

STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF PHYSICAL EDUCATION TEACHERS' CARING

Dean Michael Ravizza

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Dr. Richard K. Stratton, Chair

Dr. Penny L. Burge

Dr. Tom Gatewood

Dr. James Krouscas

Dr. Billie Lepczyk

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## Students' Perceptions of Physical Education Teachers' Caring

Dean Michael Ravizza

Chair: Dr. Richard K. Stratton, Teaching and Learning

### (ABSTRACT)

The concept of caring is reported to be an important factor in the teacher-student relationship. However, this concept has not been widely explored in the context of the teacher-student relationship in physical education. The purpose of this study was to gain insights into students' perceptions of physical education teachers' caring. The researcher sought to describe the perceptions students had in regard to caring behaviors exhibited by their physical education teachers.

Twelve eighth-grade students from a local middle school in Southwest Virginia participated in this study. The research questions were investigated using a qualitative research design that included semi-formal interviews and field observations.

The results indicated that multiple opportunities existed for the physical education teachers to demonstrate caring behaviors toward their students. The students described their perceptions of physical education teachers' caring along dimensions of content and pedagogy and interpersonal relationships. The researcher determined that factors existed that facilitated and presented barriers to the caring process. Facilitators of caring in physical education included the nature of the class, flexibility in teacher expectations, and class activities. Barriers to caring were revealed as length of time with the teacher, student personalities, role of the teacher/coach, and class size. Furthermore, physical education teachers' caring was determined to be a positive factor in students' attitudes toward physical education and their participation in physical education class. The results did not indicate a clear pattern of responses based on the skill level of each participant. Directions for future research on the concept of caring as it relates to physical education are discussed.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Reflections of past school experiences may bring about thoughts of caring teachers. One might recall an instance when a teacher provided individual guidance, motivation, or support for a particular subject area. Others may recall personal attention paid to them by a teacher to assist them in mastering a task or skill. Additionally, others may remember a teacher who provided assistance in order to sort out a personal problem. With further examination, such interactions between student and teacher may have led to an increased appreciation for a specific academic area. With this being said, one cannot discount the impact that a caring teacher can have on the educational process and the overall well-being of students.

The concept of caring encompasses a wide range of definitions that have emerged from the theoretical writings of scholars in fields like education, nursing, and psychology. Scholars have produced broad definitions of caring utilizing words such as relationships, interpersonal interactions, and concern for well-being.

The importance of caring in education continues to be emphasized in theoretical writing and research (Gilligan, 1988; Kohn, 1991; Noddings, 1984, 1992). Caring has been defined as an essential component to effective teaching (Rogers & Webb, 1991) and a significant source of job satisfaction (Nias, 1989). Many teachers enter teaching because of a desire to care for others (Nias, 1989) and are deemed good teachers because they are caring (Rogers & Webb, 1991). Students reported a more positive school experience when taught by teachers they deemed caring (Rogers & Webb, 1991, Weinstein, 1998).

While theoretical writing on the concept of caring remains a strong presence in the literature, research has begun to emerge in the field of education. Students who perceive their teachers as caring reported a more positive outlook on their teachers and course content (Teven & McCroskey, 1996). Further studies have linked teacher caring to positive student motivation (Wentzel, 1997, Wentzel & Asher, 1995).

The nature of physical education is grounded in movement, games, and sports which lends itself to a high rate of teacher-student interactions. The nature of these interactions may be a leading factor in a student's perception of physical education. Carlson (1995) and Portman (1995) cited teaching behaviors as strong indicators for either positive or negative perceptions of physical education. Survey research completed by Larson (2004) indicated that the main factor

in students' descriptor of caring behaviors of physical education teachers was the idea that students felt the teacher paid attention to them. The remaining list of factors reported by Larson (2004) solidifies the notion that the nature of the interactions between the physical educator and student plays a vital role in the students' perceptions of their physical education teacher.

Since the concept of caring within the teacher-student relationship in the context of physical education has not been widely explored, further investigations are warranted. The perceptions of students are noticeably absent in the literature. A qualitative inquiry investigating student' perceptions of physical education teachers' caring would provide a richer description of the thoughts and feelings of students in regard to this concept to provide useful findings for physical education teachers, parents, school administrators, teacher educators, and others with research interests in this topic.

#### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to gain insights into students' perceptions of physical education teachers' caring. The researcher will seek to describe the perceptions students have in regard to caring behaviors exhibited by their physical education teachers. Specific questions that will guide this research are:

1. How do students describe the concept of caring as it relates to the school setting?
2. What caring behaviors do students perceive their physical education teachers demonstrate toward them?
3. What factors related to physical education influence these perceptions?
4. Do students describe their perceptions of caring as influencing their participation in physical education?

#### *Secondary Research Question:*

1. Does student skill level influence their perceptions of physical education teachers' caring?

#### *Definition of Terms*

1. ***Caring behavior:*** An interpersonal interaction towards a student from the [physical education] teacher that conveys to the student that the teacher is concerned for the well-being of the student (Noddings, 1992).

2. ***Caring relation***: “A connection or encounter between two human beings – a carer and a recipient of care or cared-for” (Noddings, 1992, p. 15).
3. ***Perceived caring***: How much the student perceives the teacher is concerned about the student’s welfare (McCroskey, 1992).
4. ***Adolescence***: The period of transition from childhood to adulthood, entered at about age ten to twelve and exited around age eighteen to twenty-two (Santrock, 2001).
5. ***Lower-skilled students***: These are students who, in the estimation of the researcher, perform skills haphazardly, without conscious control, and with an inability to replicate a movement. These are characteristics of students at the precontrol level of skill proficiency as cited by Graham, Holt/Hale, & Parker (2004).
6. ***Average-skilled students***: These are students who, in the estimation of the researcher, perform skills with intense concentration, with greater consistency, and similar repetitions even though the movements are not automatic. These are characteristics of students who perform at the control level of skill proficiency as cited by Graham, Holt/Hale, and Parker (2004).
7. ***Higher-skilled students***: These are students who, in the estimation of the researcher, can replicate movements consistently –some of whom can perform skills automatically and in changing, more dynamic situations. These are characteristics of students who perform at the utilization and proficiency levels of skill proficiency as cited by Graham, Holt/Hale, & Parker (2004).

#### Limitations of the Study

1. The study will depend on the responses of the participants. It will be assumed that each interview question will be answered honestly.
2. The scope of the study is limited to the thoughts of students in only one grade level – grade 8.
3. Interpretations of caring behaviors during field observations will be influenced by the judgment of the researcher.
4. The findings of this study will be influenced by the analysis and interpretations of the researcher.

5. The findings of this study will be limited to the twelve students studied and the educational setting in which they attend. These participants and the school will be described in detail thus strengthening the transferability of the results.

### Significance of the Study

There is value in the examination of the concept of caring as it occurs within interpersonal interactions between teachers and students since these relationships play an integral role in the education process. It is generally thought that caring behaviors exhibited by teachers towards their students can positively impact a student's school experience. An examination of the literature on the concept of caring reveals a plethora of theoretical writings. A growing, yet, comparatively brief body of research has emerged in the field of education. Additionally, the concept of caring has not been widely explored in the field of physical education. Given that physical education provides inherent opportunities for teachers to exhibit caring behaviors toward their students, a study seeking to explore such behaviors would prove beneficial to those involved in the field.

The addition of the voices of students will add an important element to the slowly growing body of research on caring in physical education. By expanding the research through exploring the perceptions of middle school students who participate in a general physical education program, physical education teachers may be better able to identify caring behaviors that provide a positive influence on students' physical education experiences. Students' perceptions, thoughts, and expressions can be compared with that of teachers performed in earlier research to determine commonalities and differences in each individual's perceptions of caring behaviors.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF SELECTED LITERATURE

The purpose of this study is to gain insights into students' perceptions of caring physical education teachers. The review of literature which is presented in this chapter provides a frame of reference for understanding the role that caring plays in the context of education, teaching, and physical education. Because this study focuses specifically on the perceptions of middle school students, literature that pertains to middle school education, developmentally appropriate middle school physical education, and cognitive and psychosocial developmental characteristics of early adolescents will also be reviewed. Finally, attribution theory is discussed in order to focus on the concept of caring as a teacher attribute that influences students' perceptions of physical education and students' participation in the physical education setting.

#### *The Concept of Caring*

Caring is an essential attribute of most, if not all, human relationships. People desire to enter into caring relationships with others in their lives. The concept of caring has been discussed from many perspectives as it encompasses a wide range of topics. The concept of caring embodies a wide range of definitions that have emerged from the theoretical writings of scholars in fields like education, nursing, and philosophy (Noddings 1986, 1992). They have produced broad definitions of caring utilizing words such as relationships, interpersonal interactions, and concern for well-being. Thus, a plethora of definitions for the concept of caring have been cited. The focus will remain on the concept of caring as defined in the field of education.

The concept of caring can be described as human interaction characterized by mutuality, a concern for the well-being of another, and a desire to relate with another person in a positive way (Chaskin & Rauner, 1995, Noddings, 1993). Chaskin and Rauner (1995) continued to describe caring as "an umbrella concept that encompasses and connects a wide range of discrete subjects, such as empathy, altruism, prosocial behavior, and efficacy" (p. 670).

Noddings (1992) suggested that as we show caring we demonstrate receptivity to the needs of others. Her description of a caring relation constitutes a connection or encounter with two human beings that she describes as "a carer and a recipient of care, or cared-for" (p. 15). She contended that individuals do not follow a prescription, but "caring is a way of being in a relation, not a specific set of behaviors" (Noddings, 1992, p. 17). Hult (1979) stated that the

most appropriate way for a teacher to show caring is through, pedagogical caring, or “the careful or care-filled manner or style by which a teacher operates” (p. 243).

The definitions of caring imply a relationship. With a relationship, the issue of reciprocity emerges. That is, the relationship between the carer and the cared-for is reciprocal or mutual. Noddings (1984) suggested that students learn how to care when they enter into a caring relation by reciprocating or responding to the teacher within the context of their relationship. The completion of the caring process involves contributions by both parties.

Students’ perceptions of the concept of caring in the context of the school allow teachers to understand this concept from their perspective. Bosworth and Ferreira (2001) examined middle school students’ definitions of caring teachers in two middle schools. The results from interviews and field observations yielded their concept of caring in relation to the themes teacher behaviors related to content and pedagogy, such as helping with work and encouragement, and teacher behaviors that implied a relationship between the student and teacher such as individuality, respect, and being a good listener. The researcher noted through their observations that the perceived caring behaviors of teachers were unidirectional from the teacher to the student, thus eliminating the idea of a reciprocal or mutual caring relationship.

The study by Bosworth and Ferreira (2001) represents the idea that the concept of caring takes on different dimensions according to the perceptions of the individuals describing it. Thus, perceptions of caring from multiple perspectives will allow for mutual understanding of the concept with the ultimate goal of clarifying caring thoughts and enhancing the caring relationship in the educational setting.

### *Caring in Education*

A number of researchers emphasized the importance of caring in education (Gilligan, 1988; Kohn, 1991; Noddings, 1984, 1992). The growing body of literature allows individuals to ascertain a greater understanding of the role the concept of caring plays in the educational setting.

Many teachers who enter the education field feel they followed a calling to teach. They are viewed as committed to caring for children. These teachers often see themselves as individuals with a strong concern for the welfare of others. One teacher interviewed by Nias (1989) illustrated his thoughts on caring for his students with emotion and love for the students with whom he interacts:

It is now the day after the end of the term and I am deeply depressed....It must be indescribable for those with classes consisting mainly of fourth years, who lose them all every year. It's amazing how much one comes to love a class in a year (p. 33).

While Nias (1989) noted that caring was normally described as a “deep concern of for the interests and welfare of the children” (p. 33), she also found that teachers articulated their concept of caring in relation to what they felt other teachers lacked in their attitude towards teaching. Teachers also find their caring relationships with students as a significant source of job satisfaction (Nias, 1989).

Caring was recommended as one of the essential qualities required for teacher-student relationships (Rogers & Webb, 1991; Nias, 1989). Rogers and Webb (1991) concluded after multiple interviews with students and teachers that caring is an essential component to effective teaching. Noddings (1992) contended that caring teachers 1) model caring behavior to their students, 2) engage students in dialogues that lead to mutual understanding and perspective taking, and 3) expect and encourage students to do their best they can in light of their abilities.

Teacher education programs have been asked to educate prospective teachers as caring professionals (Goldstein & Lake, 2000; Noddings, 1984). Goodlad, Soder, and Sirotnik (1990) argued that the development of caring ethics should be a major concern in teacher education. Novice teachers struggle with the balance between caring for students and control. Therefore, research on the concept of caring as it relates to preservice and novice teachers deals with the caring and control issues (McLaughlin, 1991, Weinstein, 1998). As with experienced teachers, preservice teachers bring strong feelings about the concept of caring with them into teacher education programs. Perry and Rog (1992) asked a sample of preservice and experienced teachers to describe what characteristics imply teacher effectiveness. The concept of caring was mentioned more often than any other variables. Goldstein and Lake (2000) categorized the concept of caring as reported by their sample of preservice teachers as oversimplistic, essentialist, and idealistic. Yet, these early perceptions remain an integral starting point for productive dialogue about caring and the teaching practice.

### *Perceived Caring*

A basic assumption when discussing the student-teacher relationship is that teacher behavior affects the behavior patterns of students. A teacher's facial expressions and posture are a few basic tenets of teacher behavior that supplies the student with an understanding of the

teacher's attitude towards them. Teven and McCroskey (1996) cite a description by Ramsey (1979) to illustrate this idea: "in addition to the lecture...by the way she moves, stands, gestures, uses eye contact and vocal inflection, a teacher also tells her class about herself, how she feels toward the subject matter and the very act of lecturing, and how she feels about them" (p.1). This illustrates the notion that teacher behavior, verbal or non-verbal, influences how students perceive their teachers feel about them.

Based on the premise that teacher behaviors affect students' behavior patterns, and the presumption that students will care more about a class if they perceive their teacher as caring, McCroskey (1992) initiated the concept of *perceived caring*. He notes the importance of caring as a teacher attribute, yet describes caring challenges such as large class size as a potential threat to demonstrate caring behaviors. He stresses the importance of communicating in a manner that students will perceive the teacher cares for them even if that is not really the case. The perception of caring is a critical element as opposed to the actual caring acts.

McCroskey (1992) based his beliefs on Aristotle's three components of ethos: intelligence, good will, and character; the belief that there is intention toward the receiver; and eventually the components of competence and trustworthiness. McCroskey (1992) added three concepts that which he believed would lead students to perceive their teacher as caring: empathy, understanding, and responsiveness. Empathy is the ability to see a situation from the vantage point of another person and feel how they feel about it. He feels that teachers who understand and respect a student's point of view are perceived by their students as caring. Understanding is the ability to comprehend another person's ideas, feelings, and needs. When a teacher recognizes that a personal or content-related problem exists, and is observed doing so by their students, then they are more likely to be perceived as caring. And, responsiveness was described as "when teachers react to student needs or problems quickly, when the teacher is attentive to the student, when the teacher listens to what the student says" (McCroskey, 1992, p. 111). Finally, he believed that a teacher who recognizes and responds to the needs of a class or individual is perceived as being responsive and therefore caring about them.

In a study by Teven and McCroskey (1996), the results of survey research conducted on 235 university students in a communications class found that student perceptions of caring on the part of their teachers was significantly related to students' evaluation of their teachers, student affective learning, and their perceptions of their cognitive learning. Students who perceived their

teachers as caring also evaluated them more favorably. Students who perceived their teachers as caring also evaluated the course content more positively. Finally, students who perceived their teachers as caring reported they learned more in the course. Teven (2000) sought to identify specific teacher behaviors that communicated caring to students and misbehaviors that disrupted the students' perceptions of caring. The researchers, by surveying 249 students enrolled in a communications class, reported that students' perceptions of their teacher's caring was positively related to the teacher's immediacy, responsiveness, and assertiveness and negatively related to teacher aggressiveness. While these studies represent the perceptions of university students, further investigations of students at various school levels will add greater depth to the understanding of student perceptions of the caring behaviors teachers communicate in their classrooms.

### *Caring as a Motivational Factor*

Studies conducted in educational settings indicate that student's perception of teacher care is related to student motivation (Wentzel, 1997, Wentzel & Asher, 1995) and the interpersonal relationship between the teacher and student can positively influence student motivation (Skinner & Belmont, 1993). Noddings (1992) and Goodenow (1993) have suggested that the teacher-student relationship is a context in which students come to value academic tasks (Noddings, 1992, Goodenow, 1993). Skinner and Belmont (1993) identified motivated students as those who "stay in school longer, learn more, feel better about themselves, and continue their education after high school" (p. 571). Brophy (1986) described a motivated student as containing aspects of enthusiasm, curiosity, interest, and involvement.

