. However, students’ voices and perspectives were excluded when physical educators set up those goals. Although student goals in the above research were aligned with goals which physical educators had already set up, that may have been because of the influence of the teacher.

Further studies examined students’ perceptions of their learning in terms of meaning making process. Cothran and Ennis (1999) investigated students’ perspectives on school membership and its relationship to physical education to understand students’ engagement in schools and physical education. They found that “many students did not believe that school and physical education had significant meaning or value in their lives” (p. 238). That is, there was segregation between school and real lives. Students saw few connections between physical education, school and their life outside of school. In particular, they were unaware of the potential educational benefits gained from participating in various team sports that the teacher selected. For example, students believed that volleyball class was meaningless because their current experiences were so similar to previous experiences. In this study, students’ different challenges and interest seemed to arise from their skill, enthusiasm and cultural relevance rather than from instructional differences. Students who chose to be disconnected from other students believed that they were controlling some of the threat to their personal safety. In conclusion, students did not perceive that school or physical education was relevant and valuable nor did they feel a sense of attachment to others in school and in physical education.

Similarly, Christensen (2007) found that students had difficulty talking about what they learned in physical education classes. This study examined biographical learning supporting “students’ involvement in dialogues, which forms the basis for personal narratives surrounding
Table 2.1 Students’ likes and dislikes in physical education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I like physical education because of…</th>
<th>I don’t like physical education because of…</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>● A variety of activities</td>
<td>● The same activities every year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Physical education teachers</td>
<td>● Changing and showering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Feeling a healthy life</td>
<td>● Waiting turns in line</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Fun</td>
<td>● Too much competition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Competitive team sports</td>
<td>● Culturally irrelevant activities</td>
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</table>

concrete meaningful experiences from participating in sports and physical activity” (Christensen, 2007, p. 6). The findings of this study indicate that there is a conflict or a contrast between the students’ perception of learning in physical education and the reflective concept of learning which emphasizes experience articulation. Students used words a good experience, an unusually good atmosphere, and a positive influence about the expected outcome of the course, but found it strange and self-contradictory to define their experiences as real learning in physical education.

The above two studies imply that students could not see that they learned when they found little meaning in their experiences in physical education. Therefore, many scholars insisted that physical education should provide meaningful experiences for students. McCaughtry & Rovegno (2001) asserted that fitness education is problematic because it emphasizes only health behaviors, not whether students derive meaning and enjoyment from activities. This points disconnection between meaningful participation in physical activity and meaningful physiological health outcomes. They also criticized the traditional concepts of meaning, and illuminated the deeper concepts of meaning in three categories: physical qualities, cognitive qualities, and affective qualities of meaning in movement. In addition, Chen (1998) used the concept of meaningfulness.
to distinguish it from meaning in understanding students’ learning. The construction of meaning of physical education consists of students’ purpose, intention, knowledge and skills. The construction of meaningfulness represents students’ desire to achieve their purpose, their action to achieve their goal, and their willingness to pursue their goal through continuous engagement in the activity. In conclusion, students can learn something when their meanings are internalized into meaningfulness.

Learning strategies in constructivist physical education

Other studies based on a constructivist perspective revealed other factors affecting students’ learning. Suomi, Collier, and Brown (2001) found four factors that affected the social experiences of students in elementary physical education classes: teachers, the social substance of activities, cultures, and the social skills of students. In this study, social experiences of students were enhanced in a learning environment that showed teacher’s caring and acceptance of students with a wide range of abilities, and minimized competition. Positive feedback for prosocial behaviors increased students’ social learning. By contrast, students’ feeling of exclusion negatively affected their social experiences. In addition, students’ own culture influenced their social experiences in elementary physical education classes. Finally, students’ social skills either positively or negatively affected their social relationships and interactions with others. In addition, Aicinena (1991) showed that students had more positive attitudes toward physical education when they engaged in personal interaction with their teachers. Two studies demonstrated that the teacher plays a critical role in increasing students’ meaningful experiences. Allowing students to make decisions resulted in more favorable attitudes toward physical education than did teacher centered methods of instruction, which did not allow for student decision making (Schempp, Cheffers, & Zaichkowski, 1983). Also, those students’
decisions about behaviors are strongly influenced by their understanding of meaning (Lake, 2001).

In a constructivist perspective, students must recognize their knowledge and learning process because it leads them to increase their own learning. This metacognitive ability plays an important role in maximizing students’ learning. Metacognition refers to what students know about their cognitive functioning and how they regulate their cognitive activity (Luke & Hardy, 1999). Students must recognize the information available during a cognitive activity such as the desired outcomes of a task, the context in which the task is taking place, the organization of information, and the demands of the activity (Luke & Hardy, 1999). In physical education, students have failed to notice how a task was structured, how they perceive a reason behind the structure, and how they monitor the tasks and their learning. Luke and Hardy (1999) suggested some principles for developing metacognitive ability by categorizing metacognition into three areas: metacognitive knowledge, metacognitive strategy, and metacognitive experience (Table 2.2). In addition, they provided a general strategy to increase metacognitive ability such as utilizing self-questioning, self-summarization, and metacognitive discussion.

Students’ learning in youth sports programs

Similar to attitude research in physical education some studies revealed motivation and preference of students’ participation in youth sports program and provided implications for quality development of programs. Ewing and Seefeldt (2002) reported the top five motivations that lead children to participate in organized sport programs: (a) to have fun, (b) to improve skills, (c) to stay in shape, (d) to do something they are good at, and (e) to have the excitement of
Table 2.2 Metacognitive principles

<table>
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<th>Metacognitive Knowledge Principles</th>
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<tr>
<td>● Students must appreciate the purpose of a task and the influences upon that task.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Students must appreciate and understand themselves as individuals and as learners, and they must acknowledge how other people may influence their learning processes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Students must understand the importance of cognitive strategies in order to make the necessary learning associations and connections between information.</td>
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<table>
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<th>Metacognitive Strategy principles</th>
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<tr>
<td>● Students must be aware and monitor their cognitive activities and their learning processes.</td>
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<tr>
<td>● Students must evaluate and regulate their cognitive activities.</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Metacognitive Experience Principles</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>● Students must acknowledge and interpret any cognitive or affective experiences that may occur during their cognitive activities.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

competition. Also, many descriptive data indicated the primary reasons for adolescent athletic involvement to be fun, skill development, excitement and personal challenge, achievement, fitness, energy or tension release, and friendship (Chambers, 1991).

Martin, Dale, and Jackson (2001) focused on coaching preferences of youth athletes. Their findings indicate that adolescent athletes want a coach who (a) implements effective instructional practices, (b) performs the skills required of the sport, and (c) who provides opportunities for the athletes to compete and achieve their goals. They also found the gender differences in coaching
preferences. Boys preferred a coach who stresses fitness, achievement, and competitive challenge. By contrast, girls preferred a coach who emphasizes fun and excitement.

In a different study, soccer camp participants reported that soccer related games are the most enjoyable aspects of their camp. Camp related activities including swimming, social experiences such as meeting the coaches, learning soccer skills and having fun followed the major category, soccer related games. Also, the researcher found that coach gender and media image usage impacted participants’ perception of enjoyment (Jones, 2005). Unlike previous studies, this soccer camp study has a meaning in that it seeks to explore children’s experiences in real contexts beyond the statistical data. In a similar vein, Holt, Bewick, and Gately (2004) listened to the voices of kids who participated in a residential weight-loss camp. Prior to attending the camp, participants reported their worries about being bullied and fears about the military style camp. Goals and aspiration of participants were losing weight, reducing bullying at school, increasing self-esteem and making friends. Throughout the camp experiences, difficult elements were homesickness and dietary concerns. By contrast, the positive elements of camp experience were enjoyment, peer support, staff support, and choice of activities.

In summary, four major types of motivation for participating in youth sports programs are having fun, learning skills, enjoying game and competition, and meeting the coach. However, we also have to remember that those types of motivation are influenced by age, gender, and other social status. Through reviewing the literature, Kirk (2005) noted that young people’s socialization into sport follows a general pattern. Children from age of 7 through 12 participate in a range of activities because of fun and enjoyment. The emphasis is on playing rather than training to them. In the second phase, beginning at around age 13-15, the range of activities reduces, perhaps two or three, and motivation shifts from fun and enjoyment to competitive
success and enjoyment of winning. Youth at this age group focus on improving current levels of performance and increasing the frequency and intensity of training. Kirk (2005) also insisted that “social class, gender, and disability are key barriers to the development of physical competence perceptions and that children from lower social groups, girls and young disabled people are markedly under-represented in community-based sports clubs” (p. 251).

Needless to say, participation in youth sports programs improves students’ physical fitness (Hoffman, Kang, Faigenbaum & Ratamess, 2005). In addition, many studies stressed the importance of promoting positive youth development in terms of affective development. The affective benefits include enhancing physical competencies (Kirk, 2005) and self-esteem (Smith & Smoll, 1990), developing decision making skills (Kirk, 2005), and promoting cooperative learning (Foster, 2001) and moral development (Decker, 1995). Research on a values-based physical activity program using the Teaching Personal and Social Responsibility model found that the more participants thought they behaved in accord with responsibility model concepts, the greater their enjoyment, sports interest, group leader respect, and likelihood of returning (Watson, Newton, & Kim, 2003). Similarly, Martinek and Ruiz (2005) suggested that after-school sport clubs can encourage students to take more responsibility for themselves and to be more sensitive and responsive to others. In particular, they emphasized the importance of teacher and parent involvement. This cooperation assists students in integrating the concepts taught in physical activity programs into their classroom activities. Despite this suggestion, there is still lack of research in youth sports settings on students’ meaning making process and their connections between personal meanings and other contexts.
Parents’ perceptions of physical education and youth sport

Sheehy (2006) investigated parents’ understanding and perception of their fifth grade children’s physical education program. Most parents struggled to provide detailed information about their children’s physical education program. Furthermore, the information, as articulated by parents, was frequently inaccurate. All parents drew on their own recollections of physical education classes to answer about their children’s program. The most important finding of this study was parents’ belief that the physical education program did not produce evidence of student learning, but only of student enjoyment, which reinforced parents’ existing notions that physical education was not an important subject in the school curriculum. The same result was found in research on parents’ attitude toward physical education performed with a concern for the public image of physical education. Stewart and Green (1987) reported that parents see physical education as not as important as many other subjects. In the same study, however, parents favored physical education and wanted to see it as a required subject at all grade levels.

A national report (NASPE & AHA, 2006) reported parents’ supportive perceptions of physical education in school. Ninety-five percent of parents nationwide said that physical education should be included in the school curriculum. Eighty-five percent of parents believed that student should be required to take physical education everyday at every grade level. More than 75 percent of parents noted that school boards should not eliminate physical education for budgetary reasons or because of the need to meet stricter academic standards. In conclusion, parents believe that physical education is an important subject because of health promotion and students’ enjoyment. However, they do not believe that students learn in physical education classes.
A different study tried to find out what parents needed to know about physical education (Wilkinson & Schneck, 2003). Survey research on the effects of a school physical education and health website revealed that parents wanted to get information about student assessment including grades and other forms of student progress, class assignments, the content of the unit, and content knowledge to assist their children in setting goals and improving skills.

Beyond the public school setting, Kimiecik & Horn (1998) examined parental beliefs about their children’s physical activity participation. Parents in this study had relatively high perceptions of their children’s physical competence. It also appears that they valued their children’s participation in fitness activities and assumed a predominantly task goal orientation rather than an ego goal orientation with regard to assessing their children’s success in fitness contexts. The researchers provided five categories to look at parents’ beliefs about their children’s learning through physical activity in their questionnaires: life skills development, physical health, mental health, preparation for sport, weight control and fun. Among them, physical health and fun were highly ranked among five categories of parents’ beliefs, which posit to physical activities as helping students to promote their physical health and to have enjoyment, but not to promote learning of content knowledge. However, a certain study examined parents’ perceptions of children’s learning in organized youth sports programs (Lareau, 2003). Parents believed that “sports teach children crucial life lessons” (p. 60). For example, children who play on organized sports teams can develop the ability to perform in public, and in front of adults including strangers. Parents thought that those life skills acquired in organized sports will continue to be useful when their children take their jobs in the future. Parents also believed that children learn to be team players. This kind of team-participation skill is directly applicable to wide range of work environments. Finally, organized sports can help prepare children for
performance-based assessment at school. Mandatory tryouts and public games in sports camps are the best examples. In short, children can learn and practice a variety of important life skills through participating in organized youth sports programs.

Parents’ influences on their children’s physical activity

*Parents and children’s physical activity*

Beyond parents’ perceptions of physical education classes and youth sports programs, researchers have tried to reveal parental influences on their children’s physical activity. While physical educators have been interested in parents’ perceptions, sport psychologists and sociologists have paid attention to parental influence on their children’s physical activity. Despite the evidence of health benefits gained from involvement in physical activity, levels of children’s physical activity are quite low in developed countries including the United States (Gustafson & Rhodes, 2006). In reality, NASPE and AHA (2006) reported that more than a third of young people do not regularly engage in vigorous physical activity. Therefore, scholars have attempted to find factors that influence children’s involvement in physical activity. Needless to say, one of the major factors affecting children’s physical activity participation is their parents. Children spend a large portion of time with their parents, and those parents are highly involved in children’s experiences (Fredricks & Eccles, 2004). Three major ways of parents’ influence on students’ physical activities were found: (a) parents’ physical activities, (b) parental support, and (c) family socioeconomic status.

*Parents’ physical activity*

The predominant theory in students’ socialization into physical activity has been social learning theory (Anderssen, Wold, & Torsheim, 2006). The basic assumption of social learning
theory is that people learn through observing others’ behaviors, attitudes and outcomes of those behaviors (Bandura, 1977). Bandura said, “most human behavior is learned observationally through modeling: from observing others, one forms an idea of how new behaviors are performed, and on later occasions this coded information serves as a guide for action” (p. 22).

Based on this theory, Fogelholm, Nuutinen, Pasanen, Myohanen, and Saatela (1999) stressed the importance of model learning from parents’ behavior and of receiving reinforcements from significant others. Thus, under social learning theory, parents are seen as providing opportunities to become physically active as role models and as important social agents. In reality, Stalhberg, Miles, and Marcello (2003) reported that parents were named most frequently as the role model or person children admired the most. Unfortunately, however, parents spent little time being physically active with their children. Only 15% of children play a sport, ride a bike, or do other physical activities with their parents. Children engaged with parents in physical activities significantly less than sedentary activities like eating, watching television or a movie, or playing a video game.

Based on social learning theory, many scholars have attempted to find whether or not parents’ physical activity is a correlate of child physical activity. However, the results of association between parents’ and children’s physical activities have been inconsistent (Gustafson & Rhodes, 2006). Some studies support the positive effects of parents’ physical activity on children’s physical activity, and others do not. Discrepancy among studies comes from children’s gender, age, and possible methodological influences including the way of measuring physical activities (Prochaska, Rodgers, & Sallis, 2002).

A supportive study found that children from families in which both parents were active were more likely to be active than children from families in which neither parent was active.
Also, the effect of parental activity was higher for boys than girls (Moore, Lombardi, White, Campbell, Oliveria, & Ellison, 1991). Bois, Sarrazon, Brustad, Trouilloud, and Curry (2005) added the evidence of existence of direct parental socialization influences on their child’s involvement in physical activity through physical activity role modeling effects. However, only mothers’, but not fathers’ involvement in physical activity was related to their child’s involvement in physical activity.

Other studies found that physical activity of parents does not tend to influence their children’s physical activity. Anderssen, Wold and Torsheim (2006) indicated that levels of physical activity among youth are not directly affected by parental levels of physical activity. They concluded that parents’ own physical activity does not seem to play any important role in their children’s physical activity. Parent modeling does not help the child develop activity skills, provide contact with active peers or take the child to an appropriate location for physical activity (Trost, Sallis, Pate, Freedson, Taylor, & Dowda, 2003). Kimiecik and Horn (1998) found no relationship between parents’ self-reported exercise behavior and their children’s self-reported physical activity participation, which does not support the role-modeling hypothesis. However, the findings of these studies do not mean that parents have minimal influence on their children’s physical activities because role modeling is only one source of parental behavioral influence.

Parental support

Different types of parental support are significantly associated with higher levels of physical activities (Prochaska, Rodgers, & Sallis, 2002). First of all, parental belief systems that support physical activity have greater influence on their children’s physical activity than parental role modeling behaviors (Eccles & Harold, 1991). Specifically, parents’ beliefs have an impact on children’s domain-specific perceived competence, subjective task value, and achievement
behaviors such as participation, effort and persistence (Eccles, Wigfield, & Schiefele, 1998). Based on this expectancy-value perspective, Weiss and Fretwell (2005) found that students highlighted positive parental influence in the form of providing experiences such as involvement in decision making, quality time and instruction. Another form of positive parental influence was interpreting experiences such as understanding children’s ability level, special attention and player equality, but not role modeling. That is, parent’s ability to provide and interpret experiences for their child in positive ways can encourage children’s belief in their competence in sports, attraction toward sports, and continued participation. Another study focused on parental influence on students’ motivation in physical education. Parents’ emphasis on learning predicted personal task-orientation, effort and enjoyment for physical education. By contrast, perceptions of parental emphasis on comparison predicted ego-orientation and the feeling of being under pressure in physical education (Carr & Weigand, 2001).

Parents also influence their children’s physical activity involvement through encouragement and social support (Fogelholm, Nuutinen, Pasanen, Myohanen & Saatela, 1999; Raudsepp, 2006). Trost, Sallis, Pate, Freedson, Taylor, and Dowda (2003) revealed that parental support such as parental enjoyment and perceived importance of physical activity was positively associated with child physical activity participation through its positive association with children’s self-efficacy perceptions. In particulars, mothers’ perceptions of their children’s competence predicted their children’s perceived physical competence which is related to their physical activity involvement (Bois, Sarrazin, Brustad, Trouilloud, & Cury, 2005). Similarly, higher levels of perceived parental enjoyment and parental encouragement were associated with greater attraction to physical activity for both boys and girls (Brustad, 1996). Biddle and Goudas
(1996) also found that parental encouragement has been shown to increase children’s physical activity level.

