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Friendship in Inclusive Physical Education

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Social interaction and development of friendships between children with and without a disability are often proposed as potential outcomes of inclusive education. Physical activity specialists assert that exercise and sport environments may be conducive to social and friendship outcomes. This study investigated friendship in inclusive physical education from the perspective of students with ($n = 8$) and without ($n = 8$) physical disabilities. All participants attended a reversely integrated school and were interviewed using a semistructured, open-ended format. An adapted version of Weiss, Smith, and Theeboom's (1996) interview guide exploring perceptions of peer relationships in the sport domain was used. Four conceptual categories emerged from the analysis: development of friendship, best friend, preferred physical activities and outcomes, and dealing with disability. The results demonstrated the key characteristics of best friends and the influential role they play.

Inclusive educational settings purport to have attitudinal, social, educational, and behavioral benefits (Sherrill, Heikinaro-Johansson, & Slininger, 1994; Stainback, Stainback, & Jackson, 1992). The extent and nature of social interactions among students with and without disabilities have been investigated in physical education. Both positive and negative social experiences have been described. Blinde and McCallister (1998) reported that some students with a disability felt unwelcome in physical education while Goodwin and Watkinson (2000) described supportive and positive interactions with classmates on some occasions, as well as social isolation at other times. Hodge and colleagues found that students with a disability were often socially isolated (Place & Hodge, 2001), but when infrequent social interactions with classmates occurred, they were usually pleasant, friendly, and respectful (Butler & Hodge, 2004). Friendship is a dimension of social interaction and a goal of inclusion (Hamre-Nietupski, Hendrickson, Nietupski, & Shokoohi-Yekta, 1994), but it has been largely ignored in adapted physical education and sport and exercise psychology (Smith, 2003). In a study of inclusion and empowerment, Hutzler, Fliess, Chacham, and Van den Auweele (2002) described friends among the supporting factors of inclusion, but the nature and extent of the friendship was not described.

Developing and maintaining close intimate friendships satisfies the universal need for interpersonal relationships (Weiss, 1974). Friendships are found in virtu-

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ally all life domains and play a crucial role in social development (Asher & Parker, 1989; Buhrmester, 1996), psychological adjustment (Berndt, 1992), and personal well-being (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Many researchers have conceptualized friendship as a multidimensional construct, providing a plethora of psycho-social benefits, such as self validation and ego support (Hartup & Stevens, 1999; Parker & Asher, 1993), emotional security (Berndt, 1992; Parker & Asher, 1993), help and guidance (Parker & Asher, 1993), reliable alliance (Weiss, 1974), a source of intimate disclosure (Berndt, 1992; Parker & Asher, 1993), and companionship and stimulation (Furman & Buhrmester, 1985; Parker & Asher, 1993). In addition to the psycho-social benefits that friendship provides, friends also have the ability to profoundly influence an individual's development, behavior patterns, and attitudes (Berndt, 1992, 2002; Parker & Asher, 1993; Smith, 2003; Weiss & Stuntz, 2004).

Sport, exercise, and physical activity settings may afford opportunities for children with and without disabilities to interact and develop friendships (Smith, 2003). Research on participation motives in sport, exercise, and physical activity has frequently identified the need to be with, or to make new friends, as a major motive (Smith, 2003; Weiss, Smith, & Theeboom, 1996). Peers and friends are among the influential social agents of physical activity participation, along with coaches, parents, and teachers. Physical activity may provide an important vehicle for promoting positive peer relations, and thus it is somewhat surprising that there is very little research on peer group acceptance and friendships in these domains (Weiss & Stuntz, 2004).

Friendship is a close, bilateral, dyadic relationship (Weiss & Stuntz, 2004) and can be viewed from several theoretical perspectives. The work of Weiss et al. (1996) is conceptually pertinent. Their research was grounded in developmental psychology, which suggests peer groups can bear significant influence on children's psychosocial development in areas such as motivation, self-perceptions, and affect. The researchers investigated peer relationships of children and adolescents by conducting in-depth interviews of their best friend in sports. The quantity and diversity of their responses suggested that sport was intimately linked to the development, maintenance, and enhancement of peer relationships. Furthermore, Martin and Smith (2002) examined the quality of friendship in youth disability sport. Their findings indicated that disability sport provided athletes with an opportunity to interact with a best friend who provided a variety of important self-enhancing benefits.