In a longitudinal study of 1301 students, Midgley, Feldlaufer, and Eccles (1989) reported that the perceived quality of the student-teacher relationship predicted the middle school students' belief in the intrinsic value of math. Wentzel and Asher (1995) suggested that when students perceive that their teachers like them, there is a greater chance that they will adopt school-related values. The idea of perceived support from teachers was an integral determinant of motivation and academic achievement of a number of young adolescents. (Goodenow, 1993, Wentzel & Asher 1995). In addition, Wentzel & Asher (1995) determined that patterns of underachievement and behavioral difficulties decreased and the quality of their participation and academic work improved when teachers initiated a caring relationship with at-risk elementary

students. Brophy (1986) identified a motivated student according to the features of enthusiasm, interest, involvement, and curiosity.

Wentzel (1997) examined young adolescents' perceptions of pedagogical caring in relation to their motivation to achieve positive social and academic outcomes in the middle school setting in a longitudinal sample of 248 students from 6<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> grade. They described caring teachers as those who demonstrated democratic interaction styles, developing expectations for student behavior in light of individual differences, modeling a caring attitude toward their own work, and providing constructive feedback. Wentzel (1997) also determined that perceived caring from teachers was a significant, positive influence on students' pursuits of prosocial and social responsibility goals, to students' academic effort, and internal control beliefs.

Research in the context of physical education has produced similar results. Teachers and teaching behaviors were cited as important factors related to students' feelings and whether students possessed a positive or negative attitude towards participation in physical education class (Luke & Sinclair, 1991, Carlson, 1995, Portman, 1995). In addition, Carlson (1995) cited teacher behavior as a factor contributing to negative feelings toward physical education by students experiencing alienation.

### *Caring and the Field of Physical Education*

According to Larson (204), physical education provides inherent opportunities for caring behaviors. Physical education teachers typically spend a very large portion of class time interacting with their students. The qualities of these interactions can determine the perceptions students have of their teachers and participation in physical education. Very little research exists on caring in the physical education setting.

Physical educators have been called upon to meet the diverse needs of their students with caring and compassion (Irwin, Symons, & Kerr, 2003). Gubacs (1997) explored physical education teachers' and students' concept of caring in the teaching and learning process. Both teachers and students defined caring as loving, respecting, and being nice to others. While investigating the role caring played in the teaching of veteran physical educators, Larson (1999) found her subjects frequently exhibited caring behaviors related to fostering student growth. Other commonalities included structuring, evaluating, or modifying students' behavior, listening, empathizing/sympathizing, and helping. In addition, each teacher's caring behaviors were

influenced by their relationships with their students and their knowledge of their individual caring needs (Larson, 1999).

Larson (2004) also studied students' perceptions of caring teaching in physical education. Eleven clusters of themes related to caring teaching behavior emerged from her survey of 398 elementary and secondary students including:

- 1- Showed me how to do a skill,
- 2- honored my request to choose an activity,
- 3- gave me a compliment,
- 4- confronted my behavior,
- 5- inquired about my health,
- 6- attended to me when I was injured,
- 7- Persuaded me to engage in an activity,
- 8- Allowed me to re-do my test,
- 9- Motivated me,
- 10- Played/participated with me during class, and
- 11- Showed concern for my future health (A-70)

Sub-categories for these eleven clusters were determined to be: 1) recognizes me, 2) helps me learn, and 3) trust/respect me. Finally, Larson determined that the main descriptor of students' perceptions of caring teaching in physical education was the fact that the teacher paid attention to the student.

These findings confirm that physical educators have numerous opportunities to convey caring in their physical education teaching and students take note of and perceive caring behaviors to be an integral part of their physical education experience. Further investigations that utilize qualitative methodologies such as interviews and observations might provide more salient insights into these perceptions.

Because students seek positive relationships with their teachers and want to know that teachers care about them, Rink (2002) offered a number of ideas to physical education teachers that communicates to the students that they care for them. These included: 1) Learning and using students names, 2) Enthusiasm and a positive attitude, 3) Projecting a caring attitude toward each student, 4) Reinforcing and modeling prosocial behaviors, 5) Recognizing destructive behaviors, 6) Avoiding becoming personally threatened by student misconduct, 7)

Treating all students equitably, 8) Being a good listener and observer of student responses, and 9) Charting one's life and setting goals for personal growth (Rink, 2002). These suggestions further illustrate the importance of caring in student-teacher relationship and the inherent opportunities for physical educators to convey a message to their students that says "I care."

### *Middle School Education*

A review of literature related to the education of middle school students indicates that certain professional characteristics, knowledge, and behaviors are necessary in order to effectively promote student cognitive, social, and emotional growth in the middle school setting. A realization of the developmentally appropriate programs and their impact on students and the importance the role of the teacher plays in the facilitation of cognitive, emotional, and social growth of students also is prevalent.

While the history and development of the middle school is well-documented by the works of William Alexander, Donald Eichorn, and Gordon Vars among others, more recent documents offer suggestions for developmentally appropriate middle schools. Lounsbury (1982) reinforced the importance of professional knowledge, training and practices that reflect the unique characteristics and needs of early adolescent learners. He recommended an organizational structure and curriculum that recognized the cognitive and psychosocial needs of middle school students. These needs were noted by Wiles and Bondi (1986) as follows: 1) the need to be safe and free of threat; 2) the need to be loved; 3) the need to be part of a group with identification and acceptance; 4) the need to be recognized; 5) the need to be independent (p. 31).

Lipsitz (1984) performed a nationwide search for the nation's best middle schools. She conducted case studies of the four identified schools (three grades 6-8 and one grades 5-8) over a seven day period. Three common themes emerged from the data that characterized the schools as outstanding middle schools. These include: 1) a willingness to adapt school practices to meet the physical, social, cognitive, and emotional development of the students; 2) student social and emotional development received equal emphasis as cognitive development; and 3) they seriously applied their knowledge of the development of young adolescents to each aspect of their school. Each school effectively integrated these three themes in their own unique ways to promote the overall student development.

Continued attention toward developmentally appropriate middle schools produced a document by the National Middle School Association (1992, 1995) entitled *This We Believe*.

They state that developmentally appropriate middle schools are characterized by: 1) educators committed to young adolescents; 2) a shared vision; 3) high expectations for all; 4) an adult advocate for all; 5) family and community partnerships; and 6) a positive school climate (p. 11). In addition, they reported that as a result of the aforementioned characteristics, developmentally responsive middle level schools provide the following: 1) curriculum that is challenging, integrative, and exploratory; 2) varied teaching and learning approaches; 3) assessment and evaluation that promote learning; 4) flexible organizational structures; 5) programs and policies that foster health, wellness, and safety; and 6) comprehensive guidance and support services (p. 11).

Finally, the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development (CCAD) published a report entitled *Turning Points: Preparing American Youth for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (1989). This document envisioned a 15 year-old who was considered “well-served” during the middle school years. As a result, the 15 year old would embody five characteristics of an effective human being: 1) an intellectually reflective person; 2) a person enroute to a lifetime of meaningful work; 3) a good citizen; 4) a caring and ethical individual; and 5) a healthy person (p. 15).

The CCAD published an updated version of this document entitled *Turning Points 2000: Educating Adolescents in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. This document relies on the premise of the original report, and the recommendations are a result of newfound knowledge over the course of the decade since the publication of the original report. This report now calls for middle schools to:

- 1- Teach a curriculum that is grounded in rigorous, public academic standard for what students should know and be able to do, relevant to the concerns of adolescents and how students learn best.
- 2- Use instructional methods designed to prepare all students to achieve higher standards and become lifelong learners.
- 3- Staff middle grade schools with teachers who are experts at teaching young adolescents, and engage teachers in ongoing, targeted professional development opportunities.
- 4- Organize relationships for learning that create a climate of intellectual development and a caring community of shared educational purpose.
- 5- Govern democratically, through direct or representative participation by all school staff members, the adults who know the students best.

- 6- Provide a safe and healthy school environment as part of improving academic performance and developing caring and ethical citizens.
- 7- Involve parents and communities in supporting student learning and healthy development (p. 23-24).

These documents, in addition to those previously published, seek to provide guidance to all of those invested in the total education of middle school students. These characteristics are not bound to one facet of the middle school experience, but to all aspects of the middle level education.

### *Quality Middle School Physical Education*

Physical education is an integral part of the total education of the child. Quality physical education programs play an integral role in increasing the physical competence, health-related wellness, self-esteem, and enjoyment of physical activity for all students with the hope of them becoming physically active for a lifetime. Notwithstanding the important aspect of physical development, physical education also contributes to emotional, social, and intellectual growth. Yet, these benefits can only be derived if physical education programs are well-planned and well-implemented.

Mohnsen (1997) noted that physical education has gained greater recognition as an essential element in the school curriculum. She recognized that a quality physical education program aligns itself with the characteristics that establish a quality middle school. This idea was concurred by the Middle and Secondary School Physical Education Council (MASSPEC) division of the National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE) in its document entitled “Appropriate Practices for Middle School Physical Education” (MAASPEC, 2001). They note that physical education is an integral part of a school community that focuses on the three major goals set forth by *Turning Points* (CCAD, 2000) that are: academic achievement, developmental responsiveness, and social equitability (MASSPEC, 2001, p.5).

In order to meet the developmental needs of students, NASPE (2001) outlines the attributes of a quality physical education program. They suggest that middle school students should participate in a total of 225 minutes of weekly physical education instructional periods, be taught by a qualified physical education specialist who provides a developmentally appropriate physical education program, and have access to adequate equipment and facilities. A quality curriculum would include:

- 1- Instruction in a variety of motor skills that are designed to enhance the physical, mental, social/emotional development of every child,
- 2- Fitness education and assessment to help children understand, improve and/or maintain their physical well-being,
- 3- Development of cognitive concepts about motor skill,
- 4- Opportunities to improve their emerging social and cooperative skills and gain a multicultural perspective, and
- 5- Involvement for all children in activities that provide maximum amounts of appropriate physical activity. (NASPE, 2001, p.7)

In addition, NASPE (1995) published *Moving into the Future: National Standards for Physical Education* in order to identify what a child should know and be able to do as a result of a quality physical education program and establish guidelines for teacher assessment. An outcome of this document is the definition that describes the physically educated person as: 1) Demonstrates competency in many movement forms and proficiency in a few movement forms, 2) Applies movement concepts and principles to the learning and development of motor skills, 3) Exhibits a physically active lifestyle, 4) Achieves and maintains a health-enhancing level of physical fitness, 5) Demonstrates responsible personal and social behavior in physical education settings, 6) Demonstrates understanding and respect for differences among people in physical activity settings, and 7) Understands that physical activity provides opportunities for respect among people in physical activity settings (NASPE, 1995, p.1). According to the *School Health Policies and Programs Study (SHPPS, 2000)*, 77.4% of middle schools follow national or state standards and guidelines.

Middle school physical education curriculums should provide students with opportunities to participate in a wide variety of activities derived from areas such as team and individual activities, gymnastics, rhythms and dance, outdoor challenge and pursuits, aquatics, and cooperative activities (MASSPEC, 2001, Mohnsen, 1997). The largest single content area taught in most physical education programs is the teaching and learning of sport-related games (Metzler, 2000). With this being said, the largest portion of most middle and high school physical education curriculums center around the traditional games content area. Game units are typically implemented with students having a brief time to practice isolated skills combined with an introduction and reinforcement of game rules culminating with an extended period of time to

play the game for the rest of the unit. The unfortunate outcome for most students who enter such a scenario lacking previous skills is a general lack of skill improvement (Metzler, 2000).

Metzler (2000) noted that most physical education students do not possess the combination of skills and tactical knowledge to carry out the game, leading to feelings of frustration.

The following is a sample of innovative curriculum and instructional physical education models utilized in the middle and secondary level that target specific physical, cognitive, and affective development.

### *Curricular Models of Physical Education*

#### *Tactical Games Model*

The Tactical Games model is based on a sequence of developmentally appropriate game and game-like learning activities whose main focus is on tactical problems for students to solve (Griffin, Mitchell, & Oslin, 1997). The teacher begins by determining the most important tactics needed to play that particular sport or game. For instance, important tactics determined for a middle school basketball unit might involve: moving the ball on offense, defensive guarding, shot selection, off-the-ball movements, and fast breaks (Griffin, Mitchell, & Oslin, 1997). Teachers then design a series of learning activities within each tactical area, the first of which involves student participation in simulations of simple to more complex game situations that are representative of the full game. After the teacher assesses student performance and tactical knowledge, they decide if students either remain in lead up, simulated, or game activities or practice skills in drill formats (Griffin, Mitchell, & Oslin, 1997).

This model seeks to motivate participants by capitalizing on their interest and excitement towards games, allow students to become better players from an increased understanding of the game with less reliance on teacher intervention, and have students transfer their knowledge from one game situation to the next (Griffin, Mitchell, & Oslin, 1997). While the affective domain in this model is addressed by the goal of improving game appreciation and student self-esteem, the priority is clearly given to the cognitive domain followed by the psychomotor domain.

#### *Sport Education Model*

The Sport Education model (Siedentop, 1994) focuses on teaching all aspects of sport culture by providing authentic, organized sport experiences for boys and girls in the context of

school physical education. The six key features of this model, which are derived from how sport is conducted in community and interschool contexts, include: seasons, affiliation, formal competition, culminating events, record keeping, and festivity. This model differs from institutionalized sport in that all students participate at all times, the competition is developmentally appropriate, and students take on diverse roles – those of scorekeeper, referee, coach, and player (Siedentop, 1994).

Carlson (1995) and Hastie (1996) cited the potential for this model to promote physical and social development. As a student takes on diverse roles, they experience responsibility, flexibility, and cooperation. Also, students remain on the same teams for the duration of a season. This extended affiliation promotes affective development, respect, and the potential for positive relationships. Finally, the students as teammates learn to cooperate together to learn strategies for successful team performance from one another.

#### *Cooperative Activities Model*

Cooperation is directly related to communication, cohesiveness, trust, and the development of positive social interaction skills (Orlick, 1977). Through cooperation, children can learn to share, to empathize with others, to be concerned with others' feelings, and to work to get along better. Orlick (1978, 1981) developed this model that is centered on the idea that America's major social problems can be solved by embracing a cooperative ethic. His model included a wide variety of cooperative games for the physical education setting. The participants must work together as a unit with each player feeling as a valuable, contributing member of that unit. Orlick (1981) revolved his model around several *freedoms* that help nurture cooperation, good feelings, and mutual support. These are the *freedom from competition*, *freedom to create*, *freedom from exclusion*, and *freedom to choose*. The idea that students work together towards a common end, instead of against each other, allows participants to feel accepted and totally involved. Such feelings of acceptance can lead to heightened levels of self-esteem and accomplishment (Orlick, 1981).

#### *Multiactivity Model*

The multiactivity model allows students to experience a wide variety of physical activities in units commonly lasting two to three weeks in duration (Metzler, 2000). The main goals for this model include the exposure to many different activities and general active

participation (Hellison & Templin, 1991; Metzler, 2000). Proponents of this model argue that its diverse curriculum reduces student and teacher boredom and its flexibility allows for the addition or subtraction of units without an affect on the overall program. Critics of this model believe that the short unit time fails to allow for much student improvement, activities lack progression from year to year, and units are dominated with competition and play rather than skill development opportunities (Hellison & Templin, 1991).

### *Fitness and Technology in Physical Education*

The focus on fitness in physical education is hardly a new approach. Support for such a focus is the product of decreased fitness levels in children and an increase in poor health habits as a result of sedentary lifestyles that lead to heightened levels of childhood obesity and other risk factors associated with cardiovascular disease. Approaches to sustaining children's interest in physically active lifestyles vary from curricular models focusing on lifetime fitness activities to the integration of technology as a motivator and learning tool. McCracken (2001) developed a lifetime fitness approach that seeks to offer diverse activities that students will more likely sustain for a lifetime. These activities include participation in local recreational opportunities such as hiking, fishing, mountain biking, and rafting. Besides the focus on fitness, this model seeks to renew students' interest in physical education that may have been lost as a result of traditional approaches.

The integration of technology into the physical education classroom can assist students to become more aware of their fitness levels, serve as a motivational tool, and increase technology skills. Specifically, heart rate monitors help students learn more about the scientific side of physical fitness (Mohnsen, 1997). Such devices teach students how to reach and maintain a pulse in the target heart rate monitoring zone. Accompanying software allows teachers and students to download personal fitness-related information from the heart rate monitor to the computer for analysis. Students can then chart their fitness levels, understand which activities increase heart rates, and set fitness-related goals for themselves. The Physical Education for Progress (PEP) Grant program, initiated in the United States Congress, supports the purchase of technology-related equipment that aims to increase the overall fitness levels of children in the public schools.