Instrumental parental supportive behaviors, including transporting the child, observing activity, providing equipment, and encouraging the child, appeared to be related to their children’s confidence levels (Trost, Sallis, Pate, Freedson, Taylor, & Dowda, 2003; Gustafson & Rhodes, 2006). It is also parents’ work to fill out enrollment forms, write checks, call to arrange car pools, wash uniforms, and make refreshments (Lareau, 2003). Lareau (2003) made a detailed description of a middle-class family’s daily life controlled by children’s physical activity participation. The children’s schedules set the pace of life for all family members. As soon as parents finished their work, “they rush home, prepare snacks, change out of their work clothes, make sure the children are appropriately dressed and have the proper equipment for upcoming organized activities, find their car keys, put the dog outside, load the children and equipment into the car, lock the door, and drive off” (p. 42). This pattern repeated itself day after day. Sometimes, parents were forced to resolve potential scheduling conflicts coming from children’s activities by adjusting their own work schedules. In addition, the conversation at the dinner table is full of children’s experiences from their organized activities. Similarly, Yang, Telama, and Laakso (1996) concluded that children’s independence and their own expectations acquired from participation in sport have a higher potential to change the parents’ lifestyle. In short, without any doubt, many parents provide instrumental support for their children’s physical activities.

Despite agreement on parents’ supportive role, there are differences between paternal and maternal support because of their different beliefs. For example, mothers differed from fathers in their reasoning in that they want their children to participate in fitness-oriented activities (Kimiecik & Horn, 1998). Lareau (2003) noted more of a leadership role from mothers in
monitoring, feeding, and helping the children with daily life tasks, including participation in institutionalized physical activities. This seems to stress that mothers’ beliefs about children’s physical activity are as important, or even more important than fathers’. Other studies found different ways of supporting. For example, mothers provide higher levels of logistic support, including enrolling their children in sports and supporting them in sporting events. In contrast, fathers use their own behavior to encourage physical activities such as leading a family outing involving the activity (Davison, Ctuuing & Birch, 2003). In a different study (Beets, Vogel, Chapman, Pitetti, and Cardinal, 2007), mother’s use of outdoor play as recreation activities, including riding bikes, walking, and playing at a local park/playground was the only support type associated with girls’ activity. Fathers’ play with sons was positively related to the sons’ outdoor physical activity. The father-son relationship was further specified in a different study. Fathers’ verbalized feelings of pride, positive social interactions, opportunities to teach sport and life skills, and enjoyable time spent with their sons were identified as prime benefits of their involvement in physical activities (Weiss & Fretwell, 2005).

*Family socioeconomic status*

Parents’ socioeconomic status, including employment, education and income, creates different learning cultures in terms of learning environment such as facilities, equipment and the quality of teachers, parents’ different philosophies and approaches to child rearing, and practices and chances given to students (Lareau, 2003; Gustafson & Rhodes, 2006). Likewise, parents’ socioeconomic status influences the patterns of children’s participation in physical activity. Middle-class parents encourage their children to play sports in organized institutions such as sports camps or youth sports programs. On the other hand, working-class and poor parents leave their children free to concentrate on pleasing themselves and to spend their free time with family
members or relatives (Lareau, 2003). A different study confirms that family income and parents’ educational levels are positively associated with being an active sports club member. Types of physical activity are also different based on family income. (Kantomaa, Tammelin, Nayha, & Taanila, 2007).

Different patterns of physical activity between middle-class children, and working-class and poor children result in different learning. Lareau (2003) pointed out the conspicuous differences of children’s learning among different socioeconomic family groups. Middle-class children receive more than an education in how to play soccer or baseball through organized physical activity. Further, they acquire skills and dispositions that help them navigate the institutional world. Middle-class children develop their life skills through interacting with authority figures in institutional physical activity settings. For example, they learned how to make eye contact, shake hands firmly and display comfort with adults. That is, “middle-class children are trained in ‘the rules of the game’ that govern interactions with institutional representatives” (p. 6). For that, middle-class parents emphasize not only physical skills but also reasoning, discussion and negotiation through participation in organized sports programs which have a potential advantage for future institutional negotiations. They try to stimulate their children’s development and foster their cognitive and social skills through physical activity. In contrast, working-class and poor children experience less structured physical activity than middle-class children because they are released to play without adults’ supervision or teaching. That is, “children have a separate world from adults” (p. 76). Children’ physical leisure activities are treated as inconsequential and as a separate world of those of adults. In some sense, working-class and poor children develop creativity, spontaneity, independence, and enjoyment through their autonomous physical activities. However, they also learn a “sense of constraint” in their
interactions in institutional settings such as schools and organized sports programs. This “sense of constraint” comes from parents’ unawareness of their children’s school situation. Sometimes, working-class and poor parents complain that the school rules are unreasonable, but they are forced to accept them. Thus, the children in these families are trained to accept the actions of persons in authority rather than to discuss and negotiate. Working-class and poor class parents also have the limited economic resources which do not allow them to send their children to organized sports programs. They tend to focus on keeping children safe, enforcing discipline and regulating their behaviors rather than on rearing their children in a concerted manner. Parents in this group allow children to pursue their own choices of activities and spend less time monitoring their children’s activities. Thus, unlike children in middle-class families, children in working-class and poor families are not likely to be enrolled in an organized activity unless children specifically request it and parents can support this request financially.

Many scholars also have been interested in the relationship between parents’ socioeconomic status and the level of physical activity involvement. Kantomaa, Tammelin, Nayha, & Taanila (2007) found parents’ high educational level to be positively associated with their children being physically active. In the same vein, higher social class status of the families was related to higher physical activity participation of adolescents, which means that positive attitudes toward the values of activity, and a healthy life style of higher social classes are transferred to their children’s attitudes and health-related behaviors (Raudsepp, 2006). One reason of the low level of working-class and poor children’s physical activity is on parents’ belief about safety. Survey research revealed a higher level of parent anxiety about neighborhood safety and a lower level of children’s physical activity in a poor inner city community as
compared with a middle-class suburban community (Weir, Etelson & Bran, 2006). That is, inner city parents restrict their children’s activities because they believe their neighborhoods are unsafe.

Conclusion of literature review

This study began from student learning. Thus, in order to understand student learning, I reviewed literature on learning theories such as behaviorism, maturationism and constructivism. Constructivist education attracted me in that learning centers on how students construct their realities and meanings to adjust them to their cultures through interaction with others. In addition, a constructivist perspective helped me realize that student learning is supported by sense of connection to real world experiences. This was a reason why I made connection between physical education and youth sport.

In physical education settings, research focused on students’ perceptions of and attitudes toward physical education as a school subject based on a theory of constructivism. Further, research advanced to discuss conceptualization of meaning in physical education and to reveal learning strategies in constructivist physical education. In the field of youth sports, research mainly focused on motivation, preference, and benefits of participating in youth sport programs rather than on student learning or learning process. In other words, these studies used youth sports as an intervention rather than a learning context. Despite many studies about student learning in physical education and youth sport settings, there was a lack of research combining these two physical activity settings as a whole learning context. This concept of separation encouraged me to combine them as one research setting because learning occurs holistically in an individual who experiences both physical activity settings.
Although some studies found parents’ perception of physical education and youth sport through survey research, the mainstream of parent research was to reveal parental influences on their children’s physical activity. These parental influences included parents’ physical activities, parental support, and family socioeconomic status. As in student learning research, parent research also separated physical education and youth sports. Thus, this study focused on understanding how parents perceived two different physical activity settings as a learning environment. In addition, this study provided an opportunity to compare parents’ and their children’s perception of physical education and youth sports. This will help us understand how students and parents see the same phenomenon similarly or differently.
CHAPTER 3

METHOD

Theoretical perspectives

It is necessary to understand epistemology before discussing a theoretical framework because it provides a philosophical grounding for many theoretical perspectives that could influence a direction of a research investigation (Crotty, 2003). Crotty (2003) identified two major epistemologies, objectivism and constructionism. Through objectivism lenses things have an absolute and objective truth and meaning in them. For example, “that tree in the forest is a tree, regardless of whether anyone is aware of its existence or not” (Crotty, 2003, p. 8). Thus, people having an objectivist epistemology seek to discover absolute and objective meanings which are intrinsic. This belief created the paradigm of positivism, known as the quantitative paradigm, which assumes that “the social world is inherently knowable and that we can all agree on the nature of social reality” (Esterberg, 2002, p. 10). That is, the social world has regular causal laws which are able to be discovered. Therefore, within this positivist paradigm, researchers must free themselves from the social and cultural values to discover objective meanings.

Unlike objectivism, constructionism underscores the idea that things are meaningful only when human beings construct meanings. Thus, meaning is to be constructed rather than discovered. Constructionism is an epistemological view, where scholars claims “all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being
constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essential social context” (Crotty, 2003, p. 42). Within this epistemological stance, objects are meaningless without human consciousness. In this sense, researchers’ subjectivity plays a critical role in finding meanings. In conclusion, in the constructionism viewpoint, reality or knowledge is derived from what human beings construct through their engagement with the world rather than from what objective truth discovered from the world. This constructionism perspective serves a philosophical grounding for this research study.

While epistemology provides a philosophical grounding, the theoretical perspective is a more concrete way of viewing the world and making meaning of it based on epistemology (Crotty, 2003). Constructionism’s epistemological stance forms the basis for the qualitative paradigm with many theoretical perspectives such as symbolic interactionism, phenomenology, feminism, or postmodernism. However, many scholars used different approaches to categorize these theoretical perspectives to distinguish different types of qualitative inquiry (Patton, 2002). Out of them, this research study employs a phenomenological perspective because phenomenological reflection on the meanings and significances of phenomena of daily life is fundamental to pedagogic research (Manen, 1990). That is, “pedagogy requires a phenomenological sensitivity to lived experience, children’s realities and lifeworlds” (Manen, p. 2). Also, phenomenological perspective provides many useful directions for physical education in that both share the common ground in terms of lived experience, intersubjectivity and insiders’ stories (Connolly, 1995). Phenomenology seeks to explore the essence of lived experiences of phenomena, and physical education is a phenomenon filled with examples of how lived experience creates different meanings for teachers, students, and parents. Also, phenomenology has an intersubjective character, and physical education includes shared experience invoking
intersubjectivity, or a lived relationship with others; for example, how teachers make relationship with learners, and vice versa. In addition, from phenomenological perspectives, physical educators are encouraged to listen to insiders’ stories of lived experience in physical activity in order to empower the nature of physical activity. In short, phenomenology is a valuable philosophical background and a practical method that helps scholars to explore people’s experiences in physical activity settings such as physical education classes and youth sports programs. Thus, phenomenology can be flexibly utilized in physical education research both as a philosophy and as a qualitative method, even though, so far, philosophical aspects of phenomenology have been more stressed than methodological aspects. Phenomenology as a philosophy contributes to the exploration of people’s personal meanings of physical education, especially teachers’ meanings, but not students’ or parents’. With these reasons, phenomenological method is used in this study to satisfy the research purpose that focuses on exploring and describing lived experiences of students and parents in physical education classes and youth sports programs.

Phenomenology is understood in a wide range of ways such as a philosophy, an interpretive theory, an analytic perspective, a major qualitative tradition, and a research method framework (Patton, 2002). As a philosophy, there are three types of phenomenology: classical phenomenology, existential phenomenology and hermeneutic phenomenology. Edmund Husserl is a precursor of the method of classical phenomenology. The basic assumption of this approach is that access to the material world is through consciousness (Priest, 2002). People in this stream are interested in the structures of the world and consciousness; specifically, how objects are constituted in pure consciousness, and how these constitutions are identified through processes of phenomenological reduction (Grbich, 2007). Thus, the aim of this phenomenological method
is to describe a phenomenon of everyday experience in order to understand its essential structure (Priest, 2002).

However, existential phenomenology considers classical phenomenology to have a limitation in that consciousness and external world are separate from each other. Rather, existentialists such as Jean-Paul Sartre, Martin Heidegger, and Clark Moustakas see consciousness not as a separate entity but as being linked to human existence (Grbich, 2007). Within this approach, an assumption is that “people are inextricably immersed in their world” (Grbich, 2007, p.90). This is so called being-in-the-world. Another disagreement with classical phenomenology is that existentialists believe complete phenomenological reduction is impossible because of one’s own interconnectedness in the world (Grbich, 2007). In other words, the researchers cannot do pure phenomenological reduction because they are another being-in-the-world, not the participant-in-the-world. Therefore, people in this approach focus on contextual relationships rather than processes of bracketing (Grbich, 2007).

The third form of phenomenology is hermeneutic phenomenology. Martin Heidegger, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Paul Ricoeur and Max van Manen are known as scholars who support hermeneutic phenomenology. As mentioned above, phenomenologist studies the nature of lived experience. Hermeneutics is the science of interpretation. Accordingly, the hermeneutic phenomenological method is the process of interpreting the nature of lived experience. That is, it investigates the interpretive structures of experience of texts (Grbich, 2007). It focuses on interaction between the interpreter and the text.

As a method of qualitative inquiry beyond philosophical perspectives, the purpose of phenomenology is to explore, describe, and possibly interpret the meaning, structure, and essence of people’s lived experience of a phenomenon (Grbich, 2007). Patton (2002) mentioned
that “phenomenological analysis seeks to grasp and elucidate the meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experience of a phenomenon for a person or group of people” (p. 482). Many other qualitative studies have aimed at taxonomizing, classifying, or abstracting human experiences. However, phenomenology differs from them in that it attempts to gain insightful descriptions of the way we experience the world pre-reflectively (Manen, 1990). In other words, phenomenological studies focus on finding out and describing how human beings make sense of experience, and how they transform it into their consciousness both individually and as shared meaning; specifically, it focuses on how people perceive it, describe it, feel about it, judge it, remember it, make sense of it, and talk about it with others (Patton, 2002). This study employs phenomenology with the aim of exploring and describing students’ and parents’ consciousness as inherent in them through long-term experiences.

As a qualitative research method, phenomenology has been used in some different ways according to the research purpose and researchers’ basic philosophy. Thus, in this study, an attempt is made to mix up these different phenomenological methods. The basic assumption is grounded on existential phenomenology in that human consciousness and phenomenon are not separate. However, there are two reasons that cannot be overlooked hermeneutic phenomenological research method: (a) Pure bracketing, which is employed in other phenomenological method, is impossible and an interpretation is inevitable, and (b) hermeneutic phenomenology can provide physical educators with useful information as pedagogy, which requires a hermeneutic ability to make interpretive sense of the phenomena (Manen, 1990). As Heidegger (1962) said “The phenomenology is a hermeneutic in the primordial signification of this world, where it designates this business of interpreting” (p. 37).
Data Collection

Phenomenological interviewing

Phenomenological interviewing was employed as a major data collection method in this study. Phenomenological research tries to find out the way participants experience the world in order to know that world in which they live as human beings (Manen, 1990). To understand human experiences and consciousnesses which are connected with a phenomenon, in-depth interviews with people who have direct experiences of the phenomenon are employed as a major method of data collection in phenomenological studies. Interviewing is a general method employed in qualitative inquiries. The most important principle in interviewing is to unfold the participants’ perspectives as Graue & Walsh (1998) stated that “the purpose of interviews is to get participants to talk about what they know” (p. 2). Qualitative interviewing has to begin with the assumption that the perspective of others is meaningful, knowable, valuable and able to be made explicit (Patton, 2002). Cooperation between the interviewer and interviewee is essential because interviewing involves personal interaction. In addition, interviewers require diverse skills such as listening skill, personal interaction skill, and question framing skill because interviewees may be unwilling or may be uncomfortable sharing all that the interviewer hopes to explore (Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

Phenomenological interviewing is a specific type of in-depth interviewing which assumes that there is a structure and essence that can be narrated in lived experiences (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Phenomenological questions, so called meaning questions, ask for the meaning and significance of certain phenomena (Manen, 1990). Two major purpose of phenomenological interview is to explore and gather experiential narrative material that may serve as a resource for developing a richer and deeper understanding of a human phenomenon, and to develop a
conversational relation with an interviewee about the meaning of an experience (Manen, 1990). Based on this purpose, three steps of phenomenological interviewing have been identified: (a) focusing on past experience with the phenomenon of interest, (b) focusing on present experience, and (c) joining these two narratives to describe the individual’s essential experience with the phenomenon (Seidman, 1998). Prior to interviewing, however, the researcher has to write a full description of his/her own experience in order to bracket off his/her experience from that of the interviewees. This, so called *epoche*, will permit the researcher to gain clarity from his/her own preconceptions (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). The major advantage of phenomenological interviewing is that it enables the researcher to combine his/her personal experience with that of the interviewees, and to explore the deep and lived meanings that the phenomenon has for individuals. However, it is “quite labor-intensive and requires a reflective turn of mind on the part of the researcher” (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 105).

*Other Data Sources*

Before phenomenological interviewing, participants are asked to complete simple qualitative questionnaire in order for them to reflect on past experiences. It is expected that those reflective experiences would make interviews more interactive and vivid. Also, the answers from questionnaire helped to construct further interview questions. In addition, participants are asked to bring their pictures of school, physical education or youth sports if possible. These pictures contributed to prodding the participants’ memory and describing their story in detail. Finally, as another data source, students were asked to keep a diary which might provide them with an opportunity to reflect on significant aspects of their past and present life (Manen, 1990). This diary was examined as supplementary data in order to increase credibility of this study.
Data Collection Procedure

Essential criteria to select research participant in phenomenological study was that he or she has to have experience in the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). Therefore, research participants in this study had experiences from both physical education and youth sport settings. Because the purpose of this study was to explore and describe participants’ lived experiences rather than to find causal relationship between experience and a certain factor, the general factors such as race, gender, socio-economic status, and cultural influence were not considered in participant recruitment. However, this does not mean that these factors do not influence participants’ lived experience. The only factor considered in participant recruitment was age because too young children may have difficulty in reflecting and verbally describing their experience. Therefore, 12 year or older students who had experienced physical education and youth sports served as research participants, and their parents (either father or mother) were included as research participants; based on convenience sampling, parents themselves decided whether father or mother participated in this study. Also, the participants were recruited on a volunteer basis. Before I started data collection, I acquired permission from Insititutional Review Board (IRB) to conduct this research. Researcher visited youth sports programs in K County Recreation and Park, YMCA and YWCO, which are located in a small college town of the southern United States. I contacted each student and his/her parents through a face-to-face meeting to explain the overall research purpose and procedure. Ten students and their parents who voluntarily agreed to participate in this study were recruited as research participants. After getting permission, I gave the qualitative questionnaire. The first interview with students was conducted for an hour individually, and this was after three days since the participants received the questionnaire. Within a week after the first interview with student, I
conducted the first interview with his or her parents for an hour individually. As soon as I finished my phenomenological analysis of the first interview transcription, the second interviews were conducted by appointment. Total three interviews for each participant were conducted using the same procedures.