If sport and physical activity provide opportunities for friendship development, it is possible that inclusive physical education has potential for encouraging development of friendships between children with and without disabilities. Previous research has investigated social interaction in inclusive settings, but not the nature of friendship per se. The purpose of the study was to investigate friendship in inclusive physical education from the perspective of students with and without disabilities. The following specific questions were addressed. First, do friendships between students with and without disabilities actually develop? Second, what factors support or function as barriers in friendships that emerge? Third, do friends in inclusive physical education play an important role in critical self-perceptions such as competence, self-esteem, and enjoyment as suggested in sport psychology? Fourth, is inclusive physical education associated with individuals with a

disability being socially isolated or having difficulty developing social relationships (Vaughn, Elbaum, & Schumm, 1996)?

Method

Participants

The participants were eight children with a physical disability (PWD) and eight children without a physical disability (PWOD) from grades 4, 5, and 6. All attended a reversely integrated school in a large metropolitan area. The school was originally designed for students with a physical disability but for 30 years has admitted children without disabilities, resulting in almost equal numbers of students with and without a disability in each classroom. Some of the students with a disability were not performing academically at grade level but were selected on the basis of social maturity and the ability to articulate thoughts, feelings, and attitudes. Physical education was offered as a fully inclusive program, consisting of two periods per week, one in aquatics and one in the gymnasium. The physical education teacher had seven years of experience at the school and constantly adapted the program to ensure social interaction of all children, while simultaneously providing opportunity for individual skill development. The pseudonym "ABC School" will be used.

Informed consent documents were distributed to all 9–12-year-old students from grades 4, 5, and 6 with and without a physical disability who were able to verbally express their thoughts as identified by the researcher and the students' classroom teachers. Parents/Guardians and the children themselves were requested to sign a form indicating willingness to participate. Table 1 provides a summary of each participant, including age, sex, physical disability, use of assistive devices, and race.

Interview

Data were obtained through semistructured open-ended interviews (Patton, 2002; Rubin & Rubin, 1995). A four-part interview guide that explored peer relationships in physical education from perspectives of the participants was adapted from the interview guide of Weiss et al., (1996). Overall, the guide was modified to address friendship in physical education rather than sport. The first portion included broad introductory questions concerning experiences in school and physical education and was designed to initiate discussion and establish trust between the interviewer and participant (e.g., What are some of the games and sports you like to play? Why?). The second part included key questions based on the participants' best friend, inspired by Weiss et al. Specifically, the questions addressed the participant's best friend (e.g., What are some of the best things about your friendship with John?) and friendship in physical education (e.g., Imagine (physical education teacher) has organized a game like basketball or soccer and you are playing on the same team as your best friend. What kinds of things would you like her or him to say or do?). The students were asked to answer the questions with reference to their best friend. By selecting one friend whom the participants consider their best friend, they were discouraged from responding on the

Table 1 Description of Participants

Age	Gender	(Dis) Ability	Assistive Device	Race
Participants Without a Disability				
11y 0m	f	—	—	Caucasian
9y 9m	f	—	—	Caucasian
11y 4m	f	—	—	Caucasian
10y 3m	f	—	—	Caucasian
11y 0m	f	—	—	Caucasian
11y 3m	f	—	—	Caucasian
12y 5m	f	—	—	Hispanic
10y 5m	f	—	—	Caucasian
Participants With a Disability				
10y 7m	f	CP—Diaplegia	walker/manual wheelchair	Hispanic
11y11m	m	CP—Hemiplegia	ankle-foot orthotic (AFO)	Black
12y 0m	m	CP—Diaplegia	AFO	Caucasian
12y11m	m	Neuromuscular disease	power wheelchair	Black
11y11m	f	CP—Quadriplegia	power wheelchair	Caucasian
9y 5m	f	CP—Quadriplegia	manual wheelchair	Caucasian
13y 0m	f	Neuromuscular disease	power wheelchair	Black
11y11m	f	CP—Quadriplegia	Walker & AFO	Caucasian

basis of an internal representation of a stereotypic or idealized friendship or on a mental composite of several different friends (Parker & Asher, 1993).