The models of physical education presented in this section vary according to focus. Some, such as the *Tactical Games* model, concentrate mostly on cognitive understanding of

physical skills. Other models like Siedentop's (1994) *Sport Education* model, seek to equally combine facets of cognitive, psychomotor, and affective learning. Finally, Orlick's (1977, 1981) Cooperative Games model, emphasizes the affective domain by focusing on group cooperation in the physical education medium as a central tenet of student growth and development.

### Development of the Early Adolescent

In an attempt to understand adolescent students' perceptions of their physical education teachers in relationship to the concept of caring, we must first understand certain aspects of adolescent development. Students' perceptions of their teachers are influenced by their own cognitive, social, and emotional development.

#### *Cognitive Development*

Jean Piaget (1969) suggested that children actively construct their own world. Children add new ideas and facts to an existing store of information. Children use schemas to actively construct their world (Piaget & Inhelder, 1969, 2001). Piaget focused on how children organize and make sense of their world out of current experiences. For example, we separate important ideas from less important ideas, or we connect one idea to another (Santrock, 2000).

Piaget believed that all individuals pass through four stages of cognitive development in understanding the world. These four stages are called sensorimotor, preoperational, concrete operational and formal operational. He believed that all people passed through the same four stages in exactly the same order. According to Piaget and Inhelder (1969, 2000), it is the different way of understanding the world that makes one stage more advanced than another; knowing more information does not advance a child's thinking. The stages are associated with an age range as noted by Table 2.1. It is important to note that these are not labels for all children of a certain age; children develop differently.

Table 2.1

*Piaget's Stages of Cognitive Development*

| <b>Stage</b>         | <b>Approximate Age</b> | <b>Characteristics</b>  |
|----------------------|------------------------|---|
| Sensorimotor         | 0-2 years              | <p>Begins to make use of imitation, memory, and thought.</p> <p>Begins to recognize that objects do not cease to exist when hidden.</p> <p>Moves from reflex actions to goal-directed activity.</p>                 |
| Preoperational       | 2-7 years              | <p>Gradually develops use of language and ability to think in symbolic form</p> <p>Able to think operations through in logically and in one direction.</p> <p>Difficulty seeing another person's point of view.</p> |
| Concrete operational | 7-12 years             | <p>Able to solve concrete (hands-on) problems in logical fashion.</p> <p>Understands laws of conservation and is able to classify and seriate.</p> <p>Understands reversibility.</p>                                |
| Formal Operational   | 12-adult               | <p>Able to solve abstract problems in logical fashion.</p> <p>Becomes more scientific in thinking.</p> <p>Develops concerns about social issues, Identity</p>   |

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Source: Santrock, J. (1990). *Children* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Austin, TX: Wm. C. Brown.

The cognitive development of the early adolescent is best characterized within the concrete operational and formal operational stages.

### *Concrete Operational Stage*

Children in later elementary and early middle school years enter into a stage of concrete operations, a stage of “hands-on” thinking. The basic characteristics of this stage are the recognition of the logical stability of the physical world, the realization that elements can be changed or transformed and still conserve many of their original characteristics, and the understanding that these changes can be reversed (Santrock, 2001).

An important operation mastered during the concrete operational stage is classification. This is the ability to focus on a single characteristic of objects in a set and group them according to that characteristic. For instance, when a child at this level is given ten objects of assorted shapes and colors, they can select the ones that are round and place them into a group. Conservation is the principle that the amount or number of something remains the same even if the arrangement or appearance is changed, as long as nothing is added or nothing is taken away (Lefton, 1994). An example of this process is to take two equal sized balls of clay of different color and set them next to each other. One ball is left in tact while the second ball is flattened next to it. The concrete thinker is able to recognize that both pieces of clay are still of equal size.

The concrete operational child has developed a very logical system of thinking with the ability to handle tasks that involve classification and conservation. Children at this stage of development are unable to reason about abstract problems that involve the coordination of many factors at once. Students may struggle with defining a concept such as caring. They may have an idea of how to define such a concept but articulation of it may prove difficult. They may limit their definitions to a narrowly defined scope. Students in the final stage of Piaget’s theory of cognitive development called the formal operational stage may provide a more salient description and less narrowly defined concept of caring.

### *Formal Operational Stage*

In the formal operational stage, which generally appears in the middle and high school years, the adolescent moves beyond the world of actual, concrete experiences and thinks in abstract and more logical terms. The focus of thinking shifts from *what is* to what *might be*. Situations do not have to be experienced to be imagined (Piaget & Inhelder, 1969, 2001). As part of thinking abstractly at this stage, the adolescent conjures up images of ideal circumstances.

They may think about what the ideal parent or teacher is like and compares their parents and teachers to these images of this ideal standard.

### *Egocentrism*

Adolescence is also characterized by high levels of egocentrism – another characteristic of the formal operational stage of cognitive development (Steinberg, 1998). Santrock (2001) described adolescent egocentrism as “the heightened self-consciousness that is reflected in adolescents’ beliefs that others are as interested in them as they themselves are” (p. 56). At this stage, the adolescent becomes very focused on their own beliefs, although they do not deny that other people may have different perceptions and beliefs. They have the ability to reflect on other’s thinking, yet they assume that everyone else is as interested as they are in their thoughts, feelings, and behavior. Bosworth (1995), after soliciting adolescents’ perceptions of caring, states that “one might expect that adolescents would be so self-absorbed that altruism and caring would be totally out of character for any of them” (p. 687). They may often develop a sense that everyone is watching. Elkind (1981) called this the *imaginary audience*. For example, a child may feel that everyone has noticed that they wore the same outfit twice in one week or that everyone is staring at them when completing a fitness test in physical education class.

### *Psychosocial Theory of Development*

In addition to an individual’s cognitive development, psychological and social development can affect a students’ concept of caring and their perceptions of those who care about them. Psychologist Erik Erikson has contributed greatly to our understanding of adolescent development – a period of transition from childhood to adulthood.

In Erikson’s (1968) theory, individuals pass through eight psychosocial stages of development as they progress through the human life span (see Table 2.2). Individuals will pass through each stage in sequence, but Erikson (1968) notes that it is not necessarily at the same time in life. Each of these stages presents the individual with a developmental task that supplies a crisis that must be faced. A crisis is not “an impending sense of catastrophe”, but rather a “necessary turning point, a crucial moment when development must have one way or another, marshalling sources of growth, recovery, and further differentiation.” (Erikson, 1968, p.6). Each crisis involves a conflict between a positive alternative and a potentially unhealthy alternative. It

is how the individual resolves this crisis that affects a person's self-image and view of society (Erikson, 1963, 1968).

Table 2.2

*Erikson's Eight Stages of Psychosocial Development*

| Event Stages                      | Approximate Age       | Important                                  |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------|--|
| 1. Basic trust vs. basic mistrust | Birth to 12-18 months | Feeding                                    |
| 2. Autonomy vs. shame/doubt       | 18 months to 3 years  | Toilet training                            |
| 3. Initiative vs. guilt           | 3 to 6 years          | Independence                               |
| 4. Industry vs. inferiority       | 6 to 12 years         | School                                     |
| 5. Identity vs. role confusion    | Adolescence           | Peer relationships                         |
| 6. Intimacy vs. isolation         | Young adulthood       | Love relationships                         |
| 7. Generativity vs. stagnation    | Middle adulthood      | Parenting/mentoring                        |
| 8. Ego integrity vs. despair      | Late adulthood        | Reflection on and acceptance of one's life |

Source: Lefton, L.A. (2000). *Psychology* (7<sup>th</sup> ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

*Industry Versus Inferiority*

Early adolescents enter their middle school years most often during Erikson's fourth stage of psychosocial development – *industry versus inferiority*. At this time, the child must deal with demands to learn new skills or risk a sense of inferiority, failure, and incompetence (Lefton, 2000) and unproductiveness (Santrock, 2001). School and community offer a new set of challenges that must be balanced with challenges met at home. The ability to navigate between these multiple worlds and cope with academics, group activities, and interactions with peers will lead to a growing sense of competence. Achievement becomes a more salient part of the child's

life during this stage (Lefton, 2000). If parents and teachers make work and achievement an exciting and rewarding effort, the child develops a sense of industry. If not, the child develops a sense of inferiority.

### *Identity Versus Role Confusion*

The main issue for adolescents is the development of an identity. Adolescents try to find out who they are, what they are all about, and where they plan to go in life. The conflict that arises during this, the fifth stage of development, is *identity versus role confusion*.

Adolescents are confronted with numerous roles at this point in life and must be able to explore a variety of roles in order to achieve a healthy identity. Identity achievement occurs if the adolescent is allowed to explore these various roles and arrive at a positive path to follow (Marcia, 1980). However, identity confusion develops if parents push certain identities or if the adolescent is unable to explore many roles (Erikson, 1968).

In addition to identity achievement, Marcia (1980) describes three other alternatives for adolescents as they confront their identity choices. These are *identity foreclosure, identity diffusion, and moratorium*. Adolescents who experience identity foreclosure do not experiment with different identities. They usually commit themselves to the values, goals, and lifestyles of others, most notably that of their parents. When adolescents cannot reach conclusions of who they are or what they want to do with their lives, they experience *identity diffusion*. The term *moratorium* describes an individual who is in an identity crisis, which means they are struggling with long term commitment often by delaying commitment to personal and professional choices.

The changes that occur to individuals as they experiences stages of cognitive, social, and emotional development affect students' perceptions of their teachers. Adolescence is often characterized by an increase in conflict and heightened levels of egocentrism as children struggle with their new roles. Each of these developmental changes affects an adolescent's concept of caring and their perceptions of those who care about them.

### Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Abraham Maslow (1970) proposed his *Hierarchy of Needs* to predict how human beings will satisfy their needs. It is hierarchical in the sense lower level needs (deficiency needs) must be at least partially satisfied before a person will try to satisfy higher level needs (being or growth needs) (see Figure 2.1).

The following needs are listed as deficiency needs: physiological, safety, belongingness/love, and esteem. Physiological needs describe the basic human needs to sustain life including food, clothing, and shelter. Until these needs are met, there is little motivation to move to the next level. When these needs are met, the motivation for meeting them decreases. Once physiological needs are met, then safety needs become more predominant. These needs are the need to be free of physical danger and deprivation of basic physiological needs, or a need for self-preservation. If a person's safety or security is in peril, there is little concern for other needs. Once physiological and safety needs are met, then social needs – belongingness and love – will emerge as dominant needs.

Humans are social beings, and thus have a need to feel accepted by others. Maslow (1970) describes the ordinary way in which this need identification shows itself is in terms of “taking on responsibility, of care, of concern for another person” (p. 193). When these social needs become dominant then a person will strive to establish meaningful relations with others. As a person feels love and belongingness, they seek to become more than just a member of a group. They seek to become useful within that group. When this need is satisfied, feelings of self-confidence are produced.

Once the four lower-level needs are satisfied, an individual decreases their motivation to continually fulfill them. They may now begin to work on higher-level needs – the growth needs of knowledge, aesthetics, and self-actualization. Maslow (1970) believed that the main focus of self-actualization is a person's need to maximize their potential. The focus is not on what a person achieves but more on how secure the individual feels about himself. A person's motivation does not cease, but instead it seeks further fulfillment. Higher-level needs, in contrast to deficiency needs, can never be completely filled, thus motivation to achieve these needs is continuous (Maslow, 1970).

Maslow's theory has many implications for the school setting. For example, children who come to school hungry or in fear for their safety may show little interest in learning. The concept of caring is related to the needs of belongingness and love. In the context of the classroom, a student who feels cared for within the school setting will have these social needs met and will work to become an active and motivated participant in school. Students who do not feel cared for will struggle with a sense of uselessness and fail to strive for feelings of esteem.

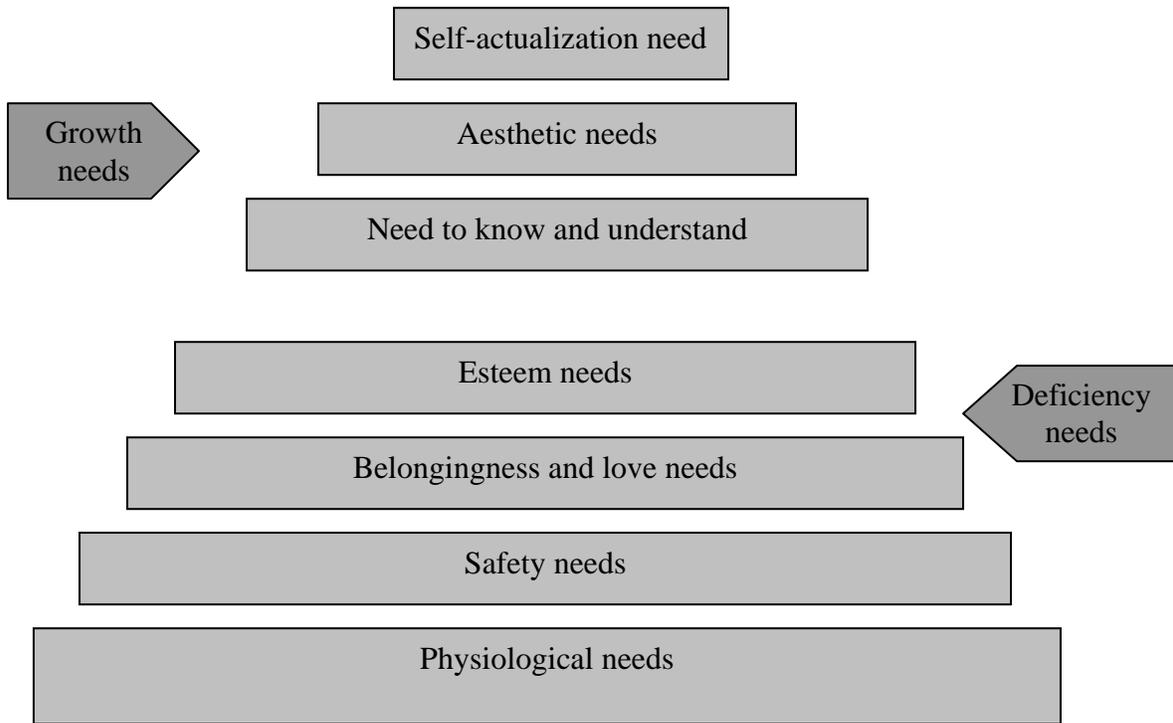


Figure 2.1 Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Source: Lefton, L. A. (2000). *Psychology* (7<sup>th</sup> ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

### Attribution Theory

Jack is a good athlete and usually performs near the top of his class in physical education. He recently received a “C” on his mid-term grade because he did not perform well on several components of the fitness test – a large part of the quarterly grade. The mark is inconsistent with his self-image and causes him discomfort. To resolve his discomfort, Jack might resolve to work harder in order to never receive such a grade again. Conversely, he might attempt to rationalize his low grade by saying the following: “I was not feeling well. It was too cold and wet outside for the test. The teacher did not let us know in advance that we were fitness testing.” These excuses help Jack account for this one-time occurrence. However, suppose he receives several poor grades in a row. Now, he may state that he does not like physical education and fitness testing in general, or the teacher shows favoritism towards others in class by letting them modify their fitness tests.

Jack struggles to find a reason for his poor performance that does not require him to change his perception of himself as a good student in physical education. He attributes his poor

performance to the subject matter, to his teacher, or to other students. These are external factors over which he has no control. He may also consider his poor performance his own fault, thus deciding it must be a short-term lapse caused by a momentary lack of motivation or attention given to this particular unit of instruction in physical education.

Attribution theory (Heider, 1958, Weiner, 1979, 1985) seeks to understand explanations and excuses for success or failure as in the aforementioned story and in other educational settings (Graham, 1990, 1991). Weiner (1985, 1994, 2000) suggested that the forms of attributions, or causes one chooses to explain their success or failure, is a process that can influence performance, expectations, and persistence. The three dimensions under which an attribution can be categorized according to Weiner (1985) include:

- 1- Locus of control: location of the cause is internal or external to the individual,
- 2- Stability: whether the cause stays the same or changes, and
- 3- Controllability or responsibility: whether one can control the cause.

According to Weiner (1985), every cause for success or failure can be categorized on these three dimensions. Typically, students attribute success and failure in achievement situations to ability, effort, luck, or task difficulty (Weiner, 1985, Graham & Weiner, 1996). For example, if a student attributes his success or failure to luck, then luck is external (locus), unstable (stability), and uncontrollable (controllability). Table 2.3 describes Weiner's (1992) examples of common attributions to success and failure related to test taking.

Weiner (1979) believes that the three dimensions have important implications for motivation. A student with an internal locus of control is one who believes that success or failure is because of his or her own efforts or abilities. A student with an external locus of control has a tendency to believe that success or failure is caused by luck, task difficulty, or other people's actions. Effort can be altered, whilst ability is relatively stable. Likewise, task difficulty is relatively stable, and luck is unstable and unpredictable.