Data Analysis

Phenomenological interview data have been analyzed through some different phenomenological analysis processes (Priest, 2002). Among them, Hycner’s work (1985) seemed to be most useful because it provided a full and detailed description of the phenomenological analysis of interview data. Thus, I followed his analytic process as my basic analysis frame and used some different approaches as well. The first step he suggested was transcription. Transcribing offers a transition between data collection and analysis as a part of data management and preparation (Patton, 2002). This first step provided me with an opportunity to get immersed into the data which means an experience that generates emergent insights (Patton, 2002). Interview transcription included not only the literal statement but also significant non-verbal and para-linguistic communications such as intonation, gesture and facial expression.

The second step was the core of phenomenological analysis, bracketing and the phenomenological reduction. Although many phenomenological analyses used different approach to data, this second step seems to be common in all of them (Manen, 1990; Moustakas, 1994). The researcher should concentrate on finding the interviewees’ world-view in order to understand the meaning of what they are saying rather than what the researcher expected them to say. For this, epoche is important because it means refraining from judgment, abstaining from or staying away from the everyday, ordinary way of perceiving things (Patton, 2002). In this step, I
reflected and described my own experience of phenomenon as much as possible focusing on a particular situation or event. Through this process, I was aware of my bias and eliminated personal involvement with the subject material. In conclusion, my cultural background, personal experiences, and prior knowledge might influence understanding of interview transcriptions. Thus, for phenomenological reduction, I had to “bracket out the world and presuppositions to identify the data in pure form, uncontaminated by extraneous intrusion” (Patton, 2002, p.485).

The third step was listening to the interview for a sense of the whole. I listened to audio-recorded interview and read the transcription several times in order to grasp a sense of whole context and to capture the non-verbal and para-linguistic levels of communication such as the intonations, the emphases, and the pauses (Hycner, 1985). This provided a context for the emergence of specific units of meaning and themes later. The next step was delineating units of general meaning which means “a process of getting at the essence of the meaning expressed in a word, phrase, sentence, paragraph or significant non-verbal communication” (Hycner, 1985, p. 282). There are three ways to isolate thematic statements, the wholistic or sententious approach, the selective or highlighting approach, and the detailed or line-by-line approach (Manen, 1990). I took the last one, the line-by-line approach to delineate units of general meaning. I did read the transcription line-by-line, and got units of general meaning expressed by the participant. After finding the general meanings through this step, I did delineate another unit of meaning relevant to the research questions. In this step, I determined if the units of general meaning respond to and illuminate the research question. Thus, the general meanings were reduced to a unit of relevant meaning.

Cluster units of relevant meaning was the next stage used to determine themes. For this, I determined the essence of each unit and integrated each unit which has the common essence into
one cluster. The final stage before writing up the findings was determining themes from clusters of meaning, so called structural synthesis (Creswell, 1998). This work was to determine one or more central themes which express the essence of the clusters. After this whole process, I returned to the participant with my written summary and themes to increase validity of data. I checked if the research participant agreed that the essence of the interview was accurately and fully captured (Hycner, 1985). If there was disagreement, correction was made. Also, further interview was conducted focusing on the issues that were not covered in the previous interview.

The transcription from further interview was analyzed again with the same previous procedures. Thus, I looked at all the data as a whole and modified or added themes as necessary. Total three interviews of each participant were analyzed and I began to look for the themes common to most or all of the interviews as well as the individual variations (Hycner, 1985). If there were common themes to all or most of the interviews, I clustered them together as identifying general themes. Also, if there were individual variations, I determined and presented unique individual themes relevant to research questions. Finally, I contextualized those meaningful themes in accordance with overall contexts of research purpose.
Manen (1990) mentioned that “From a phenomenological point of view, to do research is always to question the way we experience the world, and to know the world in which we live as human beings” (p. 5). With this sense, my goal in this study was to question how students and parents experience physical education and youth sport, and to learn about physical education and youth sport in which students and parents experience as human beings; that is, to know the personal meanings drawn from involvement in physical education and youth sport.

Phenomenology attempts to enrich lived experience by mining its meaning (Manen, 1990). Lived experience involves our immediate and pre-reflective consciousness of life (Dilthey, 1985). In order to understand and describe these lived experiences, I listened to participants’ personal experiences as stories, events, episodes and as situations. Also, I attempted to explore what these experiences mean to participants’ daily lives. For example, in order to understand students’ perspectives on physical education, I asked for similarities or differences between physical education and other subjects, and how physical education contributes to whole learning in school life.

The findings of this study are divided into five major sections: Participants’ background, students’ experiences in physical education, students’ experiences in youth sport, parents’ perceptions of physical education, and parents’ perceptions of youth sport.
Participants’ background

Ten students from 12 to 15 years old and their parents (either father or mother) participated in this study. All the participants had experiences with youth sport in K County Park and Recreation (KCPR), YMCA or YWCO. Also, all except one student had 5 years or more experience with youth sport participation. Only two students were female, and Jamie and Eric are siblings. Andrew and Will’s fathers served as a volunteer coach for their kids’ soccer team. The basic demographic information about the research participants is provided in Tables 4.1 and 4.2.

Students’ experiences in physical education

Fun/Enjoyment in physical education

Fun or enjoyment was one of the major themes that emerged from students’ perceptions of their experiences in physical education classes. Students seemed to have fun in physical education classes because they were able to do a variety of physical activities and play with friends. The following comments represent students’ idea of having fun in physical education classes.

I am ready for fun (when I enter a physical education class)… because we play dodge ball, jump ball, things like that (Changsoo’ interview transcript).

I just go in there (physical education class) to mess around and have fun (Andrew’s interview transcript).

Because meaningful experiences are discerned through the use of phenomenology, students’ idea of fun in physical education classes was further explored. Three different ways were discovered: (a) feeling of refreshment, (b) the physical education teacher, who impacted students positively in physical education classes, and (c) feeling good about themselves.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age (grade)</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Club</th>
</tr>
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<td>M</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Soccer</td>
<td>10 years</td>
<td>KCPR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Baseball</td>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Taekwondo</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brian</td>
<td>14 (9)</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Basketball</td>
<td>9 years</td>
<td>KCPR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Taekwondo</td>
<td></td>
<td>YMCA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Basketball</td>
<td>8 years</td>
<td>KCPR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>Baseball</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will</td>
<td>14 (9)</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Basketball</td>
<td>9 years</td>
<td>KCPR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Soccer</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Tennis</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>F</td>
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<td>1 year</td>
<td>YWCO</td>
</tr>
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<td>Asian</td>
<td>Swimming</td>
<td>5 years</td>
<td>YWCO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Soccer</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jamie</td>
<td>13 (8)</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Soccer</td>
<td>7 year</td>
<td>YMCA</td>
</tr>
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<td>Soccer</td>
<td>7 year</td>
<td>YMCA</td>
</tr>
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<td>David</td>
<td>12 (6)</td>
<td>M</td>
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<td>Taekwondo</td>
<td>7 years</td>
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<td>YMCA</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Taekwondo</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student name</td>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Occupation</td>
<td>The highest level of education</td>
<td>Household income</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Master’s degree</td>
<td>$100,000 or more</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Eric</td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>43</td>
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<tr>
<td>David</td>
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<td>High school</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dongjin</td>
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<td>37</td>
<td>Assistant professor</td>
<td>Doctoral degree</td>
<td>$40,000 to less than $60,000</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Feeling of refreshment

Students enjoyed physical education classes because they served as an escape from academic pressure. For example, an academy-oriented student, Andrew enjoyed being in the gym out of the classroom. When he was asked about the routine of his daily life, he referred to studying many times. Also, his best or worst moment in his school life was to get good or bad grades.

Andrew’s best and worst moment in school life: When I get a good grade, I focus a lot on academics. I like sports but I’m more academic base. If I get a good grade I’m really happy, excited, and makes most of my day better. It changes my mood. I feel better around people. I can be happy and excited when other people get excited. I don’t have to mope around and whinny… But (when I get a bad grade), I embarrass myself. If I get up in front of the class and say the wrong thing that would be pretty bad.

To this academy-oriented Andrew, physical education provided a break time from learning other subjects in the classroom. He prepared and set up his personal learning objectives for his favorite subjects, history and social study. However, when he entered into physical education class, he did not set up learning objectives. He seemed to believe physical education class was a refreshing time rather than a learning time. Andrew explained that physical education classes gave him a better balance. Thus, he believed that physical activity in physical education classes helped his academic achievement by giving him a source of refreshment. Other students also agreed that physical education is the time to relax from other classroom subjects. Physical education seemed to be considered as a leisure time in students’ school life.

I enjoy my physical education class. It is not a bad thing to me. It’s a break from constantly cramming and learning things that you can enjoy yourself and run around (Eric’s interview transcript).

Umm.. it (physical education ) is a free time we got to have (Dongjin’s interview transcript).

It (physical education) gives me a better balance, I don’t get frustrated with one thing. I have other options that I can do (Andrew’s interview transcript).
I feel relaxed. I don’t have to worry during PE time (Changsoo’s interview transcript).

**Physical education teacher**

Sam also enjoyed being in physical education classes because all pressures were off during PE time. However, his emphasis was placed on his PE teacher. During the conversation about his PE teacher, his energetic and exciting voices demonstrated his favorable attitude toward PE teacher. He believed that his physical education teacher made him happy in PE classes.

I also like PE because we have a great coach (he called his PE teacher a coach). He really takes all the pressure off. He lets us have fun. He knows that we’re kids and we want to do really fun things. He doesn’t like to keep up doing boring things (Sam’s interview transcript).

Similarly, Brian liked physical education because of his physical education teacher who makes him confident and his day better.

The best thing (in PE) is probably how our PE coach treats everybody and makes you feel like you’ve done a great job even if you haven’t had a very good day, he can make you feel like you’ve had a great day. He does a really good job of that so he’s usually the class that helps you get confidence for the rest of the day (Brian’s interview transcript).

**Feeling good about themselves**

Students in this study induced pleasant emotions in physical education not only because they enjoy it but also because they have a chance to feel good about themselves by helping other students, contributing to winning their team, and achieving their personal goals. That is, physical education classes generated internal positive emotion and outward positive action which was toward others. Will’s and Andrew’s following transcripts represent the best moment in physical education and how they felt.

When you are able to help another person and help your team win, you feel good about yourself, about what you just did (Will’s interview transcript).

I’ve won some games and activities. We maybe play kick ball and I got the winning run. That is pretty memorable (Andrew’s interview transcript).
In order to understand the impact of this positive emotion, I attempted to compare it with the best moment in the whole school life. Many students identified a good grade as their best moment in school life because that generated confidence within themselves.

Best moment in school life: I’d say, I think it was last year. we had a really big math test. Everyone was worrying about and I never study… For that test, the average grade was around 70 or so and I got 101 or something like that so I felt pretty good about that… I think it probably made me a little more confident in math and thinking that I could do it better (Brian’s interview transcript).

The feeling when they got a good grade on tests and the best moment in physical education classes was similar. That is, students’ feeling of the best moment in their school life and physical education classes was similar in that both gave positive feeling about themselves.

Both of them (best moment in school and physical education) make you feel good about yourself. When you get a good grade, you feel good, like all the hard work that you’ve tried and done has actually paid off. So they are pretty similar (Andrew’s interview transcript).

I guess in math (and in PE), they are sort of the same because with the physical fitness test I had realized how much better I had gotten since the last year and everything and how I had to do a lot better and then in math I had realized I did a lot better too. (Brian’s interview transcript).

Students in this study tended to promote their emotional development in physical education classes by inducing pleasant emotions, which led to their pursuance of other physical activities. Also, these positive emotions from both physical education classes and a good academic grade may help students have confidence in their school life.

*Discrepancies between what they learn and what they do in physical education*

Although students enjoyed physical education classes, they failed to describe what they learned from physical education classes. When Changsoo was asked about what he learned from physical education, he paused over 10 seconds and said “I really don’t know.” Other students as
well as Changsoo also murmured or hesitated when they talked about what they learned from physical education classes. Physical educators expect students to learn a variety of skills and knowledge through involvement in physical activities in physical education classes. However, students in this study had difficulty in retrieving what they learned from what they did in physical education classes. Simply doing some activities seemed to provide students with more meaningful experiences in physical education classes than learning of content knowledge, values, or skills. To students in this study, physical education is simply activity. The following cases show how much more students valued what they did than what they learned from physical education classes.
A few students answered that they learned how to stay healthy in life when asked about what they learned from physical education classes. Health-related learning included nutrition and physical activities.

Well, it (physical education) can teach you how to be healthy. What to eat, how to run, and what you need to do to try to stay healthy (Dongjin’s interview transcript).

I think I learn how to stay healthy. You need to go outside and play more. You learn a little bit about what you should eat. But not really that much but just that you need to stay active and you need to have some type of sport in your daily life (Andrew’s interview transcript).

However, students were unable to provide specific information or knowledge about health. Students seemed to answer this question from their personal value of physical education rather than from their direct experiences in physical education classes. They understood what to do for health promotion as a common sense, but did not have knowledge about how to promote an active life style. I may not conclude that they did not learn about health from physical education classes because they could not describe what they learned during interviews. Rather, students may not think they learned any knowledge about health because their personal meaning was more focused on playing games and doing physical activities in physical education classes than learning health-related content. The following transcripts about the routine and the memorable moment of physical education classes demonstrate that students have different perspectives on what they do and what they learn in physical education. No one referred to learning health-related content knowledge when they reflected and described their physical education classes.

We get in. We change into running clothes and sports clothes. Stretch. And we do our activities, whatever running we need to do or maybe we are playing a game that day. And then we usually stretch again because we don’t want to pull a muscle or anything (Andrew’s interview transcript).

We would go in and we would just sort of… everyone would normally grab a basketball and just shoot around for 10 minutes. Then coach would blow the whistle and so we’d all
go into our lines and we had a routine stretching. We would go from one to the other whenever he blows the whistle. He would say for all the guys to go to the weight room and we would all go up there and wait for him. And then he would lay out what we were going to do in there and then he’d say everyone get to a station and go ahead and start. And we would do that and he’d let us do that on our own… And we would go back in when he said it was time to go and we’d pack everything up and go back in, usually we’d shoot around again. We’d shoot around again some more and then he’d say it’s time to dress up and we’d go (Brian’s interview transcript).

Usually he (PE teacher) says everyone gets on the benches and then he’d say this is what we’re going to do. He’d pick the captains, pull them out, and they would call the teams and we’d go over the rules if we didn’t know them already and let us loose. And he’d tell us when it’s time to go (David’s interview transcript).

Because a researcher attempts to find out the nature of phenomenon as experienced in a phenomenological study, students’ personal meanings become paramount. From phenomenological perspective, students’ immediate and pre-reflective consciousness of physical education experience forms lived experience in physical education class. Thus, for example, the nature and essence of physical education to students in this study are laid more on the transcript above about the routine and the memorable moment of physical education than their perceived learning about health content.

Similarly, Brian had different perspectives on learning and doing in physical education. Brian liked physical education because “PE is usually a little bit more easy to apply to life.” The following transcript shows what he learned from physical education.

I think PE can help me think of outcomes for other things so it’s like thinking about having to focus on outcomes that will make me think later on, think about outcomes that happen when it doesn’t even have to be dealing with a score or anything like that. So I think there’s a mental aspect to it that I like because you’ve got to know what’s where and how things are going to play out if you do this or that (Brian’s interview transcript).

In spite of his belief about learning in physical education, physical fitness test seemed to represent a meaningful experience to him. In particular, running one mile had always been a major challenge for him. When asked for a memorable experience, goal setting, and best or worst
moment in physical education classes, he repeatedly talked about one mile running. Brain’s mother also knew that he always had concerns about one mile running.

Memorable experience in physical education: We did a whole bunch of conditioning so I felt like I could do really well on the physical fitness test. I can pass everything except the mile and so I thought I could do really well this year and I did. I didn’t pass it but I did really well. I came within like 10 or 15 seconds of passing the mile. I’ve never come within a minute of it before so I was proud of myself even though I didn’t get all the way through it. I was proud I could make myself do that at least (Brian’s interview transcript).

Worst thing in physical education: I’d probably have to say that I really like everything except for the mile and that is always the one thing that can be good or bad. I would like to pass it eventually but I think that is one thing in PE that normally I stress out about. So I try to do well and the when I get to there I try to do the best possible and see what happens. And sometimes it’s pretty good and sometimes it’s not (Brian’s interview transcript).

When asked what he learned from physical education classes, he did not refer to physical fitness at all, although the physical fitness test, especially running one mile, was a meaningful experience for Brian in physical education classes. Students appeared to have different perspectives on what they did and what they learned in physical education classes. Doing physical activities such as the fitness test was more meaningful than learning knowledge, values or skills. In conclusion, some students had difficulty in retrieving what they learned from physical education. In addition, although other students perceived that they learned health-related knowledge and mental skills applicable to their daily lives from physical education, they all weigh their meaning more on what they did, such as playing games and physical fitness test than on what they learned.