Table 2.3

*Weiner's Attributions in Test Taking*

| <b>Dimension Classification</b>  | <b>Reason for Failure</b>              |
|----------------------------------|--|
| Internal-stable-uncontrollable   | Low aptitude                           |
| Internal-stable-controllable     | Never studies                          |
| Internal-unstable-controllable   | Sick the day of the test               |
| Internal-unstable-uncontrollable | Did not study for this particular test |
| External-stable-uncontrollable   | School has hard requirements           |
| External-stable-controllable     | Instructor is biased                   |
| External-unstable-uncontrollable | Bad luck                               |
| External-unstable-controllable   | Friends failed to help                 |

Source: Weiner, B. (1992). *Human Motivation: Metaphors, theories, and research* (p. 253). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Table 2.4

*Weiner's Attributions for Success and Failure*

| <b>Attribution</b> | <b>Stability</b>       |                        |
|--------------------|------------------------|------------------------|
|                    | <b>Stable</b>          | <b>Unstable</b>        |
| <i>Internal</i>    | <i>Ability</i>         | <i>Effort</i>          |
| Success:           | "I am smart."          | "I tried hard."        |
| Failure:           | "I am stupid."         | "I didn't really try." |
| <i>External</i>    | <i>Task Difficulty</i> | <i>Luck</i>            |
| Success:           | "It was easy."         | "I lucked out."        |
| Failure:           | "It was too hard."     | "I had bad luck."      |

Source: Weiner, B. (1979). A theory of motivation for some classroom experiences. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 71, 3-25.

### *Dimensions of Attribution Theory*

The internal/external locus of control is closely related to feelings of self-esteem (Weiner, 1980). If success or failure is attributed to internal factors such as ability or effort, success will lead to feelings of pride, competence, and increased motivation. Students who attribute failure to internal causes are likely to experience feelings of low-self esteem and helplessness.

The dimension of stability is related to a student's expectations about the future. Students who attribute their failure to stable factors such as task or subject matter difficulty will expect to continue to fail in that subject in the future. If they attribute an outcome to unstable factors such as luck or mood, then students may hope for a better outcome in the future (Graham, 1990).

The third dimension, controllability or responsibility, is related to emotions such as anger, pity, gratitude, or shame (Graham, 1990, Weiner, 1994). A student may feel guilt if they feel responsible for their failures, while they may feel proud for successes for which they feel responsible. When a student fails at a task they cannot control can lead to feelings of shame and anger towards the person in control – most often the teacher in the school setting (Graham, 1996). Students who succeed at uncontrollable tasks often end up feeling grateful or lucky.

### Summary and Implications for Research Study

Since the concept of caring can be viewed as a motivating factor in the context of the educational setting, further investigations are warranted to understand the students' perceptions of caring behaviors exhibited by their physical education teachers and whether or not these perceptions play a role in their perceptions of and participation in physical education class.

The review of literature served as a frame of reference for understanding the concept of caring and how this concept relates to the context of education, teaching, and physical education. Because the intention of this study focuses specifically on the perceptions of middle school students, literature that pertains to quality middle school education, developmentally appropriate middle school physical education, and cognitive and psychosocial developmental characteristics of early adolescents was reviewed to provide further framework. Finally, attribution theory was reviewed in order to focus on the concept of caring as a teacher attribute that influences a student's perceptions of their physical education teachers and their participation in the physical education setting.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **METHODOLOGY**

The purpose of the study is to investigate students' perceptions of caring behaviors they feel are exhibited by their physical education teachers. The study will address the following research questions: 1) How do students describe the concept of caring as it relates to the school setting? 2) What caring behaviors do students perceive their physical education teachers demonstrate toward them? 3) What factors related to physical education influence these perceptions? 4) Do students describe their perceptions of caring as influencing their participation in physical education? A secondary research question that may emerge from the data states: Does student skill level influence their perceptions of physical education teachers' caring?

These questions were investigated through a qualitative research design that included semi-structured interviews and field observations. A qualitative research design was suited to meet the objectives of this research study because qualitative research, according to LeCompte and Preissle (1993), is "preeminently concerned with observations and recording of real world phenomena" (p.310).

The following section includes a timeline of the research process, a profile of the researcher, the research setting, data collection methods, and procedures for data analysis. In addition, a pilot study was conducted to ensure that data collection procedures were adequate in relation to the research questions. This allowed the researcher to provide an opportunity to collect and analyze data prior to the main research study.

#### *Timeline of the Research Process*

- Twelve participants were involved in the study
- Identification of participants and initial field observations took place over a two-week period
- Each participant was interviewed following the interview protocol
- Each semi-structured interview lasted approximately forty-five minutes
- Three to five semi-structured interviews were conducted over a three-week period
- Second field observations were conducted over a four-week period

- Member checks or follow up interviews took place over a two-week period as necessary
- Several weeks were allotted for the review and interpretation of the data

### *The Researcher*

Qualitative research is described by Rossman & Rallis (2003) as “fundamentally interpretive” (p.11). The researcher attempts to make sense what he has learned by interpreting the world in which he has entered. The researcher is often referred to as the instrument of study in qualitative research. Therefore, the identification of personal qualities that might influence the research process must be examined. The following description of the researcher’s history that relates directly and indirectly to the concepts of this study was provided.

#### *Background of the Researcher*

It is important to report the background experiences that the researcher brings to their research process (Merriam, 1998, Peshkin, 1993). Considering that the focus of this study was the students’ perceptions of physical education teachers’ caring, my past experiences as a teacher, physical educator, coach, and sports administrator were crucial in forming my interpretation of the data. A description of my experiences related to the fields of education and, particularly, physical education follows.

Before entering Virginia Tech University as a Ph.D. student in Curriculum and Instruction, I worked in a variety of capacities related to education, youth sports, and physical education in particular. Most notably, I worked for twelve years for the European Council of International Schools (ECIS) in the field of international education as a physical education specialist, coach, activities coordinator, and sports administrator. I lived and worked in the countries of the United Kingdom, Tanzania, Hungary, and Venezuela.

As a physical education teacher, I encountered many of the same difficulties with balancing classroom management with the teaching of physical skills as do most novice teachers. With either large class sizes or inadequate equipment and space, I was well-organized and used a directive approach in my teaching. In doing so, I clearly communicated my student expectations and requested that they follow them. I began to grow in flexibility as I grew in experience, ultimately giving my students more responsibility for their learning.

I utilized several approaches to teaching physical education skills that I studied over the course of my career. While I chose not to follow just one model of physical education, I based a large portion of my teaching on the skill themes approach (Graham, Holt/Hale, & Parker, 2005) about midway into my teaching career. Skill themes are “fundamental movements that are later modified into the more specialized patterns on which activities of increasing complexity are built” (p.14). In essence, once basic skills are learned, they can be combined with other skills and confidently applied in a variety of more complex situations that include playing a sport, performing a dance, or participating in gymnastics. I found this approach to be an effective model for teaching young children physical education mainly because it takes into account each child’s abilities in the planning and teaching process.

As I grew in teaching experience, I found my students to be enthusiastic learners. I desired to care about them greatly. Early in my career, my notion of caring was limited to the theme of interpersonal relationships. I felt I could show I cared for my students by encouraging them in class with positive feedback, offering assistance to struggling students, and showing concern for my students outside of the physical education setting. I held myself to this narrowly-defined concept of caring until I recognized the link between caring and quality teaching as my career progressed. The concept of caring does not need to be limited to overt interactions with students. Spending time developing quality lessons and implementing them in an emotionally safe environment further defines this concept for myself. I believed in this broader concept of caring, yet I was unsure if others, particularly teachers, both novice and experienced, and students, held the same beliefs. Therefore, my next logical step in the investigative process is to solicit the perceptions of students regarding caring teachers in physical education. Their voices will add an important element to the current body of knowledge on the concept of caring.

### *Reflexivity*

The term reflexivity is used in a methodological sense in reference to “the process of critical self-reflection of one’s biases, theoretical dispositions, preferences, and so forth” (Schwandt, 2001, p.224). My reflexivity as a researcher was disclosed to build on the aforementioned description of my background. Since qualitative methodologies were sole means of gathering data, the researcher was the instrument in conducting interviews, field observations, and data analysis. According to Schwandt (2001), qualitative researchers are encouraged to record and explore any evolving dispositions that may arise in the form of personal notes in a

field journal. Thus, as way to monitor myself, I wrote brief reflective notes at the conclusion of each form of data collection. These notes were included in my field journal and described my interactions with the research participants and my initial reactions to their responses and observations.

### *Pilot Study*

Prior to any contact with participants in the research process, the researcher received approval to conduct this study by the Institutional Review Board (#04-132) of the attending university. The pilot study sought to test the interview protocol as an instrument suitable for meeting the research objectives of the study.

One female grade seven student and one male eighth grade student were randomly chosen for the interview process. Each student was a participant in daily physical education and had attended the school for at least one full school year. One interviewee was considered an average physical education student about skill ability while the other interviewee was considered to be above average as evidenced by grades, personal assessment, and observation on behalf of the researcher.

The researcher asked each participant to “describe what someone who cares about you is like.” The interview shifted from general thoughts on caring to questions that asked the subjects to “describe what a caring teacher is like.” Eventually, the interview focused on their physical education teachers. The researcher then followed with questions such as to “describe how their physical education teacher cares about them.”

The responses from the pilot interviews determined that this method of data collection and procedures for data analysis provided descriptive responses to the research questions. The researcher edited the interview protocol to increase the clarity and appropriateness of each question asked of the subjects to produce a final interview protocol (see Appendix A).

Additionally, the pilot study yielded evidence that at least one additional method of data collection would prove beneficial for reaching the objectives of this study by providing additional descriptions related to the research questions. The researcher chose field observations as an additional method of data collection for this study.

### *Setting*

The setting for this research study is Wayside Middle School (pseudonym), a public middle school located in a rural area of Southwest Virginia. At the time of the study, 861 students were enrolled in grades 6-8. Of the total school population, approximately 85% of the students are Caucasian, 7% African-American, 6% Asian, and 2% Hispanic. Also, approximately 20% of the student body receives free or reduced-priced lunch.

The students participate in a general school physical education program. The school year begins and culminates with six weeks of physical education. After the first six weeks of physical education, classes alternate between physical education and health. For instance, a class that completes two weeks of physical education will then participate in one week of health class then return for two weeks of physical education and so on.

The health and physical education program is staffed by six full-time certified physical education teachers with an average of fourteen years of teaching experience. Three are male teachers (2 Caucasian and 1 African-American) and three female teachers (all Caucasian). Three of the six teachers obtained graduate degrees in their field of study. Besides their teaching duties, the physical education teachers serve the school in other capacities; one as athletic director, one as head of the health and physical education department, and four as coaches of school-sponsored sports.

The curriculum involves 2-week units on physical fitness, team and individual sports, and cooperative activities. In addition, students attend health classes that include, but are not limited to, the topics of nutrition, drugs and alcohol, family life, and personal safety.

Students “dress out” daily in a school physical education uniform. Separate locker room facilities are provided for males and females. Other physical education facilities include two large gyms, an aerobics/fitness room, outdoor tennis and basketball courts, a running track, and soccer and baseball/softball fields.

### *Participants*

A purposeful sample of students was investigated. This form of sampling enabled the selection of participants who best aid in achieving the research objective (Merriam, 1998). In addition, Patton (2002) described a purposeful sample as “the selecting of information-rich cases for in-depth study... from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to

the purpose of the research” (p. 46). For this study, participants were selected from one of four grade eight teams. To participate in the study, students attended Wayside Middle School for two previous years. In addition, they were a full participant in the general physical education program and did not receive any curricular, instructional, or physical modifications.

During a two-week observation period of each grade eight physical education class, students who fit these initial criteria were observed and listed by the researcher into one of three skill level categories: 1) higher-skilled, 2) average-skilled, 3) lower-skilled (Appendix D). This observation period lasted two weeks in order to increase the accuracy of skill level rating. In addition, the researcher gave a list of student names to their respective physical education teachers and asked them to rate their skill level without knowing the rating given by the researcher. The ratings were highly consistent with any disagreement being discussed and settled upon prior to the selection process.

An initial number of subjects (24; 8 high-skilled, 8 average-skilled, and 8 low-skilled) were identified. They were given a sheet of paper (Appendix E) that consisted of one open-ended question: 1) How do you define the word “caring?” The researcher reviewed each response. In doing so, the researcher read the responses and highlighted key descriptive words related to each question. Participants were chosen based on clarity and the ability to comprehend and articulate the topic of caring. After the review process, twelve participants (4 high-skilled, 4 average-skilled, and 4 low-skilled) were identified and asked to participate in the interview and observation process. Parent permission and student assent forms were distributed (see Appendices B and C) and signed before participation in the research study commenced. The additional subjects were utilized if any of the initial participants chose not to participate or dropped out of the study.

The researcher identified 2 boys and 2 girls for each skill level category. The twelve participants (6 boys, 6 girls) were 13-14 years of age. Each was a member of one of four eighth grade teams. Each team consisted of core teachers of math, science, language arts, and social studies. In addition, the participants attended a variety of non-core courses from the following: physical education, band, foreign language (Spanish, French, or Latin), family and consumer sciences, business, technology, and agricultural sciences. Students in grades seven and eight met each morning for their advisory period.

## Data Collection Methods

### *Student Interviews*

One semi-structured interview consisting of eighteen open-ended questions (Appendix A) developed by the researcher was utilized to achieve descriptive responses to the research questions. The interview protocol was composed of five sections as illustrated in Table 3.1: 1) the concept of caring, 2) caring as pertained to the general school environment, and 3) caring as pertained to the physical education setting, 4) caring and physical education teachers, and 5) caring and performance in physical education.

Table 3.1

### *Linking Research Questions to the Interview Protocol*

| <b>Interview Protocol Sections</b>                               | <b>Corresponding Interview Questions</b> |
|--|--|
| Section 1: The Concept of Caring                                 | Questions 2 and 3                        |
| Section 2: Caring as pertained to the general school environment | Questions 4, 5, and 6                    |
| Section 3: Caring as pertained to the physical education setting | Questions 7, 14, and 15                  |
| Section 4: Caring and physical education teachers                | Questions: 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, and 13      |
| Section 5: Caring and performance in physical education          | Questions 16, 17, 18, and 19             |

**Note:** Question 1 is a general question regarding the school setting with the intention of putting the participant at ease.

Semi-formal interviews were chosen as a main data collection method because they provided a greater potential to yield “thick, rich descriptions” (Merriam, 1998, p. 211) for readers to determine how closely their situations match that of the research. Furthermore, thick descriptions, according to Patton (2002), allow the reader to understand the phenomenon being studied and draw their own interpretations regarding meanings and significance. The use of a semi-formal interview guide was chosen because, according to Merriam (1998), it “allows the

researcher to respond the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the participant, and to new ideas of the topic” (p. 74)

Subjects experienced difficulties interpreting a small number of or parts of the research questions. Therefore, the researcher was on-hand to clarify any such occurrences. Finally, the interview process allowed the researcher to ask probing questions after a hearing a subject’s response to a particular question that allowed for more in-depth data (Seidman, 1998).

### *Field Observations*

The second method of data collection was field observations. This method was chosen in order to obtain a further description of the caring behaviors described by the participants during the interview process. The strategies for field observations were those set forth by Patton (2002). The first observation was conducted prior to the interview process. This initial observation sought to gain an initial understanding of the physical education environment, the teaching styles of each of the physical education staff members, and the participation levels of the students involved in the study. The role of the researcher consisted solely of that as an observer in this situation. The researcher found an agreed-upon place in the physical education setting that caused the least amount of distraction to the students and teacher, but also allowed an unobstructed view of the participants. The observations were documented in a fieldnote journal focusing on pure, thick descriptions of class occurrences (Merriam, 1998; Patton, 2002).

The second set of observations took place after the initial interview process and the examination of interview data. Stimulated-recall interviews were utilized for the purpose of clarifying actions, behaviors, and participant-teacher interactions that occurred during class. For instance, the researcher viewed during class time an act described by the participant in an interview as a caring behavior. The researcher then asked the participant to elaborate further on this particular incident in order to gain further insight into the participant’s perceptions of caring. These interviews took place with the specific participant immediately at end of the school day for easier recall. Guidelines set forth by the County administration stated that the researcher could not interview any participants during the school day including after any physical education classes.

The researcher observed an additional two weeks during the second or post-interview observation process. Classes participated in large group games and activities during the first two weeks of the post-interview observation period where there were minimal chances for skill

practice opportunities since the classes were merged. Students participated in units of volleyball and basketball during the following two weeks without merging with other classes. The teachers instructed their own classes in separate spaces of the two gymnasiums. These classes were highlighted with skill development opportunities and small game situations. The researcher felt that this situation provided instances of physical education teaching that could lead to greater student-teacher interaction thus provide for more caring opportunities.

### Data Analysis

Data were collected to provide adequate and appropriate interpretative material in accordance with the research questions (Patton, 2002). The strategies the researcher used for data organization and analysis are described in this section.

#### *Data Organization*

The researcher transcribed verbatim each individual interview and independently studied the transcriptions to become familiar with the data. The extensive field notes from two observation periods were typed and reviewed after the completion of each observation.

Data organization in qualitative research is important because this method of research has the propensity to produce large amounts of data (Patton, 2002). The researcher created a folder for each participant with the pseudonym printed on the front cover and tab. The folder contained three copies of their respective interview and three copies of field notes that contained observations related to them. The three copies of interviews and field notes were used for color coding, cutting and pasting, and reading respectively.

#### *The Constant Comparative Method of Analysis*

A methodological triangulation among interview data and multiple field observations allowed a number of data sources to be cross-checked and analyzed by constant comparison analysis for common themes (Merriam, 1998; Patton, 2002). Constant comparison, according to Merriam (1998), begins when the researcher establishes an initial incident from an interview, field notes, or document and compares it with another incident that has been identified from the same data set or another set. As data is continually grouped, it is compared to incidents in the previous categories, in addition to the same group and different groupings (Merriam, 1998).

The researcher read through each of the interviews and field notes to become familiar with the data. The four initial research questions provided a road map for the initial coding process. While reading through the interview data a second time, the researcher wrote down key words, phrases, and quotes that the researcher felt were important to the purpose of the study. The researcher listed each keyword or phrase on a large sketchpad and utilized them as an initial set of themes. After creating these initial themes, the researcher turned his focus on finding more specific characteristics of each theme. In doing so, the researcher read through each interview once again for quotes that related to these themes. The initial list of themes were analyzed and dissected into a number of new categories.

The researcher listed each category on a separate sheet of sketchpad paper. The researcher then found quotes and color-coded them according to the specific corresponding category. Supporting quotes were cut and pasted onto the sketchpad paper with the corresponding category. For instance, a quote found to correspond to the category of “respect” under the theme of “teacher caring” was pasted onto the respective sheet. This formed a modified sketchpad approach (Graham et. al., 1991) as utilized by Manross (1994). A category was kept if there was enough data to support it and if it was relevant to the research questions. A category was discarded if the researcher found only minimal support for it. Two categories were discarded because of minimal data support.

A triangulation of data sources was conducted to strengthen the perspectives and examine evidence from the interviews with the student participants and class observations. In doing so, after each interview was coded and supporting quotes were found, the researcher turned to his field notes to find further support for each category. The coding process continued until saturation of the categories occurred.

#### Data Trustworthiness

Qualitative research in its early stages addressed validity in terms of four criteria: internal validity, external validity, reliability, and objectivity (Anfara, Brown, & Mangione, 2002). Lincoln and Guba (1985) restated these four criteria to meet the concerns of qualitative research as follows: credibility (internal validity), transferability (external validity), dependability (reliability), and confirmability (objectivity). The strategies used by the researcher to enhance each criterion are listed in Table 3.2.

As a way to enhance data trustworthiness, the investigator sought methodological rigor by utilizing multiple data sources in order to make data and methodologies as public and replicable as possible (Patton, 2002). Credibility was established by a prolonged engagement in the field of research, triangulation of the data sources, and member checks with participants as necessary. Dependability was sought through the use of a peer investigator and the continued triangulation of data sources. The research established transferability by seeking purposive sampling and the by the use of thick, rich descriptions of interview data and observations. Finally, confirmability was established by triangulation of the data sources and reflexive journal entries (Anfara, Brown, & Mangione, 2001).

#### External Investigator

Data analysis was conducted with an external investigator for the purpose of a second perspective and to add an additional layer of analysis. Okseon Lee, a doctoral candidate in the Department of Exercise and Sport Science at University of North Carolina – Greensboro and former elementary physical education teacher, served as the external investigator. Each data analysis procedure was discussed prior to starting the data analysis process. The peer investigation process began with the researchers independently reading over the interview and observation data. Each researcher took notes and wrote down their initial interpretations. The researcher focused on understanding the participants' meanings and intentions rather than the coding process at this starting point. The researcher and the peer investigator discussed their individual results. If a discrepancy existed, the researcher and his peer reviewer provided a rationale for their selection and then conferred until a consensus was reached.

Table 3.2

*Strategies for Establishing Data Trustworthiness*

|                 |   |
|-----------------|---|
| Credibility     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prolonged engagement in the field</li> <li>• Data triangulation</li> <li>• Member check</li> </ul> |
| Dependability   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Data triangulation</li> <li>• Peer examination</li> </ul>  |
| Transferability | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide thick descriptions</li> <li>• Purposive sampling</li> </ul>                                |
| Confirmability  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Data triangulation</li> <li>• Practice reflexivity</li> </ul>                                      |

Adapted from: Anfara, V.A., Brown, K.M., & Mangione, T.L. (2002). Qualitative research on stage: Making the research process more public. *Educational Researcher*, 31, 28-38.

Following the completion of the transcription process and initial analysis, face-to-face, audiotaped member checks were conducted with participants, as necessary, to ask clarifying questions. It was at this point in the process that each participant was given the opportunity to modify or clarify any aspects of the interview.

Ethical Considerations for this Research Study

The trustworthiness of a research study is judged by standards of competent and acceptable practice and ethical conduct (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). The researcher followed several methods to adhere to an ethical standard. Prior to the commencement of the study, the researcher gained approval to conduct the research by the University’s Institutional Review Board (IRB# 04-132). Consent to conduct the study was additionally granted from the assistant superintendent of the school district, the school administrative staff, and the parents of the participants. The researcher was also provided an assent from each participant. Prior to each interview, the participants were also told of their ability to decline questions they felt they did not want to answer as well as their ability to withdraw from the study at any given point throughout the research process. The interviews were conducted in a safe, secure conference

room as designated by the school administration. Pseudonyms replaced the names of all participants in the study as well as any other names that were recorded during the data collection process. Finally, the audiotaped interviews were kept securely on the researcher's person or in a locked file in the researcher's office. The participants were made aware of their right to possess their individual audiotaped interview at the conclusion of the research study.

### Summary of Methodology

This chapter contained a detailed description of the methodology utilized for this research study on students' perceptions of physical education teachers' caring. More specifically, the chapter outlined the participant selection process, justified and discussed the data collection methods, provided results of a pilot study used to test the interview protocol, described the setting in which the study took place, and provided a description of the procedures for the analysis of the data collected for this study and the methods utilized to ensure trustworthiness of the data. A presentation of the results from the data collection will be provided in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER IV FINDINGS

“I think that part of being a good teacher is caring about your students.”

- Jack (grade 8 student)

The purpose of this study was to gain insights into students’ perceptions of physical education teachers’ caring. The researcher sought to describe the perceptions students have concerning caring behaviors exhibited toward them by their physical education teachers. The qualitative research methods of semi-formal interviews and field observations were used as the sources of data collection to answer the following research questions that guided this study:

1. How do students describe the concept of caring as it relates to the school setting?
2. What caring behaviors do students perceive their physical education teachers demonstrate toward them?
3. What factors related to physical education influence these perceptions?
4. Do students describe their perceptions of caring as influencing their participation in physical education?

The findings reported in this chapter describe the participants’ conceptions of caring behaviors, descriptions of caring teachers, students’ perceptions of physical education teachers’ caring, caring behaviors relevant to the physical education setting, and the role caring plays in their participation in physical education.

### The Students’ Understanding of the Concept of Caring

In order for the students to share their perceptions of physical education teachers’ caring, the researcher sought to obtain general thoughts on the concept of caring from each participant. In examining the students’ perceptions of caring, the researcher first looked at the complexity of their understanding of caring. The researcher asked each participant an initial question, “When I say the word ‘caring,’ what comes to mind?”

### Dimensions of Caring Behaviors as Perceived by the Students

The students provided a multitude of responses when their general thoughts on caring were solicited. Each participant provided a response to the question. The researcher categorized the responses to this question as one-, two-, or three-dimensional (Bosworth et al., 1994, Noddings, 1986, 1992).

A one-dimensional response was described as a response by the participant that encompasses one thought or attempt at defining the concept of caring with no elaboration (Bosworth et al., 1994). Eight of the participants provided a very simple, one-dimensional understanding of the concept of caring. A comprehensive list of these responses is provided in Table 4.1. Responses that were determined to be one-dimensional included, “being nice,” “respect towards others,” “someone that does things for you,” and “someone who fixes things.” Another three students provided a broader definition of caring, using two dimensions. This meant that the responses presented described two discrete dimensions or one-dimensional responses with an elaboration (Bosworth et al., 1994, Noddings, 1992). For example, Jack described caring using two distinct dimensions, “someone who helps you out. They want to bring you farther along in life.” Example of two-dimensional definitions where one dimension is an elaboration on the first include:

Someone who is thinking of you. They want you to be happy. (Cassandra)  
It’s when someone helps you and wants to bring you further along in life. (Jack)

One student, Buffy, an average-skilled female, described caring in a multi-dimensional fashion. She went beyond exclusively identifying characteristics of a caring person and identified themselves or another as a care-giver or cared-for (Noddings, 1992).

“Caring is when someone wants you to feel good about yourself. They also want you to have a good time. They want you to be enjoying yourself and stuff like that. They are also looking out for you. If something bad happens to you, they are going to be able to come and help. It is someone you can rely on so if something happens you won’t feel uncomfortable.”  
(Buffy)

In her response, Buffy describes an extended relationship as an integral part of caring.

Table 4.1

*Dimensions of Caring Behaviors as Reported by the Students*

| One-Dimensional   | Two-Dimensional  | Three-Dimensional   |
|---|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Being nice</li> <li>• Respect towards each other</li> <li>• Fixes things</li> <li>• Ensures you are okay</li> <li>• Loving each other</li> <li>• Attitude towards a person</li> <li>• Takes care of you</li> <li>• Fulfilling someone's needs</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thinking of someone; and wondering if they are happy</li> <li>• Helping someone; wanting to bring them further along in life</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Want you to feel good; looking out for someone; help if something happens; someone to rely on</li> </ul> |

Caring Individuals and Perceptions of How They Care for Others

In order to gain even greater understanding of the participants' conceptions of caring, the researcher sought examples of caring individuals. Specifically, the students responded to the question, "Who is someone that you believe cares about you in your life?" The students were asked to further elaborate on how these specific individuals display caring behaviors towards them. The response to this question and related examples of caring behaviors are listed in Table 4.2.

The students overwhelmingly perceived their parents were the most significant caring individuals in their lives. This finding was consistent with a study by Buhrmester and Furman (1987) who found parents, family members, and friends to be important companions and providers of intimacy. Some students remarked that close family members, including siblings, grandparents, aunts, and uncles also exhibited caring behaviors toward them. Friends were additionally perceived as caring individuals in the lives of a large number of the participants. Finally, one participant, Braden, who is heavily involved in the team sport of soccer and plays year round, expressed that his teammates, with whom he felt he spent a lot of time, cared about

him. He stated, “Yeah, my teammates care about me. We spend a lot of time together and go through the same stuff in sports together.”

The students provided a multitude of responses regarding examples of caring behaviors they perceived individuals exhibited toward them. A large number of the responses were multi-dimensional. That is, the students were able to elaborate, sometimes in great detail, on examples of caring behaviors they perceive that individuals they deem caring display toward them. For instance, Brigitte reflected on caring individuals in her life by stating the following:

“They understand the stuff I am going through and when I am down, they will come and console me. And, when I am sick, they will come and help me get better or they will cheer me up. And when I am like really angry, they know to stay away or keep their distance and they just know when to be there for me and when to stay back.” (Brigitte).

Monique provided several dimensions of caring in her response. She described caring behaviors of several individuals she deemed caring in her life.

“Whenever something goes wrong she [mom] fixes it for me or does something to make your life easier. They [friends] would do something for you if they know you were in discomfort for some reason. If you forgot your book at home, they also would stay on the phone with you and go through all of the problems. And if I have problems with my homework I go to my dad.”

These examples of students’ responses showed a multi-dimensional level of response. Within each of these perceptions is a sense that caring is more than a reaction to a single event.

Table 4.2

*Caring Individuals and Their Perceived Caring Behaviors*

| Caring Individuals                                      | Examples of Caring Behaviors  |
|---|---|
| Parents   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Guide me</li> <li>• Puts down rules</li> <li>• Make sacrifices</li> <li>• Help with homework</li> <li>• Give hugs</li> <li>• Writes me notes</li> <li>• Makes choices for me in my best interest</li> <li>• Supports me</li> </ul> |
| Siblings (brothers/sisters)                             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Comfort me when feeling bad – brings me blanket</li> </ul>   |
| Additional family members (aunts, uncles, grandparents) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Want you to be happy</li> <li>• Always there for you</li> </ul>  |
| Friends   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cheer me up</li> <li>• Notice if you are not in a good mood</li> <li>• Empathetic-lend a listening ear</li> </ul>  |
| Teammates   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Play sports with me</li> <li>• Know what you are going through</li> </ul>  |

*Students' Perceptions of Caring Teachers*

The students were asked to describe a caring teacher and general behaviors teachers exhibit when caring for their students. Data analysis identified a multitude of behaviors. The list of caring behaviors were divided into two categories of caring teacher behaviors perceived by the students: 1) Teacher caring behaviors that foster interpersonal relationships and 2) Teacher caring behaviors related to content and pedagogy (Ferreira & Bosworth, 2001; Thayer-Bacon & Bacon, 1996).

### *Perceived Teacher Caring Behaviors That Foster Interpersonal Relationships*

When students were asked to describe caring teachers, a large number of responses implied some form or relationship between the student and teacher. Five teacher behaviors were identified in this realm according to students' descriptions of caring teachers: approachable, respect, patience and understanding, being fair, and extending themselves outside of the classroom.

Several students remarked that a caring teacher is one who is approachable with both schoolwork and personal problems. They take the time to listen and talk to their students about their problems. Monique reflected on one particular teacher's approachability as a sign of caring when she stated,

Mr. Brickman was very caring because you could talk to him. He was just a genuinely friendly guy because you could talk with him about things and made himself very approachable so if you had a problem you could go to him. (Monique).

Respect is an integral part of the student-teacher relationship. Students were concerned about being treated respectfully by their teachers. According to Sally, when a teacher shows they care about you they, "respect you, try to let you have your say in something instead of shutting you down. They treat you like you were their own child."

Being treated with patience and understanding were two additional behaviors thought by some students to be important caring behaviors. According to Jack, a caring teacher is one who "would answer questions when you do not get something and they would not get mad at you for it." In Arnold's case, a caring teacher is one who understands when "you miss a problem on a test and they let you retake it. And if you are absent they let you catch up at your pace." Finally, Chris stated he felt "very grateful" to a teacher who he believed cared about him by showing understanding and granting him a second chance on a project. Chris tells his story:

I had this project and I did it and saw everyone else's project, and I saw that mine was inferior. And I decided I should take it home and refine it and bring it back later as a better project. And she noticed that and let me have an extra day and it worked out without her subtracting points. (Chris)

In addition to teachers being patient and understanding, some of the students also felt strongly that a being treated fairly was a sign that a teacher cared about them. According to

Arnold, a caring teacher is “always fair when dealing with me.” And Cassandra expressed that a caring teacher “will believe me” and “won’t pick on me”.

Students and teachers often spend time together outside of the classroom for reasons like extracurricular activities, field trips, and homework assistance. The quality of this time can promote feelings of care for the students with whom the teachers are sharing this time. A number of students found interactions with their teachers outside of the classroom as an opportunity for teachers to show they care for their students. Braden, who struggled with an advanced level math course, stated, “I can go after school for help with her. I can talk to her about any problems I am having with my work and she will help me.” Monique felt her math teacher also cared for her because “you can call her at home and ask her to explain a problem.” The students appreciated the extra time teachers afforded them to understand the classwork. To them, the teachers showed concern for their learning.

In addition to providing extra help, to some students the dynamics of the relationship with their teachers extended beyond the classroom and periods of homework assistance. To them, a caring teacher goes above and beyond their normal classroom duties to provide meaningful experiences for their students. Teacher care was rooted in simple gestures such as those reflected in George’s comments, “she does not have to get us food on the field trips, but she would chip in and buy special snacks for everyone. And at the end of the year, we had a party, and we each got a special bag of treats.” Moreover, participation in extracurricular activities with teachers provided inherent opportunities for teacher caring. According to Buffy,

My choir teacher cares about me because I have done a lot of things with her. I am in many choir activities so I have traveled with her. I went to Nashville with her and she spent my birthday with me so I know she cares. (Buffy)

These experiences played a significant role in shaping some students’ opinions of their teacher. This sheds light on the caring behaviors students perceive occur outside of the normal classroom. Since spending extra time with students is a regular occurrence for most teachers, the quality of such an experience cannot be underscored.