The role of physical education teachers

There is little doubt that teachers may play an important role in influencing students’ view on school subjects. This study was no exception. Will’s favorite subject was history. When I asked the reason, he said “I like memorizing facts. I’m good at memorizing and I like remembering dates and knowing when things happened.” Although he did not mention a teacher
in his answer, his favorite teacher was also history teacher. When he talked about his history teacher, he was excited and showed a smile all the time. He looked happy when he thought of his favorite teacher.

History teacher (favorite teacher): I would like to say my history teacher right now even though she throws things. I don’t know. My (history) teacher is pretty crazy right now. She likes to throw things. Whatever is in her hand if she doesn’t agree she’ll just throw it at you. So you got to be on your toes in that class. Be ready to dodge things. She has a lot to say and she’s really smart and she’s fun to be around. Whether she’s throwing things or what they say, everyday is fun (Will’s interview transcript).

Compared to the history teacher, his physical education teacher did not attract his attention because he plays a role mostly as an observer rather than a teacher. Unlike the interview about the history teacher, Will did not show an enthusiasm when he talked about his physical education teacher. He expressed his physical education teacher as follows:

My teachers in PE are more laid back. They don’t care much about what you’re doing whereas my history teacher will be all up on you. He watches. He doesn’t get involved as much. He makes sure nobody is messing up or doing anything wrong or hurting themselves. Just observe (Will’s interview transcript).

Similarly, Dongjin commented:

He (PE teacher) is watching… He’s standing around us and watching if anybody gets hurts. He whistled when time’s up.

Fortunately, Will’s and Dongjin’s physical education teachers did not affect negatively students’ positive views on physical education because they still liked and enjoyed their physical education classes. However, students’ views on teachers of their favorite school subjects were much more positive than on their physical education teachers.

On the contrary, some students possessed the positive feeling to their physical education teachers. For example, Sam liked his physical education teacher because his physical education teacher understood what students want to do in the gym. He seemed to believe that a good teacher gives students an opportunity to do what they want.
I think that he (PE teacher) was probably the teacher that was most aware of how we all work or of how all the kids work and what we’re wanting to do and what we’re thinking of. I think that he really tried to work us to do things that we like because he knew that and then he would try to get us things to do some, and he’s just start slowly pushing us in ways we never thought of and if we like it he would keep going, if we didn’t he’d sort of draw back and go back to what we liked (Sam’s interview transcript).

Other students also agreed that they liked their physical education teachers because they understand students.

I wasn’t usually comfortable but I became a little bit more loose around him because I feel like he knows me well enough to know how I’m gonna do and what I can do and what he can get me to do better (Eric’s interview transcript).

With them (physical education teachers) I try to do what I can and hopefully they can see what I am doing and they can start to develop an idea of what I am doing well or not (Will’s interview transcript).

Although some students in this study had a positive feeling toward their physical education teachers, when I asked what their physical education teachers did in class, their main role seemed to be that of an observer as teachers in the previous case where students have somewhat negative views on physical education teachers. Eric and Brian who had positive views on their physical education teachers explained their teachers’ roles in the gym as follows:

I think that he (PE teacher) likes to see how everyone is. He likes to see how we can do and see us push ourselves because he likes us to succeed and he gets us to succeed more that we could without him being there (Eric’s interview transcript).

He’d help us when he needed help but he trusted us enough that he knew we could do stuff without hurting each other (Brian’s interview transcript).

In conclusion, whether or not students like their physical education teachers, students perceived their physical education teachers as a person who watches them in the gym, not as a person who teaches them.

In addition, another interesting finding about the physical education teacher in this study was that students do not make a distinction between the physical education teacher and the coach. One reason is because physical education classes were taught by athletic coaches in some
schools, not by physical education specialists. However, that was not the only reason why they call their teacher coach. In fact, they believed that a person who teaches physical skill is a coach, not a teacher. Seemingly, students tend to think their physical education teachers differently from classroom teachers.

I don’t know. I guess it’s just most…well my PE teacher is a guy, is a male, so most males to me aren’t teacher. They’re coach for whatever reason, I don’t know why. They are just coach (David’s interview transcript).

Because he like…for me a teacher is someone who can help you just mentally…they tell you what you need to know but then whenever in PE…it’s more of a physical thing there and so to me a coach would be more the type of person who teaches you to use a skill and then helps you along with it and physically does it with you (Jamie’s interview transcript).

Students’ experiences in youth sport

*Positive experiences in youth sport*

Two major positive experiences emerged from students’ involvement in youth sport activities. First, students enjoyed participation in youth sports and they had fun as well. Second, students considered participation in youth sports as a learning opportunity.

*Fun and enjoyment in youth sports*

All students in this study enjoyed youth sport activities because it gave them opportunity to have fun. Students seem to have a positive feeling about youth sport experiences similarly to physical education because they enjoyed youth sport activities. In particular, they pointed out that playing with friends made them have fun.

And it provides…it’s fun… It provides a thing to do with your friends…to just enjoy what you are doing (David’s interview transcript).

In our neighborhood all of us used to get together and play a game (basketball) of three on three or four on four and it would just be really fun so I decided to do it for the real team (Sam’s interview transcript).
Having fun in a youth sport program was the essence of youth sport participation. Students reflected on what they remembered as positive experiences when asked about the meaning of participation in a youth sport program. They enjoyed their sports because of a winning goal, helping the team, feeling good about themselves, and refreshment from their daily routine.

Scoring a winning goal is always fun or doing anything to help my team try to…as long as they win, I am not going to be mad about it (Andrew’ interview transcript).

It (participating in youth sports) makes me feel good about myself. Like when you exercise you feel good about your body and what you’ve done (Changsoo’s interview transcript).

It (participating in youth sports) provides a change from a normal routine and it allows me to meet new people and new experiences and things like that (Amanda’s interview transcript).

**Youth sports provided opportunities for learning**

Students believed that participating in a youth sports program provides a learning opportunity, whereas students did not regard physical education classes as a learning environment. They displayed stronger enthusiasm for youth sports participation rather than for involvement in physical education activities. When asked what makes them participate in a youth sport program before asking a question about learning from youth sport experiences, students already answered that they chose youth sports because they can learn. In particular, students stressed learning social skills.

In youth sports, you learn more social aspects to be around other people and team work and things like that (Andrew’s interview transcript).

This study revealed that peer relationship influences their positive experiences. Students believed that constructing a relationship with new people in a youth sport program is a valuable learning opportunity. They saw their psychosocial development as learning. Also, students believed that they learned more about social skills in youth sport than in physical education. Interestingly,
students showed a self-contradiction in terms of social learning because they had closer friends in physical education than in youth sport.

Well I like my friends more in PE that goes to school because I knew them longer than the people on my soccer team because every year we change teams (Andrew’s interview transcript).

At youth sports, it’s more a competitive thing. I don’t want to be just best friend. I just want to beat him at whatever that is. During school, it’s you can be more be friends and you’re joking around and having fun and not very competitive with each other (Eric’s interview transcript).

In PE you have a whole bunch of guys and usually by them you’re pretty good friends with everybody and you can just predict what’s going to happen and you can pretty much see who’s going to pick who (Dongjin’s interview transcript).

In spite of good friendships with school friends, students seemed to believe that they were able to learn social skills through interacting with unfamiliar peers. Students showed some positive dimensions of peer relationships in youth sport. Apparently, students, through youth sport experiences, developed Companionship, which is described as “hanging out together,” “spending time together,” and “doing things together.” Youth sports provided an opportunity for students to interact and experience companionship with other children. Students also showed other positive dimensions of peer relationship in this study. The following transcript is similar to Pleasant/Play Association which differs from the companionship dimension in terms of a positive value associated with being together. This dimension pleasant/play association is more affectionate, enjoyable, and positive than a simple companionship relationship.

In youth sports, since you don’t pick your team, you’re are all together, you’re stuck with each other and so by the end you’re really close together and you can really get a good understanding of who does what and who is with different things (Brian’s interview transcript).

*Things in Common* is present when individuals share similarities in terms of interest, activities, and values inside and outside of the sport context. Having things in common will assure a
balanced relationship among friends. Sam’s interview transcript showed that he can develop a friendship with an unfamiliar friend because they have the same position in a sport.

But with youth sports, usually you show up and you see somebody that maybe is in your same position or have some similarity to you and you start talking to them and you become really good friends (Sam’s interview transcript).

A sport is a medium through which children can develop and maintain intimate friendships. This dimension, Intimacy, extends beyond the sport context. That is, through intimacy, children acquire knowledge of the other as a total person not only as a sport person. Once they began to have friendships, they continue to develop them outside sport contexts. The following interview transcripts represent Intimacy.

We don’t have to be talking about soccer because we’ve become friends (at the end of the season) and there are a whole lot of people because you go through different teams every season so you get more and more people and it just grows and grows (Jamie’s interview transcript).

I was invited to birthday party last weekend. We didn’t know each other before we play soccer (Donjin’s interview transcript).

Another positive dimension of peer relationship students developed through youth sport participation was Absence of Conflict. This dimension reflects the absence of fights, arguments, and judgmental attitudes. In the sport context, the absence of conflict will greatly enhance friendship between individuals. Students in this study believed that they learned how to compromise with unfamiliar teammates so they could be able to work together.

You can all work together to accomplish the same goal because you’re all going for the same thing and you can compromise with each other. So if they want to do it one way and you want to do it another way. You can combine it (Sam’s interview transcript)

(In youth sports) you can compromise well and you’re also used to that and so you can go into something where you’re never met anyone for and you be a team right away and without rehearsing or anything you can just work together really well (Eric’s interview transcript).
In addition, students thought that they could learn teamwork as well as how to interact with unfamiliar friends from participating in youth sport. Learning teamwork is a similar dimension to *Prosocial Behavior* which emphasizes the cooperative aspects of sport.

I think that you learn a lot of teamwork… I just think that really helps you work with a team and settle things without having to argue about things (Will’s interview transcript).

Interestingly, students believed that they learned teamwork and how to work together even in individual sports as well as in team sports. They had a sense of commitment toward one another through positive competition and sharing hardship.

We would want it to be better each other and he (Taekwondo master) would push us to do that, but he would also keep us so we weren’t just beating each other. We were doing what we were supposed to do and so I think that is really good learning a lot of different things (David’s interview transcript).

Because we go through the same hardship (in swimming training) (Changsoo’s interview transcript).

In short, students believed that participation in a youth sport program is a valuable opportunity to learn how to work together with other people. Peer relationships influence children’s development in a positive or negative way. In this study, from a perspective of students, constructing a positive relationship with peers, especially with unfamiliar friends, was a meaningful learning opportunity that happened in a youth sports program.

*Family relationship*

*Parental support*

One of the many benefits to students who participated in a youth sport program was that it provides an opportunity for them to talk with family members as one participant commented.

After practice or after a game we’ll talk about or find out if someone (in family) had something to say about game and I’ll talk to them to see if I agree with them. We always like to talk about it afterwards (Will’s interview transcript).
Another student explained that his parents gave him a positive emotional support after practices or games in a youth sport program.

Afterward usually my parents will say they’re proud and they’ll say if they think we played well or if they think that we need to do a little bit better. And so they can really encourage me to do better with that (Brian’s interview transcript).

Because this study does not intend to reveal the causal relationship between parental support and children’s development, it may not be concluded that parents’ support helped develop self-esteem, competence, achievement, enjoyment or enthusiasm. However, I may conclude that participation in a youth sport program gives an opportunity for children to receive their parents’ psychosocial support. Youth sport programs seemed to be a valuable environment for parents and children to interact with each other. Giving children positive emotional support through youth sport participation leads children to believe that they are cared and accepted by their parents.

In sports situations, parents can provide specific information such as a certain technique, tactic or strategy. Andrew commented that he asked his father what he and his team could do to improve. This type of conversation helps students to improve their motor skills and to increase their knowledge about sports.

Talk about it I did a good thing in the drill or more if I do a bad thing. Bad things stick in my head more. And I’ll ask him (father) if he noticed maybe something I could improve on or something my team could have improved on. He’ll usually have something to say to me he noticed while he was there (Andrew’s interview transcript).

Sibling relationship

This study found both cooperative and competitive relationship between siblings.

Cooperative relationship was shown by recommendation of a certain sport.

My brother was a real supporter of that (playing football) because he did football when he was in middle school and he thought it would be rally great for me. He thought it would get me into shape, I wouldn’t be a couch potato and I like it (Sam’s interview transcript).
A competitive relationship between siblings was also found in this study. Brian was a younger sibling who generally had not yet established a niche within the family. Thus, winning experience in betting against his older brother played a role in motivating Brian to induce high performance. Brian described the best thing in his youth sports experiences as follows:

The best experience I had was whenever we all got together and we were about to go play a game. My brother came up to me and said that he would bet me twenty dollars I couldn’t score 10 points on that game because until this season I haven’t been a big scorer. I’ve only got two or four points a game and so I said, alright I’ll do it. And he had to leave and I got the 10 points and he didn’t believe me but eventually my parents convinced him and so I got that and I was really proud because not only did I achieve that and but got something out of it and I thought well… so if I were a dog he wanted to trick by getting a bone and then eventually he did it on his own so maybe after a while of competing with my brother and showing him I can do this well I can do it without having to be driven by him (Brian’s transcript).

One student showed that sibling influenced his choice of sport. Even though I did not ask about his brother, he compared himself with his older brother when he talked about his personal history of youth sport experiences. He seemed to be very proud of himself in terms of social skills, especially compared to his brother. He explained:

He (his brother) doesn’t want to say he’s bad about being social but he doesn’t like going anywhere where he doesn’t have friends at and I can meet people real easily and we’ll be good friends in a day or two. He stopped doing Taekwondo because he didn’t want to go there where he didn’t know anybody. I stuck to it and now I’m a black belt and I’m still doing all that (David’s interview transcript).

Students like youth sport more than physical education

All students agreed that they like youth sport more than physical education. Three reasons why they preferred youth sports include learning, feeling free, and the youth sports coach.

Youth sports contexts provide more learning opportunities

Students liked youth sport experiences more than those in physical education because they learn more in youth sport than in physical education. Students perceived that the activities provided at a youth sport program were more valuable, and they, consequently, learned more in
Youth sport than physical education. Students had difficulty in believing that physical education is a valuable subject in terms of learning.

I like sports way more. I think they (youth sports) work you harder and you can learn more. In PE, there is...um... I don’t know how much you can learn. It is already set what you need to do. But when you’re playing sports you can always get better with what you do (Andrew’s interview transcript).

Probably (I learn more in) youth sports. Even though PE is set up to try and teach you things, youth sports you feel like you can learn more yourself (Will’s interview transcript).

Students’ learning is positively associated with their engagement. Students seemed to have a more sense of membership and involvement, as well as commitment and attachment to youth sport than physical education because they are more actively engaged in activities in a youth sport program. When asked about the routine of the youth sport experience, Andrew described it more in detail than that of physical education, and there was no time wasting in line in youth sport unlike physical education. He explained:

It’s pretty up tempo. We get to practice, start our warm-up, take a couple laps, then warm-up, then stretch, and then we start up our activities and drills, we always… practice always ends with 20 minutes of sprints and conditioning and running and then you stretch again at the very end and you can go home. It’s always up tempo and really fast (Andrew’s interview transcript).

Students also have a stronger attachment to youth sport than physical education because they constructed more positive relationships with coaches and friends in a youth sport program. Students gained social skills in youth sport because they learned how to interact with coaches and peers and work together in a youth sports program and consequently had a sense of attachment to them. One student commented:

By the end of the season, you’ve meet a bunch of great people and a great coach who has taught you all these new things that you can apply to all sorts of things (Jamie’s interview transcript).

This study also found that a lack of attachment to peers in physical education is related to students’ scheduling. Based on students’ physical education schedule, students met different
friends in each class. Thus, they had difficulty in attaching to their friends in physical education classes.

I’d say I am a lot more serious with youth sports because it’s my small team and it’s sort of like just your little group of friends and you really want to do well with team as opposed to PE you know you’ll be with these guys one day and you’ll be with the next guys in the next day. So I’m a little bit loose and not rally as serious in PE than I am in the youth sports (Brian’s interview transcript).

I think that probably learn a little bit more with the youth sports at the rec just because with PE it’s great but you’re with different people everyday… With the rec department you always have the same team so you can form a stronger…get your ideas together where as in PE you have one day to get your ideas but in basketball at the rec have the whole season (Sam’s interview transcript).

Feeling free

Students like youth sport more than physical education because they felt free in a youth sport program. Even though they enjoyed playing and felt less pressure in physical education classes than other academic subjects, they still felt pressure because of performance in public, which is related to their grade. They felt relatively less pressure in a youth sport setting in spite of many observers such as their parents.

When you’re in youth sports like I said you feel more free about what you’re doing, like everything is not as serious. In PE it’s sort of like you know there is a grade involved and somebody is watching you, but in youth sports it’s sport of like you can mess up and it’s not that big of a deal. There is a little more leniency in there (Andrew’s interview transcript).

Like you’re more free to do (in sports)…to find out what you want to learn instead of just being told (Amanda’s interview transcript).

Unlike physical education class which is a mandatory part of school curriculum, students chose their sports by themselves in youth sports. This choice of activities may play a crucial role in promoting students’ autonomy. Students in this study liked youth sport because they were free to choose their sport. On the contrary, students regarded physical education as a controlling
environment compared to youth sport. Thus, the perceived provision of choices in youth sport may promote students’ autonomy.

But I know I wasn’t forced to do it. It was an option, they (parents) were like, hey go play soccer, and I agree with that. I did not care. I wasn’t mad about it (Dongjin’s interview transcript).

Indeed, feeling free was important for students to have a positive feeling toward physical education as well as youth sport. Even though Brian preferred youth sport to physical education, he also liked physical education because his physical education teacher let him feel free in the gym.

He (physical education teacher) lets us be really free and creative in what we did. And then our other teachers, they sort of had what we are going to do set in stone, but usually they could do things they thought we usually liked and sometimes we did and sometime we didn’t. But I think that really in PE we’ve been really free to do what we wanted to do and he has a good idea of what we wanted to do (Brian’s interview transcript).