#### Perceived Teacher Caring Behaviors Related to Content and Pedagogy

The researcher identified five teacher behaviors related to content and pedagogy through the data analysis procedures of the participants’ descriptions of caring teacher behaviors. These

five behaviors included explanation of work, feedback, encouragement, helping with work, and providing fun activities.

Some students felt that a caring teacher explained class materials and homework assignments well. The following statement by George illustrated several students' descriptions in this category:

If they [teachers] were not caring then they would just say, here is the assignment do it, and we would be going through it and say wait a second I have no clue what this is, and she is off there playing on the computer. (George)

Similarly, when Monique described a caring teacher, she felt that "if you really don't understand things they will try to put it into another context for you." In addition, a teacher cares when "they go over everything and make time to try to explain it to me better," according to Buffy.

The students' responses indicated they felt an encouraging teacher is a caring teacher. They are interested in the well-being of their students and seek the best from them. A caring teacher can "be hard on you, but usually it is for a good reason to encourage you to do better and push you to be a better learner, writer, or reader" commented Billie Jo. According to Cassandra and other students, teachers provide this sort of encouragement because they have the best interests of the students in mind; "they want you to do good."

Encouragement of students was closely tied to the theme of feedback. Teachers may let their students know they care for them indirectly by their comments. Many students felt that a simple "good job" demonstrated caring on the part of their teachers. Moreover, some students felt that a caring teacher acknowledged student accomplishments in other ways beyond simple words. After receiving a perfect score on a science test, a class in which she struggled, Cassandra remarked "she showed how impressed with how I was doing good. She wrote it down to me, and she told the whole class I got a 100. She showed me that she cared."

Another category of caring teaching behaviors expressed by the students included receiving help from their teachers. A caring teacher recognizes when a student is having difficulty with work and, according to Braden, "will offer extra help if you are struggling." A caring teacher will "do anything for you to understand what is going on," stated Buffy. "They would help you pass the class by any means. If they see that I am not doing so well in a certain

area, they would help me review it, help test me, and get me ready to do well in the course,” remarked Chris.

Finally, several students mentioned planning meaningful lessons and fun class activities as characteristics of a caring teacher. These are teachers who, according to Izzy, are “making sure we are having a good time and learning it in a way that is enjoyable.” Caring teachers don’t just “lecture, lecture, lecture,” but they “make the lessons fun and not just give a lot of tests to you or bring a bunch of worksheets,” thought Jack.

### Caring in the Context of Physical Education

This section begins with a description of the physical education program of the school during the field observations of the data collection phase. It is followed by students’ perceptions of caring behaviors in physical education, the propensity for caring in the context of physical education, and caring as it relates to student participation in physical education.

#### *Physical Education at Wayside Middle School During the Observation Periods*

The researcher performed two observation periods; the first one prior to the interviews and the second one post-interview. The objective of the first observation period was two-fold. The researcher sought to gain a thorough understanding of the physical education program during this time period. Additionally, the researcher identified the participants for the study during this observation period. During the first observation period, the six teachers’ classes attended only physical education class. During the second, or post-interview, observations, the classes alternated between physical education and health. The researcher only performed observations in the gymnasium during physical education classes. Since eighth graders were the sole participants in the study, the researcher observed only eighth grade classes. Therefore, the researcher attended only periods one and six when eighth grade physical education was in session.

While the content of the classes varied on a daily basis, the protocols that were established at the beginning of the school year remained constant. Each day the students emerged from the changing rooms and entered one of two gymnasiums depending on their teacher. Three classes occupied the first gymnasium, two in the second gymnasium, while one teacher engaged in scheduled planning time during the first period of observation. The

researcher returned for observations during sixth period where two classes were held in the first gymnasium, three in the second, and one teacher was allotted this period to perform their duties as the department head.

After changing into their physical education uniform, the students entered their respective gym space and sat in their designated squads. Each class contained four squads of students that were seated on the floor in alphabetical order. There were approximately six to eight students per squad depending on class size. The students generally socialized amongst each other while seated in their place until the teacher was ready to begin class.

Classes regularly began with attendance. The teacher stood at the front of the class and marked the attendance in their roll books. They would occasionally interact with students beyond the roll call in either generally friendly conversation or soliciting information from a student such as why they were absent or perhaps not dressed out in their physical education uniform. Then the classes began warm-up exercises followed by stretching exercises and then two to three minutes of jogging around the perimeter of their respective gymnasium. Warm-up exercises generally consisted of series of push ups and curl ups to build muscular strength and endurance. At the conclusion of the warm up exercises, the students performed a series of stretches to increase flexibility in the legs, arms, abdominal region and lower back. Warm up exercises and stretches were always led by one teacher who kept count and time aloud as the other teachers observed their respective classes. After the students completed their stretches, they jogged around the perimeter of the gymnasium for two to three minutes. The lead teacher for the day kept track of the time as the other teachers positioned themselves in various spots around the gym to observe the students jogging. The boys always jogged along the outside perimeter of the gym while the girls jogged to the inside of them. Each day, one of the teachers turned on music over the gymnasium music system that played for the duration of the jogging time.

At the conclusion of the daily warm up session, students would either return to their particular teacher for further instructions or receive information from the lead teacher as to the class activities for the day. For instance, during the first observation period, the students participated in fitness testing and large group games. Each class performed one of five fitness tests (curl ups, pull ups, shuttle run, V-sit and reach, and the mile run) per day separate from the other classes. At the conclusion of warm ups, the students returned to their class teacher who

took them to the testing site for the particular fitness test being performed that day. Teachers performed a thorough explanation of the fitness test prior to beginning the test. Their role was either that of keeping time or counting scores. They provided general encouragement to the students during the duration of the test. And, the teachers monitored each student so they performed the test correctly. At the conclusion of each test, the teacher returned with his or her class to their respective gymnasium and allowed the students to participate in basketball-related activities until the end of the class period.

Following the conclusion of the fitness-testing period, the classes participated in a series of large group games up to the conclusion of the first observation period. These large group games included small-sided basketball games and a capture the flag style game using footballs. Additionally, the classes utilized the spacious outdoor facilities to participate in games of basketball, soccer, ultimate Frisbee, flag football, and kickball. Similar to the indoor activities, the students were asked in which activity they would like to participate and then joined that game. Therefore, the activities were made up of students from each of the classes. Either one or a pair of teachers monitored each activity. They enforced the rules of each activity, acted as a scorekeeper, and provided both specific and non-specific feedback to the students.

The second observation period commenced after the conclusion of the interview process. The researcher used this time to observe each participant in the physical education setting. The main objective of this observation period was to observe the participant-teacher interactions and caring behaviors that were stated in the interviews.

The class protocols of dressing out, sitting in squads, roll-taking procedures, warm-up exercises, stretching, and jogging were followed as per the first observation period. For the first two weeks of the second observation period, the classes initially participated in large group activities including indoor whiffle ball, a modified capture the flag activity, and small-sided basketball games. The researcher extended the observation period to accommodate for observations of structured units on volleyball and basketball. The students were given the choice of which activity they would like to participate among the large group games offerings. As per the first observation period, one or two teachers monitored an activity. They enforced the rules of each activity, encouraged positive sportsmanship and fair play, kept score if needed, and provided both specific and non-specific feedback.

The classes then began units of instruction on volleyball and basketball. Each class met individually and was instructed by their physical education teacher. It was not until the students progressed to game situations that classes joined together to participate. The three classes in the first gym during first period and the two classes in the same gym during period six participated in the volleyball lessons while the remaining classes in the second gymnasium were involved in a basketball unit. Teachers were observed reviewing basic volleyball skills including bumping, setting, and serving. They often reinforced the proper execution of skills and were observed assisting students who struggled while attempting a skill.

At the conclusion of a three-day period of skill review, the classes participated in volleyball games. The female students from each class occupied one court area and the male students played on the remaining court. One teacher was observed at each court. They acted as referee and scorekeeper for the matches and provided encouragement and feedback to the students.

The classes participating in the basketball unit were divided into teams of 3-5 players of mixed genders and skill levels. The teams played half court games until the teacher in their half of the gymnasium called for the team to rotate and play a new opponent. The students were responsible for keeping the score of their respective games. Each teacher was observed providing skill reinforcement, assisting with rule enforcement, and giving general and specific feedback to the students.

#### Students Perceptions of Caring Behaviors Exhibited by Their Physical Education Teachers

The students provided a multitude of responses when asked to describe how they perceived their physical education teacher cared for them. When the data were analyzed and coded inductively, the researcher recorded twelve caring behaviors of physical education teachers as perceived by the students: a) provides fun and meaningful activities, b) explains a skill well, c) concerned about my health and well-being, d) motivates and encourages me to complete a task, e) helps me perform a skill, f) provides feedback, g) attends to an injury, h) honors my request for an activity, i) treats me fairly, j) takes a personal interest in me, k) flexible when dealing with me, l) acts friendly towards me. Further analysis and collaboration with the external investigator found the two categories of 1) Caring behaviors related to content and pedagogy, and 2) Caring behaviors that foster interpersonal relationships (Ferreira & Bosworth,

2001; Thayer-Bacon & Bacon, 1996) to further describe the students' perceptions of physical education teachers' caring behaviors.

*Perceived Physical Education Teachers' Caring Behaviors Related to Content and Pedagogy*

The students reported five caring behaviors related to content and pedagogy. These included: 1) provides fun and meaningful activities, 2) honors my request for an activity, 3) explains a skill well, 4) gives feedback, and 5) helps me perform a skill.

Many students reported liking physical education class due in large part to the nature of the class. It is grounded in movement, games, and sports, and provides ample social opportunities. Many reported that teachers enacted caring by providing them with fun and meaningful activities. Sally believed her teacher cared for her, "because instead of doing something most people don't like, she will try to do something that is fun." In addition, a number of students equated teacher caring with taking time to plan the fun activities. Students reflected on particular activities and special physical education events such as rock climbing that stood out to them as special. Taking the time to plan meaningful and fun lessons was a sign of caring to Jack because, "I think they are showing they care because they took the time to make it so you would think it wasn't boring."

The students often liked certain activities that they requested to participate in it numerous times throughout the school year. Some students felt one way a physical education teacher showed they cared about their students was by honoring their request to play a game or participate in a particular activity. Braden felt his physical education teacher cared for her students when "she knew there were a lot of people that liked to play a certain game, then she would let us play that more." A physical education teacher demonstrates caring when "you place a request to do a certain activity before the teacher has anything else planned...and let's you do that activity," according to Chris.

Students are introduced to new physical skills in addition to rules and regulations of sports in physical education. The students found that a caring teacher is one who takes the time to explain a skill or rule so the students understand it. Monique reflected on an experience learning to play football for the first time. "I have no idea how to play football," she commented. "So, if they actually explain it, I would say they are caring to do that."

Student appreciated teacher feedback because, according to Sally, "if you are doing something wrong, they care enough to tell you and help you fix it." The students equated

specific feedback with teacher care because the teacher took the time to recognize the student and help guide them towards successful play experiences. They would not just say, “why did you do this?” according to Sally, but instead they would say, “next time try and do it like this.” Teachers demonstrated caring according to many students when they took extra time to help them perform a skill. Teachers recognized that a student was struggling to perform a skill and took time out to assist them with learning it. Chris felt comforted by the fact that he could “always request help from them” if he could not play the game or perform a certain skill.

*Perceived Physical Education Teachers’ Caring Behaviors Related to  
Fostering Interpersonal Relationships*

The students reported seven caring behaviors related to fostering interpersonal relationships. These included: 1) acts friendly towards me, 2) motivates and encourages me, 3) treats me fairly, 4) flexible when dealing with me, 5) takes a personal interest in me, 6) shows concern for my health and well-being, and 7) attends to an injury.

Students responded that a caring teacher displays overt behaviors such as acting friendly towards their students. Physical education teachers are often seen as friendly and popular teachers in their schools. Cassandra described her physical education teacher as someone who “jokes around with me sort of like a friend,” she “let’s us have fun.” Conversely, those students with whom they failed to interact deemed teachers who would only display such behaviors to only certain students uncaring. Izzy responded to this situation by stating, “the people she knows really well she is talking to them or making jokes, but everyone else she is just telling them what to and making them do it.” Students may resent such behaviors, feel a sense of alienation in the physical education setting, and deem their teacher uncaring.

Every student reported liking physical education to some degree. Some students found certain facets of physical education class difficult and needed encouragement to participate. Student responses illustrated a caring teacher as one who motivates and encourages their students. They are physical education teachers who “make you try harder” because “they know you can do better” (Braden). They often “push you to do things in a good way” (Buffy) in order to “make you feel better about yourself” (Billie Jo). Jack reflected on one particular incident:

We were running the mile and in Ms. Mavis’ class and somebody was

lagging behind. They were like ‘I can’t do this’ and she really boosted them up. She was like ‘yes you can, I have seen you run and you are really good at it. You just need to push through it’.

According to the students, teachers provide this encouragement because they “want you to succeed” and “do good.” The researcher frequently noted physical education teachers exhibiting this caring behavior. On one occasion in volleyball, a physical education teacher reinforced a positive, yet unsuccessful, effort of one girl to get the ball over the net. She hustled to strike a ball that was going out of bounds. She extended her arms and struck the ball, but failed to get it over the net. The teacher praised her effort and intensity despite the outcome.

The students showed concern over their teachers’ being fair. A sense of fairness was extremely important to them in relation to their treatment in physical education. For some, it was merely the notion of being treated justly. For instance, they felt it would be unjust if they were blamed for something they did not do. The researcher observed an incident where one student was mistaken for throwing a basketball that accidentally struck a student. The teacher called over a student whom she felt perpetrated the act. Upon further discussion, the teacher noted she had the wrong student. She allowed him to return to the activity and discussed the incident with the student found to be the one who committed the act. Izzy described how a teacher fails to care when they do not assess a student’s performance fairly: “You are graded in the class for effort and the people they care about they actually seem to consider what they are doing more and the people they don’t they base their grade more on everyone else as opposed to their work.” He felt such an incident would be unjust to a student and would fail to reflect their true performance in physical education.

Some students deemed a flexible teacher caring. They act in the best interest of the student by “not making you do things that are impossible” (Arnold) or “not pressuring you too much.” (Sally). Specific situations call for flexibility on the part of the physical education teacher. George felt his physical education teacher cared for him when sharing the following story: “When I come into class and I forget my gym clothes, Mr. Jakes is especially good to me and he will help me out. He will even though I don’t have .25 cents in my locker to rent it.” He appreciated his flexibility because it allowed him to participate in the lesson despite forgetting his uniform.

Some students reported that a physical education teacher shows they care by taking a personal interest in their students. This was described as going beyond simple statements of

recognition or a “deeper understanding of how we feel (Monique). According to Buffy, “Mr. Jakes would talk to me a lot. He knew I rode horses so he would always ask me about how I was doing with that.” She felt he cared for her by showing an interest in her life outside of school. The researcher noted several instances where physical education teachers engaged in friendly conversation that reflected this category of caring. In one instance, the researcher noted a physical education teacher engaged in a brief conversation regarding a movie both of them found they recently enjoyed. Other conversations included talk regarding band performances and sports.

Closely related to showing personal interest is the theme of showing concern for students’ health and well-being. Physical education teachers often “push their students to be healthy.” (Billie Jo). In doing so, students reported that some might misinterpret these actions as being uncaring. Buffy justified this when she commented, “we know this is part of their job and they are just trying to work harder for you to be more healthy.” A caring teacher is “not going to work us too hard, but she doesn’t work us too lightly either... to help our health” (Jack). The researcher noted one teacher who regulated the amount of physical activity for a student suffering from asthma. The teacher encouraged the student to pace herself while jogging and to walk when needed.

Since physical education is grounded in movement and physical skills, there is the chance of injury for students despite safety measures and proper planning procedures. When an injury occurs in physical education, the teacher is usually the first person to attend to the injured student. Students reported that teacher caring was closely related to the teacher’s reaction to a student’s injury. A caring teacher will “help comfort you if you get hurt” (Brigette). Jack described a past incident: “someone fell down and would over react. She would be understanding...she would be like okay we are going to fix this...let’s go to the office and get you some ice and you will be okay.” A caring teacher will take time out and assess the individual’s situation and act in the best interest of the student. During the observation periods, two students were injured while participating in physical education. While serious injury did not occur, the researcher observed the physical education teacher respond immediately to the situation. In each case, they assessed the situation, reassured the student would be alright, and allowed them to sit out of the activity until they felt as if they could rejoin.