Youth sport coach vs physical education teacher

Students prefer youth sports to physical education due to their perceptions of the coach and the physical education teacher. Children liked their youth sport coaches more than physical education teachers.

My soccer coach. I like playing for his team because we… he’s a fun coach. I just like playing with him and stuff (Jamie’s interview transcript).

As found in a previous theme, physical education teachers played a role as an observer rather than a teacher. Compared to the physical education teacher, students believed that youth sport coaches participated more actively in their practices and games. The following student transcripts indicate different student perceptions between physical education teacher and youth sport coach. A student indicated:

He (youth sport coach) doesn’t observe as much. He’ll get there and yell at you and tell you what you’re doing wrong. But it’s kind of a mix of teacher and observer. He observes until you do something wrong and then he jumps in (Andrew’s interview transcript).
Like I said PE is more laid back. And when you’re out there practicing with your coach, it’s more, you actually have something to do instead of just being in there (Andrew’s interview transcript).

Students’ perceived teacher content knowledge was also a factor that affected their preference. Because physical education teachers are supposed to teach a variety of course content in a limited time including health, motor skills and sports, they may not have a deeper understanding in one sport than coaches. Nevertheless, students seemed to believe that physical education teachers had less content knowledge than youth sports coaches.

Umm my soccer coach, he teaches us how to do tricks and like when we play other teams we know how to spread out and pass the ball and know how to work as a team. But our PE teacher, she knows some things about soccer but she doesn’t know lot like my soccer coach. She tries to teach us things but we know most of it (Eric’s interview transcript).

Students’ perceived accessibility to the youth sport coach/physical education teacher also influenced students’ perceptions of youth sport and physical education. Students in this study felt free to approach to their youth coach more individually than the physical education teacher because they knew that a teammate’s parent works as a volunteer coach. Some students already knew the coach personally before entering a youth sport program as a father of their friend. This personal relationship allows them to have intimate interaction and communication. Thus, they shared ideas about practices and games. Students commented:

My coach right now I have been with him several times, and I am very glad I and his sons are good friends so we always can talk about strategies, I can go to their house and we can practice there and so I think that is great (Brian’s interview transcript).

Coach knows I can use his ideas and incorporate those into there (practices and games) so it keeps getting better and stronger and I can take one idea and add another trick to it to make it better (Sam’s interview transcript).

I think it’s important to have one coach that you can build up a strong relationship with and get your strengths up (Changsoo’s interview transcript).
In short, students’ perceived image of youth sport coaches such as active involvement, sport-related content knowledge and individual accessibility allowed students to have more meaningful experiences in youth sports programs than in physical education classes.

Parents’ perceptions of physical education

From a parents’ viewpoint, physical education, as a part of school curriculum, was considered as an important subject to contribute to the promotion of students’ physical health, and cognitive, psychomotor, emotional and social development. Parents seemed to agree that physical education is a valuable subject as a part of total education. One parent explained that:

I think it’s an important part of a total education. I think it’s important for them as a part of total education to understand health and fitness, to how to exposure to a lot of different activities and different games and different sports. I think, you know I think particularly in elementary school, it’s just important for them to sometime during the day just to be able to run around and play and not just be sitting particularly for boys it’s important to have that. But I think it’s a part of an overall education to understand the health and fitness aspect (Will’s father interview transcript).

In particular, parents indicated three aspects of physical education classes: (a) learning life skills, (b) playing time, and (c) health education

Learning life skills

Understanding parents’ perspective on learning from whole school life helped me talk about learning from physical education because they regarded physical education as a part of total education. The following episode represents parents’ view on their children’s learning in school.

I remember one day in 6th grade which is the first day of middle school. Andrew was standing around a group of boys and as happens in middle school, a little fight broke out. And Andrew trying to do the right thing, went to try to break the fight up well… by the time the teacher got there it looked like Andrew was in the fight and they had to work all
that out, and he and I talked about how I liked how you wanted to do the right thing but
the thing to do when there is a fight is to go get a teacher. Because nobody can tell who’s
in the fight and who’s trying to help when everybody is in a big pile. So I think those are
the… outside the subject matter. Those are the kinds of experiences and lessons they can
learn (Andrew’s father interview transcript).

Parents believed that their children learn not only knowledge of each subject but also life skills to
deal with conflicts through social interaction at school. Parents stressed the social development
in school life.

One of the important things you learn in that process (school) is you’re not gonna like
everybody you have to deal with in life. And so you have a teacher you don’t like. You
know I have had bosses I don’t like. Conflict among friends and peers, we’ve had some
conversations about being careful, being truthful, and not getting involved in someone
else’s problem (Andrew’s father interview transcript).

I think the interacting. Especially with Russ, our oldest one going from middle school to
high school kind of learning that social hierarchy that goes with that and it’s the same if
you go to a job or anything else. They learn about the customs and the culture of our little
community how they need to behave here…I think just learning how to behave in a
society is one of things (Brian’s mother interview transcript).

Physical education is a school subject that teaches students responsible social behavior such as
etiquette, cooperation, teamwork, ethical behavior, and positive interaction. Parents believed that
physical education as a part of school life contributed to their children’s social learning process
through cooperative activities. In particular, they believed that a variety of team sports played in
physical education classes helped students learn how to interact with a teacher and teammates as
a team member. Parents explained:

I always thought like they had someone in PE that they enjoyed the coach, that they enjoy
the activities with the other children. It was almost always team activities or group
activities it wasn’t really individual skills. So the team might be working in groups
together and having fun with physical activity was… there is a social element of that, of
working together in physical education (Dongjin’s father interview transcript).

Well I think most of what they do in the physical education classes are team sports, so
they learn how to interact on a team and they learn, hopefully they learn the positive way
to behave when it comes to somebody is stronger in sport than another, and encouraging
and accepting everybody for what they can do… (Sam’s father interview transcript).
Although some parents believed that physical education deals with many different educational issues such as teamwork, some were not able to state what their children learned from physical education. Rather, they thought their children played with other classmates in physical education classes. Some parents believed that physical education is playing time rather than learning time. They explained:

Well, I don’t think they learned something from PE in middle school… In elementary school, he was playing and running with other kids… I have seen him running here and there at the gym… Definitely he had fun… He began swimming (at YWCO)… but I don’t know they learned something about physical from PE (Changsoo’s mother interview transcript).

PE is more for fun and a lot of goofing off, whereas the youth sport is more of a competition, or a competitive and there is more of a goal to do something. I mean a lot of the physical education is more just hanging out with your buddies and goofing off (Amanda’s mother interview transcript).

In particular, parents thought that their children played rather than learned in the elementary level physical education. However, they understood that the nature of physical education classes changes according to the grade level. They explained that doing a variety of activities is the main intent of physical education at the elementary level, and it changes into health education at the secondary level.

In elementary school, they got exposure to a lot of different activities and I think that is the intent of it. They got to play a lot of different sports and learn a lot about different sports. I think the idea of team work and what it means to be on a team (Andrew’s father transcript).

In middle school, it becomes a different kind of subject matter. It’s something they can choose to take and it’s also paired with health with… is also sex-edu… In elementary school, it was pretty much chaos because they get a lot of kids in a gym playing around and doing a lot of things. So it’s loud and crazy. But, because it’s more of a health and sexual education class in middle school, I just see more of a classroom setting. I don’t think they’re really doing PE in middle school. Now I could be wrong but I think the emphasis is more on it’s an academic, personal hygiene, personal fitness, diet, that sort of thing, so it is more of a classroom (Will’s father transcript).
Health education and fitness test

Needless to say, an aim of physical education is to promote health and physical fitness by teaching and encouraging physical activities. The findings from the qualitative questionnaires indicated health promotion to be the most important benefit that their children gained from physical education. Parents believed that physical education is an important school subject to promote individual health or physical fitness.

I think physical education program that they have at school, I feel like their goal is to educate them more the benefits of physical conditioning or ways of maintaining physical conditioning, nutrition and the whole thing. I think that is sort of their goal is more of life-long to teach them stuff they can use for the rest of their lives… I think the difference (from youth sports)… being just teaching them the benefits and how to as far as physical fitness regardless of a sport (Sam’s father interview transcript).

Well I think long term… if taught properly it can help develop long term awareness of your health and better health. It teaches you different ways of exercising. Especially as sedentary as most Americans are it introduces the physical activities. And giving them (children) a few minutes to get away from math and science gives their brain a rest, gets the blood circulating… (Dongjin’s father interview transcript).

Parents seemed to understand the basic principle of physical fitness, and believe that their children were able to learn and acquire a habit of physical activity from physical education classes. In particular, they stressed that early experience with exercise leads to life-long participation in physical activities.

I think kids should take PE class in school…because exercise is a kind of habit… so if they don’t take PE in early age, they cannot do exercise… When I was a student, I was sick often, so my PE teacher made me doing exercise, so I physically felt better and it helps me study… you know you cannot study for a long time without physical fitness (Changsoo’s mother transcript).

Physical fitness has long been an important goal of physical education. Whether it was a positive or negative experience, physical fitness tests were memorable experiences to most of students in this study. Indeed, fitness tests were considered as a part of physical education curricular to both...
students and parents. Parents thought that fitness tests are an important part of physical education.

One mother indicated what she talked about physical education with her child.

He (Brian) doesn’t really talk about any sport that they do at school. It’s more he talks more about the physical fitness test that they do at the beginning and at the end. The days he has to do the long mile after mile in eight minutes or when he has to do sit-up and pull-up but he doesn’t say anything. I don’t really hear him talk about any sport (Brian’s mother interview transcript).

Parents’ perceptions of youth sport

Parents’ perceptions of youth sport may be an important predictor for their children’s participation in a youth sport program. Understanding how parents perceive youth sport helps many people who work in the field of physical education and coach education to increase the quantity and quality of physical activity programs. Parents in this study acknowledged the potential benefits of youth sport for their children. Three major benefits included health promotion, learning life skill and family bonding.

Health promotion

Active participation in physical activities contributes to children’s health and well-being. With this sense, parents in this study agreed that participating in youth sport promotes their children’s physical health.

I think the physical activity is important (for kids’ health). Certainly I think being a good physical shape helps your general life. So I think that is important (Eric’s mother interview transcript).

I like it when they play sports, it keeps them somewhat healthy (Amanda’s mother interview transcript).

It (playing at youth sports) gives them a physical outlet to burn off some energy to help keep them in physical condition. Health benefit is one of benefits to send our kids to youth sports (Sam’s father interview transcript).
However, parents did not explain the process of how physical activities contribute to maximizing personal health. In spite of a lack of health-related knowledge, parents believed physical activities in a youth sport program promote their children’s physical health. Indeed, parents’ personal experiences made them think that being physically active promotes children’s physical health. Parents talked about their past experiences in order to explain the importance of their children’s physical health as follows:

I think the idea of physical fitness is interesting. I’ve gotten more active in the last two and half, three years. I’ve realized that I was getting a little heavy and I wasn’t active and so I started doing a lot more running and bicycling and swimming and doing all that. So I think it’s important for them to be active in both contexts. I think it’s important just to go out and play without structure without somebody telling them what to do without necessarily being on a team with sports and then I think it’s important to be physically active in the context of an organized sport (Will’s father interview transcript).

I thought I have to let my kids do exercise even before I got married. I was weak when I was a student, so I knew the importance of physical fitness. And because I strongly believe that sound mind from sound body (Changsoo’s mother interview transcript).

Learning a variety of important life skills

Parents believed that their children learn a variety of life skills though participation in youth sports. The following transcripts show parents’ perspectives on the major benefits gained from participating in youth sport. Parents indicated how their children learned many different life skills from youth sport.

I think the value of sports is good value for life. So I think in some way it probably does help their academic life. I like to see them get better and I like to see them improve in whatever they’re doing whether it is school work or sports. So I like seeing improve, I like seeing them commit to something, and carry out that commitment and again I think that is an important value that extends beyond sports as well (Andrew’s father interview transcript).

It (playing sports) teaches them a lot about winning and losing and sportsmanship, and how to get along with folks and I think it’s good for their social growth... Learning to deal with other people, which is also our job to teach them... learning to play as a team, learning to accept other people’s inadequacies or the fact that somebody may be better than them and they get to play more fair play, and I just think that is a benefit to them. Plus, our oldest son, his life revolves around social activity, he just wants to be with his friends all
the time and so it gives him a chance to be with his buddies (Sam’s father interview transcript).

The result from the qualitative questionnaires indicated that social development is the most important learning gained from participation in a youth sport program. The subtheme most frequently noted in the qualitative questionnaires was being a team member or learning teamwork. Parents in this study strongly believed that social development is one of the most important life values their children can learn from inside and outside of school. Also, a top benefit and motivation of sending their children to a youth sport program was for a reason of social development. Parents believed that youth sports experiences helped their children learn a variety of life skills that promote social development, including respect for and working with others. In particular, participation in team sports such as soccer and basketball was a great source for learning about working as a team member. The following transcripts showed how much parents valued their children’s learning experiences that involved working together with others as a team member, which was considered as an important life skill. Andrew’s father explained that the best moment in youth sport was when his kids displayed true teamwork. He said that:

I think the moments I’m most proud of in sports are when they show true teamwork. Where the decisions they make and the things they do are driven by what’s best for the team. So in basketball it might be making a pass rather than taking a shot, or an assist in soccer or if your coach puts you in a position that you’re not used to playing, then you just do without…So those are the kind of values I want them to have as a part of a team, that the team is more important than you (Andrew’s father interview transcript).

Other parents also agreed that their children can learn teamwork through participating in a youth sports program. They explained:

I think learning to be part of a team is important. I think some level of commitment to a team and saying I will be there at these times, I will commit to doing that… I think they learn what it means to be on a team and what your responsibilities to the other people on the team are. I think they learn about working hard. I mean just classic values of commitment and teamwork, and working hard (Will’s father transcript).
You know that I think it’s important for them to learn to be a part of the team or a part of the group. I think in life most of time you’re going to be working with other people. So the skills of working with other people, appreciating other people’s strengths and your own strengths, and working on weakness to get better, but the idea of how a group of people works together to accomplish a common goal is part of what they learn in youth sports. I think it does definitely have application to their life in everything they do. We’re always going to be around other people (Sam’s father transcript).

Because you know again they have the opportunity to meet kids and work together as a team and you may meet some kids through youth sports that he wouldn’t have met at school (Brain’s mother transcript).

Parents’ perspectives on youth sport point it to being a place in which their children are able to learn social life skills such as teamwork. These perspectives are gained from parents who sent their children to team sports. On the contrary, parents who sent their children to individual sports such as swimming and Taekwondo stressed learning self-discipline through participating in a youth sport program. Parents believed that their children could apply self-disciplines such as patience to their daily lives. They explained that:

He feels self-achievement (through swimming training)... He learns patience and self-control after finishing the hardest practice... so he can stop playing video game by himself, and he wants to be prepared for all other things like playing piano, reading and doing homework. (Changsoo’s mother interview transcript).

I think they also learn a lot of discipline, self-discipline. How you have to apply yourself, you can’t just show up and expect to be successful you have to do something to make it happen (Amanda’s mother interview transcript).

Family relationship

Parents believed that participation in a youth sport program provides an opportunity to interact with their children. The interaction through participating in a youth sports program is a great resource for bonding with family members because they “All go together and ride home together and talk about what happened and things that maybe happen to do differently next time” (Brian’s mother’s transcript). Participation in a youth sport program leads family members to spend their time together. Parents said:
We go to… we play a tournament in Atlanta or we play two games on Saturday and one on Sunday, so you might have time to spend together. So a chance to go on for a weekend with children for some other activity has been really a lot of fun. And I think definitely a bonding experience (Sam’s father interview transcript).

It is certainly one of the ways that a part of my relationship with my children has developed, particularly because I coached all of them. I think that is an opportunity to have a particular relationship and a particular set of memories with each one of them. I know it’s important to me and something that I value and I hope that they value too, but it’s time spent together doing something we both enjoy (Andrew’s father interview transcript).

As students explained that participation in youth sport provided an opportunity for discussion with their family members, parents also agreed that youth sport participation contributed to bonding family members through having a chance to talk with their children. In particular, parents listened to their kid’s talks after practices and games. Listening to children’s stories about practice, game or competition was an important form of parental emotional support. They explained that:

As a parent usually I try to listen to what they’re saying, to what they’re talking about the game if they were happy or unhappy and as they’ve got older those conversations have gotten better because they do understand more about the sport, about the game, about what went well, what didn’t go well (Will’s father interview transcript).

Dongjin and I talk about the kinds of things the team needs to do and each player needs to do to make sure that we play a full game. I try not to start the conversation. I like to talk, so it’s hard but I really want to listen to what he says…and I wanna respond to what they say and if they want to me to respond, I wanna respond to them (Dongjin’s father interview transcript).

Every parent was concerned about their children’s playing too many video games and watching television when they described their children’ routine of life. Parents took for granted that their children play video games in their leisure time. They said that:

A lot of times when we don’t have a game we kind of all get in the house and we get in different parts of the house. You know the boys will be upstairs playing video games or that sort of thing. So I think we have more conversation with them on the days there is a sport activity (Eric’s father interview transcript).

You know they are teenagers and so they’re playing video games and talking to their friends and playing on the computer (Brian’s mother interview transcript).
If they got a free time, what are they (children) gonna do? They play a video game and watch TV… He has no time to do (video game) because he has to swim… He plays a video game only during the weekend… if he could have a spare time, I am pretty sure he wants to play a (video) game and watch TV (Changsoo’s mother interview transcript).

From parents’ perspectives in this study, children seemed to spend time efficiently through participating in a youth sport program. Parents believed that youth sports participation helps their children use their free time well.

The following interview transcript from a father showed how much his child’s participation in a youth sports program signified an important and valuable activity to his family. He said that youth sport forms his family’s identity. He explained that:

It’s almost our identity because we have done it so much and every season except for summer and now Tom does tennis in the summer so every season where somebody is playing a sport and it’s been up to this point mostly been sports, and so it’s sort of a common bonding experience. It’s something we can all share. We can all enjoy in different ways. And something we can all be proud of (Andrew’s father interview transcript).

Further, youth sport plays an important role in bonding not only family members but also community members through having an opportunity to interact with each other in youth sport. Children may first be introduced to sport by their parents. However, as a child continues to participate in sport, the direction of influence may be reversed; that is, children may influence their parents’ socialization though promoting parental involvement or parental adjustments in lifestyle. For example, for children’s participation in a youth sport program, parents have to fill out enrollment forms, wash uniforms, drive children and most importantly watch children’s practices or games. Parents in this study believed that they met other familiar or unfamiliar families and construct new relationship with them during children’s practices or games. This process of parental socialization seems to contribute to building a sense of community. One parent indicated that:
Well, I think we enjoy going to the games because just like the boys have the same kind of friends, a lot of parents have become our friends either we’ve knew them from before or we’ve gotten to know them better through Sports. So my parents live close to us so they come so it gives us an opportunity to see family. They can come see the boys and I mean it’s a big part I guess right now socially, most of what we do outside of work is around a sport that one of the boys play. Go and be with other families (Eric’s mother interview transcript).

In addition, a father believed that participation in a youth sports program helped people to have a sense of attachment to community based on his personal experience. This father explained that:

I think it gives them a stronger tie to the community because where I grew up, I grew up in a small town and I was never allowed to play youth sports. I was in a small private school and when left home, when I got out of high school and went to college, so now when I go home to visit my parents, I don’t know anyone there. So I don’t feel a real strong tie to my community just because I never did anything there… I mean they know kids they don’t go to school with, and I think it gives them a strong tie to their community (Sam’s father interview transcript).

*Their children learn more in youth sport than in physical education*

Parents believed that their children learned more from youth sport than physical education. One mother commented that she is not concerned about the possibility of no physical education in her child’s school curriculum. However, she did not want to imagine a life without youth sport. She felt that youth sport can be a substitute for physical education. She explained that:

I think that, in our case with Brian, he has an opportunity to play and do other sports outside the school PE program, and because I guess of my comfort level with talking to them about other things that they do in PE… if all of a sudden they decided he couldn’t have PE at school, I don’t think that would be something that upset us a lot because we know he would have an opportunity to do it somewhere else. However, he was in a situation where we did not have youth sports, then it would become very important (Brian’s mother transcript).

Three reasons for parents to believe that their children learn more in youth sport than in physical education include deeper understanding in one sport, children’s choice of activities, and parental involvement.
Deeper understanding in one sport

Parents understood that physical education, as a part of school curriculum, has to deal with a variety of topics such as health, fitness, sports, games, motor skills, and psychosocial development. They did not think that their children could learn all of these in a limited time. Therefore, they believed that their children learn more in youth sport by playing one sport and acquiring a deeper understanding of it. Parents explained that:

I think… (they learn more in) youth sports because it’s learning the levels and layers of one activity over a period of time. Certainly in PE they learned a lot of different things and they had exposure to a lot of different games which I think is good and important but I think over time, with Jon and Andrew with soccer and Tom with basketball, because now you’re talking about multiple seasons of playing and seeing what they’ve learned and seeing how more sophisticated their understanding of their particular sport has become over that time, they’ve learned more through the focus of playing one sport over time (Andrew’s father interview transcript).

I think with the PE at school, there is a curriculum, you know. You’re not really trying to teach them to perfect their skills. They just earn how the game is played. Where in youth sports they come with some expectation that you know pretty much how the game is played and the rules. And you really are working around more on their skill, you know their ability to play the game and then youth sports are totally centered around the sports that they’re coming in to play (Sam’s father interview transcript).

Because you spend more time with one sport in the course of a season in youth sports or sports so you would learn more deeply about that sport over the course of the season playing one sport (Will’s father interview transcript).

Children’s choices of sport in youth sport

Parents believed that their children could learn life skills through youth sport. When asked why parents chose sports for their children to learn life skills, they answered because their children chose a sport. Although the original impetus for participating in a youth sport program came from their parents, students chose sports more than other activities.

So primarily it’s been their choice that they enjoy sports. If they enjoy playing, I mean we are about to have four kids on five teams for the next two months. Eric will play two soccer teams, school and club. Tom will do track pole-vaulting and Jon will finish out basketball season and play tennis at school. So that has been their choice to play sports (Eric’s father interview transcript).
Parents’ preference for a certain sport was not transmitted to their children. For example, Brian’s parents were faithful baseball fans, but their son dropped baseball from his list of youth sports. Brian’s mother explained:

We’re going to Disney world for (baseball) spring training. We’re Braves fans and I am trying to figure out where we’re going to go while we are there so Brian I sat at the computer because we went a couple of years ago (Brian’s mother interview transcript).

My husband’s brothers played baseball so I knew I would probably get my kids started in baseball. Brian played one year of Tee ball and one year of baseball and he did not like it. So he did not play anymore baseball but he really likes basketball and Taekwondo (Brian’s mother interview transcript).

She also explained clearly why Brian chose basketball and Taekwondo instead of baseball.

I don’t know. Brian is hard to figure out. But he started Taekwondo at an early age and I think he was very impressed with how far you can go with it. And I think he was pretty good at it and I think with baseball it was just too slow because he played it one year (Brain’s mother interview transcript).

However, the son provided the different answer from his mother’s explanation. He said that:

I got a little tired of baseball because we went to all the Braves games and my brother’s games and so I got little tired of baseball and I was actually at the time I was little scared someone would accidently hit me with the ball and it would hurt. So I sort of dropped baseball for a while and haven’t picked it up since then (Brian’s interview transcript).

He also added why he started Taekwondo:

I and my brother used to watch The Karate Kid and all those movies and we decided we wanted to do Taekwondo and martial arts and we went in there thinking we were going to be flipping off the walls and stuff like Jackie Chan and it would be amazing and we would be able to disappear and appear somewhere else, but then that wasn’t what it was going to be like. And I thought the new concept of it was even better that it would be improving everything and not just helping you beat someone up. I thought it was a lot better of a picture than what I had before (Brian’s interview transcript).

From the story of this family, it can be understood that student’s choice of athletic activity is important for their enjoyment and continuation of youth sport activities. This study shows that parents do not necessarily need to provide a model of sports preference or participation.

However, as shown below, it is true that Brian’s parents encouraged their children to participate
in what they want to play. That is, parents’ encouragement influenced their children’s involvement in physical activity.

He played football last year in middle school. And he liked it but he said it got in the way his Taekwondo, he didn’t have time to do both so he prefers the Taekwondo… We’re really big baseball fans but we’ve encouraged them… if that’s what you want to do then we’ve encouraged them to do it. Like Brian is not interested in plying football, so that’s fine, if he doesn’t want to play, we’re not going to try pushing him into it (Brian’s mother interview transcript).

Brian’s parents seemed to keep an appropriate balance in terms of parental expectation. A case from Brian’s family showed how a child’s participation in a youth sport program begins and continues through the interaction among family members as provided in the following quotation:

After the first year, I think they had no idea until we took them the first year and after that, Brian was very quick to tell me he wants to get signed up for basketball every year and Taekwondo. It’s kind of become a habit now, I mean they know each season is coming (Brian’s mother interview transcript).

Compared to youth sport, parents believed that their children may not enjoy physical education because it is a mandatory part of the curriculum. They thought that feeling an obligation was a restraint to enjoy physical education classes. Parents believed that their children preferred youth sport to physical education because they chose it. Parents assumed that their children just follow teachers’ direction in physical education classes rather than actively seeking autonomous learning.

With the PE classes at school, it’s everybody. You don’t have a choice of whether you want to take that class. People that rarely love it are there and people that hate it and just do it because they have to be there… so I think it’s not really a love of a sport as much is it having to do a certain curriculum (Sam’s father interview transcript).

Physical education as opposed to youth sports, typically you sign up for youth sports that you’re interested in… where physical education you follow curriculum, so you may have to play some sports you’re not really interested in or not really good at (David’s mother interview transcript).

In addition, this study also found, from parents’ viewpoint, students are less likely to be involved in physical education classes because they did not select the activities they want to play.
One year they did lacrosse or something (in PE) I mean he didn’t care about that. He just did it because he had to do it. But I think that they tend to learn more what they want. And youth sports they signed up for that because they love the game (Eric’s mother interview transcript).

I have to think you know with PE there might be a few things that the kids would not necessarily try for whatever reason you know they think they couldn’t or think it would be silly, but they have to in PE, so that kind of gives them a chance to learn something they wouldn’t pursue. I remember in the 7th grade we had to do a unit on square dancing. And I would have never done that in my life (Brian’s mother interview transcript).

Parental involvement

One of the biggest differences between youth sport and physical education was that parents are able to recognize their children’s learning directly or indirectly. In other words, parents see children’s learning directly in youth sport settings and know it indirectly in physical education from grades and conversations with their children. One parent indicated the different views on recognition of students’ learning in two settings as follows:

How to know children’s learning in youth sports: Well, I watch them play. And what I see and would like to see is the level of complexity that they understand about the games they play from five years ago to today. They not only learn the physical skills of the game but some sophistication and complexity about strategy of a game, how the game should be played, what response you have to certain situations, and decision making. So I can see those particularly in the team sports they’ve played that they have a much deeper understanding of the game itself in addition to the physical abilities that they’ve improved (Andrew’s father transcript).

How to know children’s learning in physical education: Well, I see their grade. And we assume their grade is a reflection of how well they performed in the class. We have some conversations and we talk to them about what they’re learning but that’s at the time that they’re at the class. It is an interesting question how do I see, what did I carry beyond the moment of learning in the academic setting. I don’t know. I’ve never really thought about that. Beyond the grade, beyond the conversations we had at the time I don’t know how to measure that (Andrew’s father transcript).

Characteristics of moderate levels of parents’ involvement include attending children’s practices and games and providing social support. Parents who participated in this study showed characteristics of moderate involvement in youth sport. However, they indicated a lack of interest in physical education. A parent said that:
In addition, Brian’s mother’s description of physical education and youth sport showed how she was more involved in youth sport than physical education. When she described her son’s routine of physical education classes, she used her imagination. On the contrary, she was able to describe youth sport more vividly and actively than physical education because she participated in youth sport with her child. She discussed physical education and youth sport in the quotation below:

Physical education: Well, the students have to change clothes so I know that he has to change clothes and it’s boys and girls together I think in middle school so I think they change and go, and the teacher tells them what they’re doing for the day, and I imagine Brian is breathing pretty and sweaty.

Youth sports: For Brian, his games usually start at seven, so he gets home from school those days on the bus. He gets home about 4:30, and that morning, I say “You’ve got a game, I’ll pick you up, get your homework done.” So we leave our house about 6:15. Coach Toney likes them to be there about 15 minutes early. We’ll go to the gym and Brian gets out of the car and goes in and I come later and we watch the game and then usually a lot of nights after a game, we’ll go through Zaxbys or something and get them something to eat afterward and come home. On the way home, he talks about… we talk about how many point he had and whether they won or lost or what coach Tony was saying and you know if anybody fell down or whatever. We’ll talk about if they got hurt and if Brian got to throw free throws, we’ll talk about whether or not he was nervous… If he, he always calls his dad on the way home and tells him what the score was and how many points he scored (Brian’s mother transcript).

Summary of the chapter

Ten students from 12 to 15 years old and their parents (either father or mother) shared their perspectives on physical education and youth sport. The findings were divided into four sections: students’ experiences in physical education, students’ experiences in youth sport, parents’ perceptions of physical education and parents’ perceptions of youth sport. Although the findings
are divided into four sections, they are not separate from each other. Rather, participants’
experiences were interwoven in all sections.

Students had a positive feeling toward physical education because they had fun, and there
was an opportunity for them to feel good about themselves. Specifically, students had fun
because they could escape from other academic classes and felt good about themselves by
helping other students, contributing to winning in team games or achieving personal goals. In
spite of these positive views, students did not regard physical education as a learning
environment. They had a separate perception of what they did and what they learned in physical
education. They considered what they did such as games or fitness tests to be a more meaningful
experience in physical education than what they learned academically such as health-related
knowledge. One reason why students could not explain what they learned from physical
education was because physical education teachers was perceived to be much as an observer.
Students made distinction between the physical education teacher and classroom teachers
because they considered the physical education teachers as a coach who teaches physical skills.

Like physical education, students had a positive feeling toward youth sport because they
had fun. However, unlike physical education, students considered their experiences in youth
sport to present learning opportunities. In particular, students believed that constructing a new
relationship with people, especially with their peers, in a youth sport program is a valuable
learning opportunity. They learned social skills more in youth sport than in physical education.
Another benefit for students to participate in youth sport was that they could receive parents’
psychosocial support such as emotional support and informational support. Also, sibling
relationships had an important influence on a students’ participation in youth sports in
competitive or cooperative ways. Finally, all students agreed that they liked youth sport more
than physical education because of the level of learning, engagement and feeling free, and the youth sports coach.

Parents stressed the importance of their children’s social development in school life. Thus, they believed that physical education, as a part of school curriculum, contributed to this social learning process through cooperative activities such as team sports. Parents also have a similar perspective toward physical education as students did in that physical education represented a playing time rather than learning time. However, they understood that the nature of physical education changes depending on the grade level; in secondary level, parents believed that physical education relies on health education and physical fitness test more than doing physical activities.

No student referred to health promotion in youth sport during interviews. However, parents assumed that exposure to physical activity settings such as youth sport may promote their children’s health and wellness. As parents stressed social learning in school, they believed that youth sport experiences helped their children learn a variety of life skills to promote social development including respect for others and cooperation. In particular, participation in team sports such as soccer and basketball was a great source to learn about working as a team member. In addition, parents who sent their children to individual sports such as swimming and Taekwondo stressed learning self-discipline such as patience and self-control applicable to their children’s daily lives. Parents took for granted that their children play video games in their leisure time. In this era of separation, parents believed that participation in a youth sport program provides an opportunity to interact with their children. Finally, parents believed that their children learn more in youth sport than in physical education because of deeper understanding of one sport, children’s choice of activities and parental involvement. In order words, parents
believed that their children learn more in youth sport by playing one sport and acquiring a deeper understanding of it, and by selecting sports by themselves. In addition, parents themselves are more involved in youth sport activity than in physical education by attending children’s practices and games, interacting with children and having interest in skill development. Table 4.3 and 4.4 summarized the findings of this study.
Table 4.3. Summary of students’ perspectives on PE and youth sport

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Physical education</th>
<th>Youth sport</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Enjoyment in PE</td>
<td>1. Positive experiences in youth sport</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1) Fun: Refreshment from academic classes and PE teacher</td>
<td>1) Fun in playing sports</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Experience of positive emotion: Feeling good about themselves by helping other students, contributing to winning their team, and achieving their personal goal</td>
<td>2) Learning opportunities: social development by constructing the relationship with new friends</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Discrepancies between what they learn and what they do</td>
<td>3. They liked youth sport more than physical education</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1) What they learn in PE: health-related knowledge</td>
<td>1) Youth sport is a more valuable learning setting than PE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) What they do in PE: game, fitness test or other activities</td>
<td>2) They are more actively engaged in activities in youth sport than PE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) Doing is more meaningful than learning</td>
<td>3) Freedom from grade-based performance and choice of activities in youth sport</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Physical education teachers as an observer</td>
<td>4) Youth sport coaches’ active participation in practices and games.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.4. Summary of parents’ perspectives on PE and youth sport

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parents</th>
<th>Physical education</th>
<th>Youth sport</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. Social development through PE</td>
<td>1. Health promotion in youth sport</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1) Participating in cooperative activities such as team sports</td>
<td>2. Learning life skills in youth sport</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Playing time rather than learning time</td>
<td>1) Working together with peers (teamwork)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Understanding the nature of PE depending on the grade level</td>
<td>2) Self-discipline such as patience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1) A variety of activities and playing with peers in elementary level</td>
<td>3. Family relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2) Health education and fitness test in secondary level</td>
<td>1) Chance to interact with their children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4. Their children learn more in youth sport than PE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1) Deeper understanding in one sport in youth sport</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2) Their children’s own choice of sports</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
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<td>3) parental involvement</td>
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CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Overview of the findings

*Enjoyment in physical education classes and youth sport programs*

The purpose of this study was to explore students' experiences and learning in physical education and youth sport, and to examine parents' perceptions of their children's experiences in physical education and youth sport. In order to explore students' experiences, understanding students' attitude toward two educational settings was important because it is generally agreed that attitudes are acquired through positive experiences, negative experiences and modeling (Woolfolk, 1987). Aicinena (1991) noted that “Attitudes may be thought of as a person’s feeling, biases, notions, ideas, fears and convictions about any topic” (p. 28). Phenomenological research begins from the natural attitude of everyday life as the original, pre-reflective, pre-theoretical attitude (Manen, 1990). In this sense, an attempt was made to explore student’s attitude toward physical education and youth sport in their everyday lives. A better understanding of how attitude impacts perceptions and feelings will provide valuable information to teachers, coaches, and parents (Silverman & Subramaniam, 1999).

Based on this theoretical background, one of major findings in this study was that students had a positive attitude toward physical education and youth sports because they enjoyed their experiences in both settings. This finding supports previous research because fun or enjoyment is one of the most important factors that influences a positive attitude toward physical education,
and is one of the top motivations that lead students to participate in organized sport programs was having fun (Couturier, Chepko, & Coughlin, 2005; Ewing & Seefeldt, 2002; Ryan, Fleming, & Maina, 2003; Solomon & Cater, 1995; Aicinena, 1991; Laws & Fisher, 1999). Sport enjoyment research used terms such as *enjoy, happy, fun,* and *like* to conceptualize enjoyment (Crocker, Bouffard & Gessaroli, 1995). Likewise, students in this study used terms “fun”, “enjoy”, “excited”, and “feeling good” to explain their positive feeling about physical education and youth sports. As Weiss and Chaumonton (1992) suggested, these positive emotions such as enjoyment, excitement, pleasure and fun increase future motivation for students to participate in physical activities.