## The Propensity for Teacher Caring Behaviors in the Context of Physical Education Class

An overwhelming number of the students responded that physical education was a class in which their physical education teachers were able to enact caring behaviors toward them and other students. Some participants responded that certain factors increased the likelihood for teachers to demonstrate caring behaviors in this setting. These were listed as facilitators of caring. A large number of students felt that some factors made it difficult for teachers to demonstrate caring behaviors. The researcher listed these as barriers to caring.

### *Facilitators of Physical Education Teachers' Caring Behaviors*

Student responses revealed factors that help facilitate the caring process in physical education. These included the physical nature of the class, flexibility in teacher expectations, and class activities.

Physical education is grounded in movement, physical activity, and sports. Along with this come natural occurrences of physical injury. Students participating even in the safest of physical education environments can be prone to injury. Many participants responded that teachers demonstrated caring behaviors when they reacted with concern following the injury of a student.

Additionally, some students require motivation to participate and strive for success in physical education. Sally thought caring teachers have many opportunities to motivate their students to do their best. She stated, "they [P. E. teachers] push you to do your best; they are not trying to be mean, they are just trying to help you." Since regular participation in physical activity plays a large role in increasing physical health, physical education teachers often strive to increase the overall wellness of their students. In doing so, physical education teachers "care you are doing the right things for your bodies," remarked Cassandra. Finally, many students view physical education as an opportunity to participate in fun activities with their classmates. Some viewed physical education as a respite from the sedentary nature of the regular classroom environment. Cassandra thought that the "more fun and less stressed" environment helped promote a more caring atmosphere.

Physical education teachers set classroom protocols that are maintained by each teacher and expected to be followed by all of the students. Teachers demonstrate flexibility in regard to their class expectations. George found that when "[the P. E.] teachers are flexible and have

different standards for them and let things slide sometimes” the physical education teachers show they care for their students.

### *Barriers of Physical Education Teachers’ Caring*

Student responses also revealed factors that made it difficult for their physical education teachers to demonstrate caring behaviors toward their students. The researcher cited these barriers as length of time with a teacher, student personalities, role of the teacher/coach, and class size.

Secondary school physical education programs usually consist of a team of specialists who may not teach at each grade level. Therefore, it is likely that a student will have a different physical education teacher each school year. Billie Jo felt an integral part of why she believed her physical education teacher cared about her was because she “had him twice now so he really knows me.” Monique found that teacher caring proved difficult because “you get a completely new group of students each year...if you begin to get close to someone, they will be gone next year.” Students felt that continuity in the relationship played a significant role in teacher care.

Certain students receive a larger amount of teacher’s attention often due in part to their personalities. Therefore, students felt that there was a correlation between this dispersement of attention and teacher caring. Teachers often struggle to equally disperse attention to every member of their classes. Braden felt that “if somebody is quiet and they don’t exactly stand out, then the teacher may not notice them as much.” In an attempt to treat everyone the same, this may, according to Braden, “make them seem less caring to the whole class.”

Physical education teachers quite often coach one or more school sports in addition to their teaching duties. In doing so, they have established an additional relationship with students outside of the physical education setting. Monique commented on a teacher’s struggle to separate the athlete from the student. She felt that “if you play a sport and one of the P.E. teachers is your coach, then they are going to favor those on the team. They talk more with them because they know them better.” This closely ties into the sense of fairness students believed to be an important aspect of their relationships with their teacher.

A large number of the students’ comments focused on class size. Many physical education programs combine classes together because of a lack of space and equipment. Also, the researcher noted this happening in order to increase team size or the number of teams. Students felt that large class sizes presented a barrier for teachers to show they cared for their

students. “They really can’t focus on one student so it makes it harder for them to understand you,” responded Arnold. Izzy commented, “in physical education, you have to teach everybody at one time and make sure everybody is doing the same thing just right so you can’t really specialize on one person.” Such a barrier was seen as an obstacle to recognition and acknowledgment—two important perceived caring behaviors as noted by the students.

### *The Role Caring Plays in Student Participation in Physical Education*

Each student stated that they enjoyed physical education class. Some students stated it was their favorite class. For others, they enjoyed certain aspects of the class such as particular games and sports, but only tolerated other aspects such as warm ups, running, and some large group games. The students overwhelmingly agreed that a caring teacher played an integral role in their liking physical education class. All but one of the students stated that they would like physical education class (or any class for that matter) more if they knew their teacher cared about them. For one student, they stated that it made little difference to him because he enjoyed participating in physical activity; he would “like it anyway.” (George).

The students reported distinct feelings when asked about how a caring teacher impacts their feelings toward physical education. For some, knowing that their physical education teacher cares about them led to increased self-esteem. Others felt secure in asking their teacher for help at any point during the lessons. One student felt it was okay to “mess up” in class because the teacher “would not yell at you for it” (Buffy). Finally, Izzy replied that a caring teacher was one of three factors (the other two being his classmates and the course contents) directly related to him liking the subject.

The students were very adamant that attending physical education class would be a negative experience if their teacher failed to care for them. For some, they stated they would feel a lot less motivated to participate. Others stated they would dread attending the class period and feel the activities would not be as fun. For Cassandra, she stated that having a physical education teacher that failed to care for her would “put me in a bad mood.” Simply put, Billie Jo stated, “it would suck.”

Students also reported positive feelings when equating skill development to teacher care. Students expressed the importance of teacher feedback and acknowledgement when accomplishing a task in physical education. Simple words of praise such as “great job” or encouragement and recognition “that was a great hit, keep it up” seem to be especially

meaningful to these students. Several students reported feelings of increased self-esteem and pride when accomplishing a task alongside a caring physical education teacher. For Chris, accomplishing a task and knowing his teacher cared felt like “when I hit a home run in baseball in front of my mom.” Sharing in their accomplishments with a caring teacher seemed to hold great importance for these students.

The students overwhelmingly agreed that they were motivated to perform better in physical education for a teacher they perceived cared for them. They felt a strong desire to please such a teacher who cares for them. In doing so, they would “push themselves harder” and set out to “do their best” and try to “impress them.” Two students, Cassandra and Jack, remarked that they in turn would reciprocate caring or “show them I care back” by performing their best in physical education. Cassandra’s comment illustrated the idea of reciprocity in caring:

I would want to show them they are doing a good job. I would want to show them that I care about them and so I would not slack off or not try my best. I would always try my best for them and show them I care back.”

These findings suggested that physical education teacher caring holds great importance to the students in relationship to their desire to perform their best in physical education.

Twelve students of varying skill levels served as the participants for this study. Four students were categorized as high-skilled, four as average-skilled, and four as low skilled. The researcher found no clear pattern of responses based solely on the skill level of the participants. Students across varying skill levels described a variety of perceived physical education teacher caring behaviors within the dimensions of content and pedagogy and fostering interpersonal relationships. Students from each skill category appreciated encouragement, concern, fun and meaningful activities, feedback, and help with rules and skill tasks among other caring behaviors.

The findings reported in this chapter described the participants’ conceptions of caring behaviors, descriptions of caring teachers, caring behaviors relevant to the physical education setting, students’ perceptions of physical education teachers’ caring, and the role caring plays in their participation in physical education. The following chapter will discuss these findings and offer implications and recommendations for further research.

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSIONS, CONCLUSIONS, AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The purpose of this study was to gain insights into students' perceptions of physical education teachers' caring. The researcher sought to describe the perceptions students had regarding caring behaviors exhibited by their physical education teachers. The qualitative research methods of semi-formal interviews and field observations were utilized as the sources of data collection to answer the research questions. The discussions section is divided into four categories that directly reflect the purpose of the study and the research questions: 1) The students' conceptions of caring; 2) The students' perceptions of physical education teachers' caring; 3) Caring in the physical education environment; and 4) Caring and student participation in physical education.

#### *The Students' Conceptions of Caring*

The concept of caring encompasses a wide range of definitions that have evolved from fields such as nursing, philosophy, and education. Broad definitions have emerged that embodied such words as relationships, interpersonal interactions, and concern for the well-being of others (Chaskin & Rauner, 1995, Noddings, 1992). The students provided a multitude of responses when asked to describe their concept of caring. These responses were categorized as one-, two-, or three-dimensional responses (Bosworth et al., 1994, Noddings, 1992). The majority of the students posed one-dimensional responses when their general conceptions of caring were solicited. These included simple statements such as "being nice" and "respect towards others." Three students articulated responses that were deemed two-dimensional; that is, either having two distinct dimensions or one dimension with an elaboration. An example of this is Jack stating, "someone who helps you out. They want to bring you farther along in life." One student provided a thicker, richer response that reflected several dimensions. She went beyond exclusively identifying characteristics of caring person and identified themselves or another as a care-giver or cared-for (Noddings, 1992). A study by Bosworth, et al. (1994) yielded similar descriptions of caring yet the majority of the middle school students responded with two- and three- dimensional responses thus displaying a more complex understanding of the concept of caring.

The students provided more salient responses regarding their conceptions of caring when applied to specific people in their lives. These significant individuals included parents, siblings,

close family members, friends, and teammates. The participants provided a plethora of responses that embodied their ideas of caring behaviors along several dimensions. This saliency may be best explained by the length or continuity of the relationship (Noddings, 1992, 2002). The caring individuals listed here are those with whom they have established a long-term relationship thus creating multiple caring opportunities. Secondly, some of the individuals described here may have more than one role in the lives of the participants. For instance, a friend may also take on the role of classmate and teammate thus creating more opportunities to exhibit caring behaviors.

When students were asked to describe caring teachers, they provided responses along several dimensions of caring as noted by Noddings (1992). These findings were somewhat consistent with similar studies soliciting students' perceptions of caring teacher behaviors (Ferreira & Bosworth, 2001, Rogers, 1994, Wentzel, 1997). The students cited five teacher caring behaviors related to content and pedagogy. Similar to the study by Ferreira and Bosworth (2001), the students failed to mention caring behaviors related to curriculum. A number of students cited caring related to "fun and meaningful activities." However, most students related caring to common teacher processes including explaining work, encouragement, and feedback.

The remaining teacher caring behaviors cited by the students were dedicated to fostering meaningful teacher-student relationships. The students' responses indicated behaviors that were unidirectional or initiated by the teacher toward the student as noted by Ferreira and Bosworth (2001) and Rogers (1994). In a study by Van Sickle and Spector (1996), conceptions of caring were categorized into three dimensions of relationships: teacher-student, student-student, teacher-content leading to teacher-student-content relationships. The students' perceptions were limited to that of the teacher-student relationship. Noddings (1984, 1992) contends that definitions of caring imply a relationship where mutuality or reciprocity exists. There were no indications of reciprocity or "reciprocal caring" (Noddings, 1992) when general thoughts on caring were solicited. This may be explained by the students' inability to clearly articulate their conceptions of caring outside of an egocentric view of oneself (Bosworth, 1995). However, two students' descriptions of their relationship with their physical education teacher displayed signs of reciprocal caring. Jack's stated that he would "try to help them help me" when participating alongside a physical education teacher he deemed caring. Cassandra responded, "I would try and do my best for them to show them I care back." The students felt they were entered into a caring

relationship with their physical education teacher where caring was not merely focused on oneself.

### *Students' Perceptions of Physical Education Teachers' Caring Behaviors*

The students provided a multitude of responses when asked to describe how they perceived their physical education teachers cared for them. The researcher recorded twelve significant caring behaviors as a result of the data collection process. The students provided salient descriptions of their conceptions of physical education teachers' caring. The twelve behaviors were divided into the themes of content/pedagogy and fostering interpersonal relationships. The findings from this group of participants were similar to those of studies on caring teaching in physical education (Larson, 2004) and students' perceptions of caring teachers (Ferreira & Bosworth, 2001, Rogers, 1994). Larson (2004) noted three important facets of caring teaching in physical education: trust/respects me, recognize me, and help me learn. She concluded that caring physical education teaching centered on the attention the teacher shows to the student (Larson, 2004). Attention, however, covers a broad range of behaviors from a brief, fleeting "good morning" to in-depth assistance with a particular skill. It can be concluded that each of the caring behaviors cited by the students falls under the category of attention, yet it is the quality of the behavior that needs to be examined. Caring can be initiated by the teacher in ways such as complimenting a new haircut or in response to a student action such as a statement of positive and specific feedback after a successful skill attempt. The quality of each perceived caring behavior cannot be underscored. Additionally, the caring behaviors cited in relation to physical education teachers mirrored a large number of the recommendations for establishing a caring physical education environment as set forth by Rink (2002).

The students' responses to their perceptions of caring physical education teachers reflected a number of facets of their thoughts on caring teachers. The majority of responses described overt caring actions on the part of the teacher directed toward the students. Similarities in both caring behaviors related to content/pedagogy and fostering interpersonal relationships were noted. Students appreciated feedback and encouragement from their teachers, enjoyed fun, meaningful activities planned out by the teachers, stressed the importance of being treated fairly and individually, and valued additional help with a skill.

Most of the responses related to physical education teachers' caring could be interpreted along the same dimensions of those related to the general classroom environment. The sole

notable differences in responses were *attended to an injury* and *concern for my health and well-being*. This should not be interpreted as if classroom teachers would not respond to an injured student without care. This statement reflected the propensity for students to be injured during physical activity regardless of stringent safety and planning measures undertaken by the physical educator. The students provided responses related to injury as a direct reflection of their past experiences or that of other students in physical education.

When discussing care in relation to concern for the students' health and well-being, students focused on health-related wellness and the desire for teachers to enhance the overall fitness levels of their students. One must not conclude that classroom teachers lack a concern for the health and well-being of their students. The findings indicate that physical education provides a more opportunistic venue for displaying such caring behaviors. The students provided responses that reflected past experiences with this facet of caring.

As with prior conceptions of caring teachers, the students failed to mention caring behaviors related to curriculum. Noddings (1992) posits that part of caring is providing students with interesting and challenging things to do. The students stated they enjoyed most physical education activities and appreciated the "fun and meaningful activities" their teachers planned for them. Again, the students related physical education teacher caring to common teaching processes as providing encouragement, feedback, and help with a skill.

The researcher noted many occasions in which the physical education teachers engaged in caring behaviors with students who were both participants and non-participants of this study during the observation periods. Each of these behaviors was related to one of the three basic tenets of perceived caring: empathy, understanding, and responsiveness (McCroskey, 1992). McCroskey (1992) believed teacher behaviors exhibited within this realm might lead students to perceive their teacher as caring about their welfare. Since a teacher may not be able to show caring behaviors all of the time to each student, the teachers portrayed an image that suggested to the students that when in the same situation, the teacher would show similar caring behaviors. For instance, when a teacher responds to an injured student in a caring way, the students may perceive that the teacher will react in the same caring manner if they were to be injured. It is difficult for teachers to interact with each student in every class throughout the day. Thus, it is important for teachers to exhibit behaviors consistent with caring in order to be perceived as caring by their students (McCroskey, 1992).

The findings of this research indicated that physical education teachers are presented with numerous opportunities to show they care for their students. Through the use of qualitative research method, the students were able to paint a tapestry of caring behaviors as they exist in physical education. The students' perceptions of caring behaviors of their physical education teacher straddled several dimensions of caring including behaviors related to content and pedagogy and fostering interpersonal relationships.

#### *Physical Education as a Discipline that Presents Opportunities for Teacher Caring*

An overwhelming number of students responded that physical education was a discipline in which their teachers were able to enact caring behaviors toward them and other students. An analysis of the field notes and interview data revealed characteristics of the physical education program that facilitated and presented barriers to teacher caring.

Physical education is unique in the sense that students must change clothes or "dress out" in order to participate in the daily activities. The physical education teachers were required to monitor the changing rooms before and after each class period. They also positioned themselves at the entrance to each changing room. The teachers were observed continuously interacting with the students at various levels. They took the opportunity to greet as many students as possible. And they were often noted responding to students' inquiries and holding brief conversations with some students. Some of these interactions may seem brief or insignificant, but the students emphasized their importance. It is often these small interactions that lead children to show teachers care (Noddings, 1992). Students emphasized the "critical nature of the brief, almost fleeting interpersonal interactions teachers have with their students in schools day after day" (Rogers, 1994, p. 35).

The physical education teachers established daily protocols that the students were expected to follow. Protocols are a means of classroom management that Graham (2001) describes as "predetermined ways which we want the children to function in classes" (p. 36). The observed protocols included sitting in squad formation, daily warm-up exercises, dressing for physical education, and the handling of equipment. Studies have cited classroom management as a means for teachers to demonstrate caring (Bosworth, 1995, Rogers & Webb, 1991, Weinstein, 1998) by both teachers and students. While the students in this study failed to mention classroom management as a perceived caring behavior, one might conclude that the teachers'

desire to establish order can be considered caring by looking out for the well-being of the whole class and a establishing a clear set of expectations.