Even though students agreed that they enjoyed their experiences in both physical activity settings, their positive feelings differed. That is, students stressed affective development in physical education classes and psychosocial development in youth sport programs. Stress reduction is one of the main benefits of well-planned and well-implemented physical education program (NASPE, 2004). In this study, students benefitted from their involvement in physical education because they thought their physical education time as a relaxing time from other classroom subjects. That is, they released their tension and anxiety from academic pressure through physical education classes. In addition, NASPE (2004) presented another benefit from physical education, which is improved self-confidence and self-esteem. This study also showed that students could increase their self-confidence and self-esteem through physical education classes because they had an opportunity to feel good about themselves by helping other students, contributing to winning as a team and achieving personal goals. As a positive emotion from a good academic grade, physical education classes helped students to develop self-confidence and self-esteem in their school life. Also, these pleasant emotions in physical education classes may
energize behavior and reinforce the pursuit of physical activities, whereas unpleasant emotions may motivate avoidance behavior and reinforce withdrawal from physical activities (Carver & Scheier, 1988). This study supports the fact that physical education classes have the potential to induce strong emotional reactions from students who engage in them (Ceciliani, Bardella, Grasso, Zabonati & Robazza, 2008).

Students’ psychosocial development is a benefit derived from participating in organized youth sport programs (Smoll & Smith, 2002). Many studies revealed that peer relationship in sports influences children’s psychosocial development in either a positive or negative way (Brustad, 2002). Brustad (2002) noted that youngsters view youth sports as a viable means of developing social relations and gaining peer acceptance. Similarly, from a students’ viewpoint, this study demonstrated students’ ability to learn social skills through interaction with unfamiliar peers. Weiss, Smith and Theeboom (1996) found 12 positive and 4 negative dimensions of peer relationship in the social context of sport through in-depth interviews. Their research provided a useful framework to understand students’ youth sport experiences in this study. Students showed some positive dimensions of peer relationship in youth sports including companionship, Pleasant/Play Association, Things in Common, Intimacy, Absence of Conflict, and Prosocial Behavior (Weiss, Smith, & Theeboom, 1996). These positive peer relationships led students to believe that participating in a youth sport program provides a learning opportunity whereas students did not regard physical education classes as a learning environment.

Learning in physical education classes and youth sport programs

Although many studies focused on students’ attitude toward physical education and youth sports, no research has compared these two physical activity settings in terms of learning. From a phenomenological perspective, human experiences including learning are relational and
intentional (Moustakas, 1994). Due to this relative characteristic of experiences, comparison of students’ experiences gives us a better understanding of a meaning of experiences. For example, students showed a positive attitude toward physical education because of fun and affective development when they were asked only about physical education. However, when students compared their experiences in physical education with other classroom subjects, the main role of physical education to them was a recess. From this comparative standpoint, the most important finding in this study was that youth sport experiences provided more valuable learning opportunity than physical education experiences from both students’ and parents’ viewpoints.

Ericsson, Krampe and Tesch-Romer (1993) suggested that the most effective learning occurs through involvement in a highly structured activity which requires effort, is inherently enjoyable, and is specifically designed to improve the current level of performance. Only the second condition *enjoyable* seems to be applicable to students in physical education classes. That is, students enjoyed their physical education classes because they had fun, but they doubted if they made an effort or improved their level of performance. This finding is similar to a previous study in that physical education curriculum has been designed to serve as a student recess or a recreational period (Hill, 1991). Physical education seems to be typecast as play time. In addition, this finding corroborates previous research in that people view physical education as non-academic (Strand & Scantling, 1994) and even students who enjoyed their physical education classes were not convinced they were learning (Calson, 1995). Hill (1991) also noted that physical education is considered a recreational period with little consideration to students’ developmental and instructional needs. Physical education offers students experiences different from those provided in other academic subjects because physical education classes are usually held outside the classroom in a recreational context (Kjonniksen, Fjortoft & Wold, 2009).
designation is one of several reasons why physical education is a popular subject in school. With this popularity of physical education, however, physical educators cannot overlook that viewing physical education classes as glorified recesses may be a problem that are inherent in many physical education programs, and may lead students to possess a negative attitude toward physical education (Strand & Scantling, 1994).

On the contrary, students enjoyed youth sport experiences not only because they had fun but also because students were more engaged in activities, saw their improvement in psychomotor skills and acquired a deeper understanding of sports in terms of tactics and strategies. In addition, students did not need to make an effort to construct new relationship with friends in physical education because they were already good friends with each other or they were not going to meet again after a physical education class. However, in a youth sport program, students had to work together with unfamiliar friends as a team during a whole season that lasts about three months. Students seem to be ready to accept a new relationship with new people such as teammates and coaches when they got involved in youth sport.

Motivation

Motivation is an important factor that influenced students’ perceived learning in two physical activity settings. Larson (2000) revealed that students have low intrinsic motivation but high concentration and challenge in classroom experience. On the contrary, students’ experience with friends in school has high intrinsic motivation and low concentration. Although this study used different methods and did not pursue finding intrinsic motivation, students in physical education seemed to have high intrinsic motivation with fun, but low concentration because of the absence of a challenge. This finding about physical education experience is similar to students’ experience with friends in school in Larson’s research. That is, students’ experience in
physical education is closer to playing experience than learning experience. Larson (2002) also reported that students’ experience in structured voluntary activities such as youth sport includes both high intrinsic motivation and concentration. The finding of this study confirms Larson’s research because students showed perceived learning, challenge, engagement, and improvement in youth sport experiences. Figure 5.1 and 5.2 indicates the comparison between Larson’s study and this study in terms of students’ intrinsic motivation and concentration. I modified intrinsic motivation into enjoyment because the aim of this study was not to rate intrinsic motivation with the number unlike Larson’s research. However, it seems to be reasonable to adopt Larson’s model because enjoyment is a crucial part of intrinsic motivation, which is the experience of wanting to be doing an activity. Also, students’ verbal descriptions and explanation in this study were enough to show their levels of concentration in two different settings.

Implications of the findings

Challenge

The first implication from the findings of this study is that physical education should give students appropriate challenge to make an effort to learn something as well as fun. High rates of disconnection from meaningful challenge are signs of deficiency in positive development (Larson, 2000). Similarly, the absence of challenge in this study prevented meaningful students’ learning in physical education. Csikszentmihalyi (1975) introduced the concept of flow which is a highly enjoyable experiential state entailing the “holistic sensation that people feel when they act with total involvement” (p. 36). Flow has been associated with peak performance. Thus, it is referred as “being in the zone,” “ecstasy,” and “aesthetic rapture” by athletes, religious mystics
In addition, as Larson (2000) insisted that youth activities such as youth sport should receive an equivalent attention to school, family and peers as a focal context of development, coaches working voluntarily in a youth sports program should be trained not only in the field of sports but also in the field of human development.

Figure 5.1 Students’ average ratings of their psychological states (Larson, 2000)

Figure 5.2 Students’ experience in physical education and youth sport
and artists respectively. One condition for flow experience to occur is that a person’s skills and challenge are in balance. In particular, when both skills and challenges are high, flow occurs.

From the findings of this study, I was unable to measure students’ objective skill levels. However, I recognized students’ perceived skill levels in terms of physical capability. Students in this study showed a high level of self-competence in terms of psychomotor skills. For example, all students except one maintained their youth sport activities over five years; my assumption is that students may not continue to participate in youth sport for a long time unless they have self-competence in their psychomotor skills. Also, students showed confidence and pride when they talked about their psychomotor skills. The following interview transcript represents students’ high level of self-competence in their psychomotor skills. A student said that:

When I can be the best at whatever we are doing. Maybe we’re running a lap and I can be the fastest. It happens a lot (Andrew’s interview transcript).

With students’ acquisition of high competence through their psychomotor skills, students set more opportunities to experience flow in youth sport than in physical education because both perceived challenge and skill level to be high in youth sport. In addition, based on flow theory, students may experience relaxation in physical education because their high perceived skill matched with the low level of perceived challenge. A student said “I feel relaxed. I don’t have to be worry” when he reflected on his physical education experiences. Figure 5.3 shows the quality of experience in physical education and youth sport based on flow theory.

Students who have long-term experiences in youth sport had a high level of self-competence in terms of psychomotor skills. Thus, they had a higher probability to experience flow in youth sport than physical education because youth sport provided a higher level of challenge. In addition, a finding of this study confirmed the importance of appropriate challenge for the quality of experience in physical education. Most students talked about long distance
running when they recalled physical education experiences because it challenged them. Long distance running was the most memorable experience whether it was positive or negative, and simultaneously was the only challenge to students received from involvement in physical education class activities. Therefore, providing appropriate challenges to students will increase the quality of their experiences in physical education.

**Autonomy**

A study revealed that, based on social validation theory, students will enjoy the class more and help the class to run more smoothly if teachers allow students’ input into the curriculum and class procedures (Martin & Lumsden, 1987). Survey research found that most students agreed
with the following statement: “I would like to be able to pick my own activities” (75.5%) and “I would like to be able to tell the teacher the activities I would like to do” (73.6%) in physical education classes (Couturier, Chepko & Coughlin, 2005). From these findings, I could infer that students may enjoy their physical activities when they choose them. However, in this study, students and parents believed physical education is a mandatory part of the curriculum. Thus, students were unaware of the potential educational benefits of various sports that physical education teachers selected (Cothran & Ennis, 1999). Consequently, students had difficulty in having the belief that physical education is valuable and meaningful. This finding is similar with previous research (Like & Cope, 1994) in that “programs that instill positive attitudes will increase the likelihood of children and adolescents adopting and maintaining an active lifestyle when free choice is given” (p. 57). This choice of activities may play a crucial role in promoting students’ autonomy. (Holt, Bewick, & Gately, 2004). Autonomy is a part of essential human needs for facilitating optimal functioning of the natural propensities for growth and integration, as well as for constructive social development and personal well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Autonomy was an important factor that affected students’ and parents’ perceptions of learning in physical education and youth sport. Both students and parents agreed that voluntary participation in youth sport increased their quality of experiences. Self-determination theory may explain this finding in terms of autonomy. Although self-determination theory is an integrated theory of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2007), I paid attention to autonomy instead of motivation because students showed a discrepancy in terms of features of motivation in physical education. In other words, students enjoyed physical education because it is fun, which is a feature of intrinsic motivation. Simultaneously, however, there was a lack of intentionality and personal causation to students because physical education was simply a leisure
time in their school life, which is a feature of amotivation; amotivation is defined as the relative absence of (Deci & Ryan, 2002). Accordingly, I decided to focus on autonomy instead of motivation.

Based on self-determination theory, three basic psychological needs, competence, autonomy and relatedness, are essential for self’s development and well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2002). Self-determination theory assumes that “people are viewed as typically having multiple motives, both intrinsic and extrinsic, that are simultaneously in play, all of which must together be assumed to determine the overall quality of motivation” (Ryan & Deci, 2007, p. 7). In particular, this theory used the continuum of autonomy to determine how autonomous people are by incorporating a differentiated view of extrinsic motives in terms of how much they emanate from or reflect one’s self. The findings of this study showed the different level of students’ autonomy in their behaviors in physical education and youth sport (See figure 5.4). As mentioned above, students had a high level of perceived competence in terms of psychomotor skills in both settings. However, their levels of autonomy were different because they chose their youth sport activities independently, but they participated in physical education as a part of required school curriculum. Therefore, students showed a higher level of autonomy in youth sport than in physical education. As shown in Brian’s case, although the original impetus for his participation in a youth sports program came from parents, the motivation, direction and goal of activities came from students themselves (Larson, 2000). Because of the higher level of autonomy in youth sport, students tend to see it as a learning environment where they can seek autonomous learning, but they spend effortless time by just following teacher’s direction in physical education.
In conclusion, the higher level of autonomy led students and parents to see youth sport as presenting a more valuable learning environment than physical education. Therefore, physical education teachers need to make an effort to increase students’ autonomy in order to make their class a meaningful learning environment. For example, teachers can provide students with an opportunity to choose the activities, listen to students’ opinions about curriculum and instruction, and include those students’ voices that impact learning in their classes.

**Physical education teachers and youth sport coaches**

A finding about physical education teachers in this study was that students did not make a distinction between physical education teachers and coaches because both are viewed to represent a person who teaches psychomotor skills. This finding is related to students’ perception...
of the nature of physical education. Students tended to believe physical education to be a non-academic subject because doing activity was the most important part of physical education. Therefore, in the opinion of students, physical education teachers seem to be a different kind of teacher from other classroom teachers.

Concerted engagement in an environment is associated with intrinsic motivation (Larson, 2000). Therefore, based on the levels of challenge and autonomy, students are more likely to be engaged in youth sport activities than physical education activities. Indeed, students’ descriptions of routine of physical education and youth sport demonstrated different levels of engagement in the two settings. Students were more highly engaged and involved in youth sport activities than in physical education activities. However, students’ motivational climate was not the only factor that affected students’ engagement. The coach-athlete relationship can ultimately influence the athletes’ sport enjoyment and their decision to continue participating in the sport (Cote, 2002). Thus, students’ perceptions of the physical education teacher and the youth sport coach also influenced their level of engagement. The following two transcripts directly compare students’ different perspectives between a physical education teacher and a youth sport coach. Students said that:

My teachers in PE are more laid back. They don’t care much about what you’re doing. He watches. He doesn’t get involved as much. He makes sure nobody is messing up or doing anything wrong or hurting themselves. Just observe (Will’s interview transcript).

He (youth sport coach) doesn’t observe as much. He’ll get there and yell at you and tell you what you’re doing wrong. But it’s kind of a mix of teacher and observer. He observes until you do something wrong and then he jumps in (Andrew’s interview transcript).

In short, students viewed the youth sport coach being more actively engaged in actions than the physical education teacher.
Narration of differences between a physical education teacher and a youth sport coach is not to be critical of physical education teachers in this study. Rather, the intent is to inform both physical education teachers and youth sport coaches that students are observing their behaviors in classes, practices and games differently, and their level of involvement in actions may influence students’ engagement and involvement in classes, practices and games. Besides, teachers’ or coaches' low expectations for their teaching or coaching still possibly affect students’ attitudes in a negative way by preventing students from perceiving that their classes or practices are a valuable learning environment. In addition, physical education teachers and youth sport coaches need to provide the structured instruction and appropriate feedback if they want students to perceive their class, practice and game as presenting a meaningful learning environment. Finally, physical education teachers and coaches have to strongly believe that they are able to enhance students’ level of engagement in many ways, including evaluating them in terms of effort and making improvements rather than just ability, emphasizing individual learning, and providing related feedback that assists students in their efforts to improve (Hein, 2003).

Moreover, teachers and coaches need to do their best in their teaching and coaching because students represent the public relations agent, the most often listened to by adults (Pawlas, 1999). The quality of instruction would be immersed into not only students but also parents and community.

**Parental influence**

Cote and Hay (2002) presented that family environment heavily influences whether children become involved and decide to remain in sports and physical activity. Another difference between physical education and youth sport was the level of parental influence. That is, the level of parental influence was higher in youth sport than in physical education mostly,
due to parents’ time commitment, one of tangible parental supports (Cote & Hay, 2002). Lareau (2003) documented middle-class parents to take for granted their obligation to develop their children’s talents through participating in organized activities such as youth sports. As in previous research (Cote, 1999), parents in this study were heavily involved in spectating and transporting their children to practices and games. This time commitment was important in two ways. First, the family had a chance to construct companionship by spending time together. Companionship is one of parental supports which enable parents to be involved in various kinds of activities such as attending sporting events with their children (Cote & Hay, 2002). Lareau (2003) found that “the greater the number of activities middle-class children are involved in, the fewer opportunities they have for face-to-face interaction with members of their own family” (p. 39). On the contrary in this study, participating in a youth sport program provided the family members with opportunities to interact with each other. Playing video games or watching TV was the most dominant leisure activities of children. Parents seemed to take for granted that their children were upstairs and they are downstairs. Separation during their leisure time was typical of families in this study. In this reality, youth sport experiences provided an opportunity for family members to bond because they spent time together and talked with other. As Brian’s mother commented in an interview, through youth sport, “All go together and ride home together and talk about what happened and things that maybe happen to do differently next time.”

Second, spectating children’s practices and games played an important role for parents to understand their children’s learning. Parents recognized learning in physical education mainly from students’ grades. Sometimes, students talked with parents about their experiences in physical education only when they had a special one. In contrast, parents observed the routine of practices and games, and directly saw children’s learning such as improvement of psychomotor
and social skills. The most important benefit of direct observation is that parents were able to initiate conversation and provide their children with more concrete feedback, which was a part of emotional and informational support. Many studies have revealed that these parents’ psychosocial supports are an essential factor in the development of children’s self-esteem, competence, achievement, enjoyment, and enthusiasm (Woolger & Power, 1993; Power & Woolger, 1994; VanYperen, 1995). In addition, such parental support influences children’s level of enjoyment and self-competence because parental feedback is an important source of competence information (Hein, 2003). Thus, watching was not merely watching but was a starting and key point for parental support. The absence of parental involvement might influence students’ learning in physical education. Therefore, physical education teachers need to make an effort to increase parental involvement. For example, teachers can arrange their gym in a way that it invites parents in (Pawlas, 1999). Further, inviting as an instructor as well as a spectator provides a memorable experience for families (Na, 2009).

Too high or low parental expectations may result in less enthusiasm from children who participate in youth sports (Cote & Hay, 2002). Hellstedt (1987) used a parental involvement continuum from underinvolved to moderate to overinvolved to describe the amount of involvement that parents have in their children’s sports activities. Although moderate levels of involvement enhance students’ enjoyment and competence through emotional and informational support, parents’ excessive amount of involvement might prevent students’ learning. Overinvolved parents are characterized by excessive attendance at practice session, standing next to the coach, and yelling (Hellstedt, 1987). A father showed those characteristics of over-involvement in a low level. The following transcript describes what Andrew’s father does during practices and games.
I try not to coach. And both Andrew and Jon have come asked me not to speak up. And I try. So I think Laura, my wife, probably catches that because I just talk about what I wished had had happened differently or what I... some particular things that I might have observed that I would like have liked to have been different. But I am trying not to coach from the stands or from the sidelines (Andrew’s father interview transcript).