The nature of physical education is grounded in movement, sports, and physical activity. With this comes the teacher's opportunity to structure, evaluate, and modify students' skill execution. It is often accomplished by verbal cues and specific feedback. The students emphasized the importance of a wide range of interactions from encouragement and motivational words to specific feedback and teacher assistance to accomplish a skill or task. These perceived caring behaviors were consistent with the literature on perceived caring behaviors as stated by students and teachers.

Despite the inherent opportunities for physical educators to demonstrate caring behaviors, certain factors presented obstacles for them to enact them. A number of students reported class size as a barrier for their physical education teachers to demonstrate caring behaviors. At any given physical education period, over one hundred students participated between the two gymnasiums. Because of limited space and weather conditions, the classes often combined for large group games and activities. The researcher noted the teachers often managed these large-scale activities from the perimeters of the games. In doing so, their feedback was generally limited to non-specific statements such as "good kick" or "nice catch" and words of encouragement like "keep trying." Studies have linked large class sizes to a decrease in motor-appropriate activity in addition to the quality of student involvement and teacher interactions (Hastie & Saunders, 1998). In the context of caring, large class sizes limited the amount of teacher-student interactions, a critical element in the caring process (Noddings, 1992).

The teachers utilized outdoor facilities by setting up several sports and games throughout the allotted space. The students were able to choose in which activity they preferred to participate and did so under the supervision of one teacher. The small groups enhanced the caring process by allowing teachers to interact with smaller groups of students on a more personal level.

Few students reported having the same physical education teacher more than once during their middle school experience. They felt that if they had more time with their physical education it would enhance the caring process by strengthening the teacher-student relationship. Noddings (2002) cites continuity as an integral step in the development of caring relationships

between teachers and students. A short school year may not lend itself to the establishment of a caring relationship. But, over several years a caring relationship based on understanding, personal interest, trust, and respect can be established. These barriers need to be addressed and modified in order to enhance the caring process in physical education.

### *The Role Caring Plays in Student Participation in Physical Education*

The participants in this study generated an overall positive attitude towards physical education. Any dislike toward physical education may seem surprising since the subject is grounded in games, sports, movement, and physical activity, all of which holds a significant place in the lives of many students. A large number of the participants liked many facets of physical education including certain games, sports, and social aspects. And, some stated they only tolerated tasks such as warm-up exercises, running, and some large group games. These expressions of likes and dislikes were consistent with literature on the topic (Carlson, 1995, Luke & Sinclair, 1991, Portman, 1995). Caring behaviors were determined to be an integral part of the students' development of positive attitudes toward physical education. While no studies have determined the effect a caring physical education teacher has on attitudes towards the subject area, studies have concluded that students who hold a more positive attitude toward their physical education teacher reported a more positive view of physical education (White et. al., 2002). Gubacs (1997) found that teachers' observed actions supported their statements regarding the importance of caring in developing better student attitude toward both school and physical education. In a related study, Teven and McCroskey (1996) reported that students who perceived their teachers as caring evaluated them more favorably, evaluated the course content more favorably, and reported they learned more in the course. This magnifies the effect a caring physical education teacher has on students' attitudes toward physical education.

Students reported they appreciated an atmosphere where mistakes would not be met with negative teacher behavior. Buffy reiterated this thought as she felt it was "okay to mess up" in physical education because the teacher would not "yell at you for it." Consistent with Maslow's *Hierarchy of Needs* (Maslow, 1970), a student who feels confident a physical education teacher will address their mistakes in a caring manner will move forward to feelings of love and belongingness. In this context, a student who feels cared for will have these social needs met and will work to become an active and motivated participant in class.

The students overwhelmingly agreed that they were motivated to perform better for a physical education teacher they perceived cared for them. Their statements such as “push myself harder” and “do my best” described some of their feelings related to performing for a physical education teacher they deemed caring. While Gubacs (1997) mentioned students being more positive towards a physical education teacher perceived to exhibit caring behaviors, no studies were found establishing caring teachers as a motivating factor in physical education. Studies outside the physical education setting have established that teacher care is related to student motivation (Wentzel, 1997, Wentzel & Asher, 1995). Throughout this study, students expressed value in the teacher-student relationship. They overwhelmingly reported characteristics of positive teacher-student relationships. Skinner and Belmont (1993) noted the interpersonal relationship between teacher and student can positively influence student motivation. Thus, the importance of establishing quality teacher-student relationships in physical education along themes of care as a motivational factor cannot be underscored. Further studies investigating a correlation between student motivation and teacher care may provide insight into this issue.

Finally, the results of this study did not indicate a clear pattern of responses based on the skill level of each participant. That is, the student skill level was not determined as influencing their perceptions of physical education teachers’ caring. It can be ascertained that students at various skill levels may find certain caring behaviors to be slightly more relevant in their perceptions. For instance, a low-skilled student may focus on specific feedback and being provided assistance with a skill as integral to their perceptions of caring. Yet, these conclusions cannot be made without further research focusing on this topic.

### Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to gain insights into students’ perceptions of physical education teachers’ caring. The students described their general concept of caring as behaviors initiated by the teacher toward the student. The students initially provided narrowly defined conceptions of caring. These conceptions broadened when applied to teachers, specifically their physical education teachers. The researcher sought to describe the perceptions students have regarding caring behaviors exhibited toward them by their physical education teachers. The results indicated that multiple opportunities existed for physical education teachers to show they care for their students. Student responses noted multiple caring behaviors existed along dimensions of content and pedagogy and fostering interpersonal relationships. The researcher

determined that factors existed that facilitated and presented barriers to the caring process in physical education. These barriers must be examined and alleviated in order for further enhancement of the caring process. Furthermore, students expressed generally positive attitudes toward physical education. Physical education teachers' caring was determined to be a positive factor in students liking physical education and the students' desire to perform their best in physical education. In addition, many of the perceived caring behaviors reflected behaviors cited as those determined to increase student motivation. A positive teacher-student relationship highlighted by caring behaviors may enhance student motivational processes in the physical education setting.

#### Directions for Future Research

Further investigations regarding the concept of caring in physical education should take place since very little research exists. Twelve middle school students were the participants for this study. Further investigations of elementary and high school students' perceptions of caring may add further insights into this topic from their perspective. Secondly, given that caring behaviors exist within the teacher-student relationship, future researchers could examine veteran and novice teachers' perceptions of caring to determine commonalities and inconsistencies with student perceptions.

Physical education programs focus a great deal on teaching physical skills, rules, and strategies of games, physical activities, and sports in addition to classroom management skills. Therefore, students within a physical education teacher education program may emphasize these areas as essential to effective teaching in physical education while ignoring the importance of the teacher-student relationship. Further investigations could closely examine the role caring plays in the teacher preparation process and the existing beliefs preservice teachers have regarding their conceptions of caring.

Studies on caring in physical education seem to be of legitimate value in light of the significance of the teacher-student relationship. The field would benefit greatly from further investigations into the role caring plays in physical education. As Rogers (1994) states, "without someone caring, it is difficult for children to dream" (p. 47).

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**APPENDIX A**  
Interview Protocol

1. Describe for your school setting. How long have you been at your school?
2. I say the word “caring,” what do you think about?
3. Can you describe someone that cares about you in your life? What are they like?
4. How would you describe a caring teacher?
5. How do teachers in your school show that they care about you and other students? How do they show they don’t care?
6. You mentioned (possibly) specific teachers. Can you tell me more about how these teachers show that they care about you and other students?
7. Is physical education a class where teachers to show caring behaviors? When does this happen the most?
8. Do you think your physical education teachers care about you?
9. How do they (physical ed. teachers) show they care about you and other students?
10. Do you think that they do not care about you at any point in time?
11. Of all the physical education teachers you have had since kindergarten until now, who is the one you liked the most and why?
12. When you say you “liked” a specific physical education teacher, does this mean t that the teacher is a “good” teacher? A “caring” teacher?
13. Can a physical education teacher be a good teacher but not a caring teacher?
14. Is there anything that relates to physical education that might affect whether your physical education teacher cares about you?
15. Is there anything about physical education class that does not allow a physical education teacher to show they care?
16. Do you like physical education when you have a teacher you think cares about you?
17. How would you feel about physical education class if you thought your teacher did not care about you?
18. How do you feel when you perform a skill successfully and you know your physical education teacher cares about you? Does not care about you?
19. Would you perform better in physical education class if you thought your physical education teacher cared about you?

## APPENDIX B

### Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University Parent Permission Form

Dear \_\_\_\_\_:

Your son/daughter \_\_\_\_\_ is invited to participate in a physical education research project designed to study the concept of caring physical education teachers as perceived by students. Physical education includes a very high rate of student/teacher interaction thus providing inherent opportunities for teachers to demonstrate caring behaviors. Since the concept of caring has not been widely explored in the field of health and physical education, it is hoped that the information gathered in this study will play a part in identifying caring behaviors that exist in the physical education setting.

If you choose to allow your son or daughter to participate, they will be asked to participate in one audiotaped interview. A follow-up interview may be necessary to clarify any statements that were unclear in the initial interview and will be audiotaped as well. These interviews will be conducted in a safe, secure area of the school as designated by the administration. I will also visit your son or daughter's health and physical education class to observe any caring behaviors that were described during the interview process.

Please be assured that participation in this study will in no way affect your child's grades. I will treat each participant and the data collected in this study in a confidential manner. Every effort will be made to protect the confidentiality of the student participants' identities. I will include fake names (pseudonyms) in place of the names of each participant along with the names of any teachers, students, administrators, and schools. Your child's teachers and administrators will not have access to any of the data collected throughout the course of this study. In addition, your child may have the audiotaped interview once after the transcription process is complete.

By signing below, you indicate that you have read and understood the informed consent and conditions of this research study and that you give your voluntary permission that your child participate in this study. Please note that if your child participates in this study, they are free to withdraw from participation at any point during the course of the study. They may withdraw from the study by contacting me or the project sponsor listed at the bottom of this form. *If you choose to allow your child to participate, please have them return the permission form in the sealed envelope to their advisory teacher.*

If you have any questions concerning any aspect of this study, you may contact:

Investigator: Dean M. Ravizza (540) 951-0360/231-5029

Study Sponsor: Richard K. Stratton (540) 231-5617

IRB Chair: David M. Moore, DVM (540) 231-4991

IRB Departmental Reviewer: Jan Nespor (540) 231-8327

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

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parent/Guardian Signature and Date

Thank you for your willingness to consider having your child participate in this project.

Sincerely,

Dean M. Ravizza

By following Montgomery County Public School's guidelines for research in the schools, I must interview your son/daughter after school. I plan to conduct one interview per day beginning Thursday, October 14, 2004 – Friday, November 05, 2004 from 2:45-3:45pm. In order to work around your schedule, I ask you to list three days that would allow your son/daughter to stay after school for the interview. Thank you again for your time and consideration.

First choice date: \_\_\_\_\_

Second choice date: \_\_\_\_\_

Third choice date: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX C

Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University

### Student Assent Form

**Title of Project:** Students' Perceptions of Caring Physical Education Teachers

**Investigator:** Dean M. Ravizza

Dear Student:

You are invited to participate in this research study. The reason for this study is to find out your thoughts and feelings about the idea of caring as it relates to your teachers-physical education teachers in particular. You are being asked to join me because you are an eighth-grader who has attended your school for at least two full school years prior to this study and you participate in the general physical education program. My hope is that this study will help teachers understand how students feel their physical education teachers care for them in their physical education classes.

For this study, I will ask you to complete one interview with me and the possibility of a follow-up interview if I do not understand something that you say and want you to explain it to me. For the interview, we will meet after school depending on your schedule. The interview will last for approximately 45 minutes. During this time, I will ask you questions concerning your thoughts on caring as it relates to your teachers-physical education teachers in particular. I will ask you how you think a physical education teacher cares for you as a student and what behaviors they show to you that makes you think they care for you. If you choose, you do not have to answer all of the questions. You may also ask me questions anytime during the study, or you may wish to add something that I do not ask.

For the interviews, we will meet in a quiet, safe location in the school. The interview, and any follow-up interview, will be audiotape-recorded so I can remember what you said in the interview. After I have typed the interview notes, I will meet with you so you may look over the notes. At this point, I may ask you a few questions if I did not understand something you said to me. Also, you will have the opportunity to make any changes by adding or taking out words. I will keep the interview tape, interview notes, and field observation notes in a secure location in my office or home. Only a peer examiner will have access to the typewritten notes and tapes. I will destroy or erase the tapes at the completion of the final research study or hand it to you wish to have it. The final report of this study may be shared at meetings, conferences, or in written publications/reports.

After the interviews, I will come to your physical education class a few times to look for some caring behaviors that you described in your interviews. I will only be an observer in the gym. The teachers and other students will not know why I am there observing the class.

A false name (or pseudonym) will replace your name in the interview, field notes, and final report. That means if I write this information in a report, I will not use your name, but a fake name instead. If you say any teachers' names, I will replace those names with false names as well. I will also use false names for your middle school and county. However, since this is an interview and I might use your actual words at times in the written reports; someone may be able to recognize you by remembering the experiences you tell me. I will make every effort to protect your identity in the written report by the use of false names.

Finally, you may drop out of the study at anytime. If you choose to drop out, you may tell me when I come to the school or you may contact me (231-5029 or [dravizza@vt.edu](mailto:dravizza@vt.edu)) or Dr. Richard Stratton, the project advisor. You may call his at his office at 231-5617 or e-mail her at [rstratto@vt.edu](mailto:rstratto@vt.edu). He will then let me know that you wish to drop out of the study.

## **X. Subject's Permission**

I have read the permission form and understand the conditions of this project. I have had all of my questions answered. I have received a copy of this form. I hereby acknowledge the above and give my voluntary consent to participate in the study.

---

Student's name and signature

Date

If you have any questions concerning any aspect of this research study, you may contact:

Investigator: Dean M. Ravizza – (540) 951-0360/231-5029

Study Sponsor: Richard K. Stratton - (540) 231-5617

IRB Chair: David M. Moore, DVM - (540) 231-4991

IRB Departmental Reviewer: Jan Nespor – (540) 231-8327

**APPENDIX D**

Student Skill Rating Form

**Period One**

| <b>Student Name</b>           | <b>High-Skilled</b> | <b>Average-Skilled</b> | <b>Low-Skilled</b> |
|-------------------------------|---------------------|------------------------|--------------------|
| 1. Jake Arsenal (pseudonym)   |                     | X                      |                    |
| 2. Betty Brighton (pseudonym) | X                   |                        |                    |
| 3. Cain Charlton (pseudonym)  |                     |                        | X                  |
| 4.                            |                     |                        |                    |
| 5.                            |                     |                        |                    |
| 6.                            |                     |                        |                    |
| 7.                            |                     |                        |                    |
| 8.                            |                     |                        |                    |
| 9.                            |                     |                        |                    |
| 10.                           |                     |                        |                    |
| 11.                           |                     |                        |                    |
| 12.                           |                     |                        |                    |
| 13.                           |                     |                        |                    |
| 14.                           |                     |                        |                    |
| 15.                           |                     |                        |                    |
| 16.                           |                     |                        |                    |
| 17.                           |                     |                        |                    |
| 18.                           |                     |                        |                    |
| 19.                           |                     |                        |                    |
| 20.                           |                     |                        |                    |
| 21.                           |                     |                        |                    |
| 22.                           |                     |                        |                    |
| 23.                           |                     |                        |                    |
| 24.                           |                     |                        |                    |
| 25.                           |                     |                        |                    |
| 26.                           |                     |                        |                    |
| 27.                           |                     |                        |                    |
| 28.                           |                     |                        |                    |

**APPENDIX E**

Student Questionnaire

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

Please do your best to answer the following questions honestly and in your own words. There are no right or wrong answers, just your thoughts and opinions. I will not share these answers with anyone.

1) How would you best define the word “caring?”

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Thank you very much for your help. I appreciate you taking time to help me with this important research. Sincerely, D.M. Ravizza

## Curriculum Vitae

### **Dean Michael Ravizza**

13700 Copper Croft Run, NW  
Blacksburg, VA 24060  
(540) 231-5029  
[dravizza@vt.edu](mailto:dravizza@vt.edu)

- EXPERIENCE:**     **Graduate Teaching Assistant, Health Promotion and Physical Education Program Area**  
Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University  
(2002 – 2005)
- Elementary Physical Education Coordinator & Instructor**, Escuela Campo Alegre, Caracas, VE (1999-2002)
- Elementary Physical Education Coordinator & Instructor**  
American International School, Budapest, Hungary  
(1996-1999)
- Elementary Physical Education Coordinator, Instructor & Activities Director**  
Int. School of Tanganyika, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania  
(1992-1996)
- EDUCATION:**     **Doctor of Philosophy**, Curriculum and Instruction  
Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University (2005)
- Master of Science**, Exercise and Sport Sciences  
George Mason University (1992)
- Bachelor of Science**, Health and Physical Education  
George Mason University (1991)