This finding of parents’ over-involvement provides a rationale of parent education in youth sport program. Recently, media has focused on parents’ violence coming from over-involvement in youth sport settings. Regardless of violence, however, parents should recognize that positive experiences in physical activity settings are not necessarily children’s individual processes, but rather involve collaborative process. Parents should be educated about how seriously their behaviors influence the quality of their children’s experiences in physical activity settings.

Lareau (2003) found that middle-class parents strongly believed that sports teach children crucial life lessons, and they have repeated opportunities to practices those lessons in organized sports activities. Likewise, in this study, both students and parents agreed that sports are a valuable source to promote children’s social development as a life lesson. Social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) explained that children can learn parental belief systems. Students seemed to learn the importance of social development from their parents. Parents strongly believed that learning social skills as well as gaining knowledge of subjects is the most important and meaningful experience in school life for their children. Thus, physical education and youth sport to them were a great opportunity for their children to learn those social skills. Although parents struggled to explain the process of how their children learned life skills in physical education, they believed that exposure to physical activity such as team sports helped their children learn those skills both in physical education and in youth sport. However, students believed that they were able to learn social skills in youth sport, not in physical education. Many studies revealed how children learn social skills through interaction with parents, coaches, and peers in youth
sports (Cote, 2002). In particular, students in this study stressed that they learned social skills in youth sports through interacting with new peers. In conclusion, physical education teachers have to realize and satisfy these students’ and parents’ needs for social development.

Peer relationship

Many researchers in the field of sport psychology have been interested in the development of social competence, peer acceptance, and friendship quality (Vaou, Ntoumanis, & Duda, 2005). They found children’s perceived competence in sports to be strongly related to their success in peer relations (Weiss & Duncan, 1992). Students in this study showed positive peer relations in youth sport, including companionship, please/play, things in common, intimacy, absence of conflict, and prosocial behavior. Also, as mentioned above, they had a high level of self-competence. Although this study was not directed to find the relationships between peer relations and students’ perceived competence, the findings support the previous studies in that those are related with each other. Another research interest in peer relations was friendship quality. Smith (1999) found that greater friendship perceptions have been found to predict choice of tasks and physical activity levels for male and female adolescents. Similarly, the findings of this study demonstrated the importance of friendship quality in choice of physical activities. Students’ motivation for participation in a youth sport program was to play with close friends in an organized sport program. This view is corroborated in the following quotation:

We can have fun with that (basketball). Now it’s even funner because I brought my best friend who really enjoys it (Will’s interview transcript).

However, this study indicates that quality friendships deprived students of a learning opportunity that allowed them to interact with peers in physical education. This supports Cothran and Ennis’s (1999) study, which indicated students’ lack of attachment to classmates in physical education, a situation that student scheduling accentuates. Also, students did not have to meet new friends in
physical education because they already had close school friends in class. Therefore, students did not consider physical education as a context for constructing peer relationships although physical education as well as youth sport is an ideal context for fostering a deeper understanding of peer relationships. The most important problem of this phenomenon in physical education was a lack of structured instructions to enhance social development. From students’ perspective, physical education teachers were an observer rather than a teacher in this study. Thus, students did not receive structured instructions and feedback from physical education teachers. In addition, because students thought of physical education as playing time rather than learning time, they were not willing to make an effort to promote their social learning through physical education. Unlike their parents’ expectations, students did not learn social skills simply because they play team sports in physical education. Therefore, physical education teachers need to provide specific goal-oriented teaching to enhance students’ social development such as cooperative learning instruction (Polvi & Telama, 2000). Moreover, as Smith (2003) emphasized, physical education teachers need to understand that peer relationships can contribute to the quality of physical education experiences and vice versa.

*Relationship between physical education and youth sport*

One assumption of this study was that there would be a relationship between physical education and youth sport because they have a commonality in that both intend to increase students’ learning though physical activities. However, students and parents perceived these two physical activity settings to be separate. Historically, youth sport began to contribute to children’s moral development at the early twentieth century (Wiggins, 2002). Due to this educational intent, youth sport was supported and sponsored by school. However, youth sport began to be separated from public education during the 1920s and 1930s because of a high focus
on competition. This historical story may or may not influence students’ and parents’ perspective on two different social agents. Regardless of impact of history, an important fact is that students and parents believed youth sport to provide a valuable learning setting as much as school setting. As a matter of fact, youth sport was regarded as more valuable than physical education in this study. Therefore, it can be said that physical educators need to make connections between these two settings in order to maximize students’ learning. Indeed, Brian’s interview transcript showed how students continue to be involved in learning activities by making connections between physical education and youth sport.

In PE we were learning to, I think we were learning to shoot, like basic things most people already knew..., I carried that over to youth sports and that’s one reason I’ve been able to score more. And I have been more consistent with that. Also, in youth sports, coaches have taught me to spin in the right direction and to look for the pass really quickly and to get all the positions in my mind before they change and so I use that in basketball games in PE and help my team to win and then they want me back on their team the next time and so we can get more consistent (Brian’s interview transcript).

Although Brian’s learning process was not the result of teaching or coaching, his idea provides teachers and coaches with insights into their instructional strategies. That is, they can maximize students’ learning by connecting the two settings.

The National Association for Sport and Physical Education (2004) presented that “the goal of physical education is to develop physically educated individuals who have the knowledge, skills, and confidence to enjoy a lifetime of healthful physical activity” (p. 11). Thus, another reason why we need to make connection between the two physical activity settings relies on lifetime physical activity which is one of the most significant issues in the field of physical education in recent times. Through active participation in physical activities, people achieve and maintain physical fitness which contributes to health and well-being. Youth sport supporters noted that lifelong patterns of physical activity that promote health and fitness can be initiated
through involvement in youth sports (Smith & Smoll, 1997). Children want and need positive experience in sports. These early positive experiences will lead students to participate in life-long physical activities (Kirk, 2005). Despite increased public interest in physical activity due to obesity, physical education time in school tends to be reduced in the United States (NASPE & AHA, 2006). Limited physical education time cannot provide students with enough amount of time for physical activity to reap health benefits. Thus, researchers have studied how physical education contributes to students’ physical activity outside school such as youth sport and how those influence lifetime physical activity (Kjonnisen, Fjortoft, & Wold, 2009; Kirk, 2005). Kjonnisen, Fjortoft and Wold (2009) found that attitude toward physical education was moderately related to participation in organized youth sports. In addition, experience in physical education during childhood and adolescence may influence participation in physical activity outside school (Ommundsen, 2003). However, based on this study, the direction seems to go from youth sport to physical education rather than from physical education to youth sport. That is, students’ experiences in youth sport seem to influence their attitudes toward physical education. All students except one started their youth sport when they were 5 to 7 years old before they experienced physical education in school. These early experiences in youth sport helped them acquire a positive attitude toward physical activity, which led them to have a positive attitude toward physical education. Thus, in spite of the lack of learning experience in physical education, students liked physical education because they had a positive attitude toward physical activity.

The aim of physical education in most countries is to promote health and physical fitness by encouraging physical activities (Zeigler, 1999). Physical fitness has long been an important goal of physical education and is the goal that physical education teachers most frequently assess in schools. Although students did not consider health benefits in physical education and youth
sport, a benefit of both settings to parents was the promotion of physical health for the children. In addition, a previous study revealed a positive attitude toward physical education and youth sport, which significantly predicted physical activity in adulthood (Kjonnjsen, Fjortoft, & Wold, 2009). Therefore, physical education teachers and youth coaches need to understand that the quality of children’s experience in their classes, practices and games may influence children’s lifetime physical activity.

Limitations

Phenomenology assumes that a person cannot reflect on lived experience while living through the experience. Thus, lived-experience descriptions are not identical to lived experience itself (Manen, 1990). For example, when Andrew talks about his experience in a youth soccer program during interviews, his consciousness of soccer is already different from that of soccer when he was in a youth soccer program. All recollections of, reflections on and descriptions of experiences through interviews are already transformations of those experiences. Thus, reflection on lived experience is always recollective and retrospective instead of introspective (Manen, 1990). Thus, this study assumed that true introspection is impossible because it depends on reflection of experience in physical education and youth sports.

In addition, phenomenology as a qualitative research method does not intend to generalize the findings of a study. In particular, because convenience sampling for recruiting research participants was used, the findings of this study are not representative of the whole body of students and parents. Rather, based on a phenomenological perspective, the assumption is that that an event that one student or parent experiences can happen to another (Manen, 1990). Thus,
the findings of this study could provide readers with some insights that could hold in similar situations in physical education and youth sport.

Students’ learning in physical education and youth sport is a complex process, and is realized in various interactions with parents, teachers, coaches, siblings and peers as presented in figure 5.5. Each interaction was so complicatedly interwoven with one another that students created their own meaning from their experiences in different ways. Nevertheless, previous studies in the field of physical education and youth sport focused on a single arrow relationships such as student-coach, student-teacher, student-parent, student-peer, and student-sibling relationships. These separations of contexts could hinder development of a holistic understanding of students’ learning. Although an attempt was made to acquire a deeper understanding of

Figure 5.5. Students’ learning through interactions in physical education and youth sport
students’ learning by connecting youth sport and physical education, and students’ and parents’ perspectives, there is still a weakness in the findings of this study because the data were gathered only through interviews and questionnaires. Employing an additional data collection method such as observation might increase credibility of the study. In addition, teachers, coaches and peers may have similar or different perspectives on student’ learning in physical education and youth sport. Therefore, research including all of them in the same context, such as a case study will be useful for a true understanding of one student’s learning experience.

Conclusions

The main finding of this study was that youth sport experiences were more valuable and meaningful learning opportunities than physical education experiences from students’ and parents’ perspectives. Although physical education and youth sport were compared in this study, the intent was neither to distinguish superiority of one nor to be critical of physical education teachers. Rather, it was believed that understanding of strengths and weakness in both settings could help construction of curriculum and teaching in physical education setting.

Physical education teachers may have many constraints including large class sizes and an obligation to cover a broad ranging curriculum such as health, games, and sports as parents understood that “in PE they learned a lot of different things and they had exposure to a lot of different games.” However, if physical education teachers recognize students’ and parents’ perspectives on the strength of youth sport in which their students participated, they would be able to have an opportunity to increase those students’ quality of physical education experiences. Thus, physical education teachers need to understand that the presence of effort, challenge,
engagement, autonomy, cooperation, and improvement allows students to have learning experiences in youth sport.

Finally, this study confirmed that youth sport programs are an important social and cultural learning setting as school. Therefore, as Larson (2000) insisted, youth sport should receive an equivalent attention to school, family and peers as a focal context of development. In addition, youth sport workers such as coaches should take a responsibility as an educator.
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APPENDIX A

Written Responses

Students' responses: Reflection on memorable experiences in school life, physical education, and youth sport activity

1. How would you describe the best moment in your school life?

2. How would you describe the worst moment in your school life?

3. What was the best thing that happened to you in your physical education class?

4. What was the worst thing that happened to you in your physical education class?

5. What was the best thing that happened to you in your youth sport activities?

6. What was the worst thing that happened to you in your youth sport activities?
Parents' responses: Reflection on memorable experiences and perceptions of physical education and youth sports

1. How would you describe the best moment with your child(ren)?

2. How would you describe the worst moment with your child(ren)?

3. What do you think your child(ren) learn from school?

4. What do you think your child(ren) learn from physical education?

5. What do you think your child(ren) learn from youth sports?

6. How many children do you have?

7. Do you send all of your children to a youth sport program?

8. How long have you sent your children to a youth sports program?

9. What sports have your children participated?
※ The following questions are about your background information. It will be kept confidential.

1. Are you: □ Father       □ Mother

2. Age: _______years

3. Occupation:

4. Ethnicity: □ African-American       □ Asian       □ Caucasian

□ Hispanic       Others:______________________.

5. Please circle the highest level of school completed.

□ Elementary school       □ Junior High School       □ High School

□ College/university       □ Master’s degree       □ Doctoral degree

6. Please circle your household income.

□ $100,000 or more

□ $60,000 to less than $100,000

□ $40,000 to less than $60,000

□ $30,000 to less than $40,000

□ $20,000 to less than $30,000

□ Less than 20,000
APPENDIX B

Interview Questions

Student Interview #1: Overall feelings and perceptions of experiences in school, physical education and youth sport.

1. Background information (Age, grade, school, family)

2. Can you tell me about your ordinary life? What time do you go to school? What do you do in and after school? What do you do during the weekend?

3. (Based on written response) can you tell me about the best moment in your school life? How did you feel? How does that experience change you?

4. (Based on written response) can you tell me about the worst moment in your school life? How did you feel? How does that experience change you?

5. What is your favorite subject? Why? Do you have any interesting episode in that class? How do you feel in that class? What do you do (prepare) for that class? Do you set up your goal for that class before class?

6. (If PE is not the favorite subject) Compared to your favorite class, what do you think about physical education? Do you have any memorable experience in physical education (best or worst)? What do you want to attain in physical education class?

7. What is the best and worst thing that happened in your physical education class? Can you explain it?

8. What do you think you learn from school? What do you learn from your favorite subject? How do you use that learning in your life? Can you give me an example?
9. What do you learn from physical education compared to your favorite subject? Can you describe the routine in your PE class?

10. Who was your favorite teacher through your whole school life? Why? Do you have any interesting episode with him/her?

11. (If PE teacher is not the favorite teacher) Compared to your favorite teacher, how is your PE teacher different? What does your PE teacher do in class? Do you have any interesting episode with him/her?

12. How about youth coach? How is your coach similar or different from your PE teacher?

13. What kinds of youth sport have you participated? How long? What makes you participate in a youth sport program?

14. Which do you like to participate in youth sports or physical education? Why?

15. What is the best and worst thing that happened to you in your youth sports program? Can you explain it?

16. Compared to physical education, what do you learn from youth sports? Can you describe the routine in your youth sports?

17. Who is your best friend? What do you do and talk with him/her? How do you feel similarly or differently between school mate and youth sport mate?
Student Interview #2: Comparison of experiences in physical education and youth sport based on the first interview.

1. Can you compare your feeling of the best moment in school, PE, and youth sport?
2. How do you think PE as a subject contributes to your learning in whole school life?
3. What about youth sport? How does it contribute to your school life?
4. Why do you call your PE teacher as coach?
5. Do your PE teacher and coach teach you in similar way or different way?
6. How do you feel when you enter into PE class and youth sport practice or game?
7. Which setting between PE and youth sport do you think you learn more?
8. Which setting do you like more?
9. Do you think you use what you learn in PE in your life?
10. Do you think what you learn in PE helps your youth sport experiences?
11. Which setting are you more serious or relaxed?
12. Do you think these two settings are related?
13. Which do you like more between your PE teacher and youth sport coach?
Student Interview #3: Member checking and summary of interview.

1. What makes you have fun in PE and youth sport?

2. What makes you participate in youth sport?

3. Why do you like youth sport more than PE?

4. How do you think PE and youth sport influences your family relationship?

5. Do you set up a goal when you enter into PE and youth sport?

6. What do your PE teacher and youth sport coach do in class, practice and game?

7. What do you think you learn more in youth sport than PE?

8. How do PE and youth sport help you make friends?

9. Can you tell me again what you think you learn from PE and youth sport?

10. What does that learning mean to you?
Parents Interview #1: Overall perceptions of their children’s experiences in school, home, physical education and youth sports

1. Can you describe your families’ ordinary life?

2. What was the recent issue you discussed with your children? Can you describe that scene? How did you feel?

3. What do you think your child learn from school? In what way? How do you know your child learn from school? Do you have any example?

4. What do you think your child learns from physical education? In what way? How do you know your child learned from physical education? Do you have any example?

5. Have you ever heard about physical education from your child? If yes, what was it?

6. Can you draw a picture of your child’s physical education class in your mind? Can you describe it? It was based on what?

7. What makes you send your child to a youth sports program?

8. What is the benefit that results from sending your child to a youth sports program? (To you, your child, and your family)

9. What do you think your child learns from participating in a youth sports program? How do you know your child learned it? Do you have any example?

10. How do you think your child is different at the day of youth sports from the other days? How about game day? Can you describe the day your child participates in a youth sports program?

11. Do you go to the field with your child every practice and game? What do you do while you child practices or plays game?

12. What do you talk about with your child in the car while you take him/her youth sports?
Parent Interview #2: Comparison of experiences in physical education and youth sport based on the first interview.

1. How do you think PE contributes to your children’s learning in school?
2. What about youth sport? Does it help your children’s school life? In what way?
3. How much do you think PE is an important subject compared to other subjects?
4. Do you think we need to increase PE time in school?
5. Do you think youth sport participation gives you more chance to talk with your kids?
6. How do you think PE and youth sport contributes to your family relationship?
7. Why do you choose youth sport than any other activities such as boy/girl scout?
8. Do you have anything to ask PE teacher and youth coach about your kids?
9. Do you think these two settings are related to each other?
10. Can you tell me about similarity and difference between two settings?
11. Which setting do you think your kids learn more?
Parent Interview #3: Member checking and summary of interview.

1. What do you think your kids learn from PE and youth sport?
2. What does that learning mean to your kid and your family?
3. What is the meaning of participation in youth sport to your family and your community?
4. Why do you choose a certain sport (soccer, basketball, Taekwondo, swimming)? How does your preference influence your kid’s choice of sport?
5. Do you have any kind of relationship with PE teacher and youth coach?
6. Do you think PE and youth sport have to have a certain relationship with each other?
7. You thought youth sport promotes student learning in terms of social skills. On the contrary, don’t you think youth sport prevent your kids from studying?
8. Which setting do your kids like more? Why?
9. Which setting do you think your kids learn more? Why?