The third part included a summary question that reviewed previous topics to validate answers previously given (e.g., In your opinion, what is the most important quality to have as a best friend in physical education?). The fourth section included concluding questions that allowed the participant to make additional comments, to alter any answer or idea, and to ask the interviewer any questions (e.g., Is there anything else you would like to add?). Following Rubin and Rubin (1995), interview probes and follow-up questions were used to elicit clear, in-depth responses, to pursue the central themes discovered, to elaborate on the context of answers, and to explore the implications concerning conceptions of a best friendship in inclusive physical education.

Procedure

Each child was interviewed individually at ABC School in a quiet room for a period of 1/2–1 hr, as suggested by Weiss et al. (1996). Several preliminary procedures occurred before the interview. The participant was given general instructions concerning the interview procedure (e.g., four sections, estimate of interview duration), informed of the confidentiality of the analysis, and reminded that the interviews would be audio taped.

Data Analysis. The objective of our analysis was to build and organize a system of categories that would reflect friendship in an inclusive physical education setting. The procedures set forth by Côté and colleagues (Côté, Salmela, & Russell, 1995; Côté, Salmela, Baria, & Russell, 1993) were used. This method consisted of four steps: meaning units, tags, properties, and themes.

Raw data quotations, phrases, or paragraphs that represented one conception or idea were divided into single units of information known as *meaning units*. A total of 550 meaning units were identified from PWOD and 460 from PWD (Table 2). Second, each meaning unit received a *tag* based on content. A total of 49 tags emerged. Third, the tags were examined for relatedness and arranged into distinct higher order groups designated as *properties* (Côté et al., 1993). A new name was assigned to each property based on the commonalities of the tags shared. Ten properties were created from the 49 tags. Finally, similar properties were combined to create themes, each of which represented one “pool of meaning.” The 10 properties produced four larger themes. Completion of the inductive process occurred once sources of information were exhausted and categories were saturated, so that no further meaningful groupings could be inductively created (Côté et al., 1995).

Trustworthiness. To ensure trustworthiness, this study adhered to frequently recommended protocol (Eder & Fingerson, 2003; Lincoln & Guba, 1985) including prolonged engagement, persistent observation, peer review, pilot study, and member checks.

Prolonged engagement refers to time spent by the researcher to learn and become acquainted with the culture and surroundings of the participant, as well as to build trust with the participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Specifically, the interviewer worked at the ABC School for two years as a physical education assistant, enabling her to introduce the interviews in a personal manner and to gain insight into some of the basic communicative norms (i.e., words, phrases, and culture; Eder & Fingerson, 2003).

Peer review was also implemented to enhance the credibility of the study (Côté et al., 1995). A neutral peer assistant examined 25% of the meaning units and attempted to correctly assign each unit with the tag formerly established by the researcher. This process resulted in a reliability rate of 87%. Subsequently, discrepancies between the researcher and peer assistant were addressed; for example, it was agreed that two tags would merge with similar tags due to their repetitive nature. The same process was completed for the properties. The peer assistant assigned the 49 tags into 10 properties. A reliability rate of 91% was achieved. A rate of 100% reliability was achieved for the four themes.

Pilot interviews were conducted with three children, allowing the interviewer to rehearse and to receive feedback regarding (a) interaction style, (b) use of probes, (c) time management, (d) video and audio taping, and (e) effectiveness of the interview guide (Patton, 2002). The pilot interviews were reviewed by one of the secondary authors who had extensive background in this area and who was able to provide feedback to improve the researcher’s interviewing skills.

Lastly, member checks were conducted on two occasions. Immediately following the interview, the participant was given the opportunity to add or alter any previous response, concept, or idea presented in the interview. In addition, the

Table 2 Categories and Properties With Frequencies as Expressed by Each Participant

Categories and Properties	n	Participants Without a Disability								Participants With a Disability								
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	n	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
<i>Development of Friendship</i>	66	16	9	4	4	6	9	8	10	54	7	6	4	7	9	12	5	4
Compatible / elected playmates	26	6	3	1	1	2	6	2	5	13	3	2	1	2	0	2	2	1
Building of friendship	31	8	6	2	2	3	2	4	4	28	4	2	2	4	7	3	3	3
Facilitation of friendship	9	2	0	1	1	1	1	2	1	13	0	2	1	1	2	7	0	0
<i>Best Friend</i>	291	34	32	34	47	32	42	33	37	244	28	21	37	28	43	34	31	22
Description	80	7	12	7	15	7	12	7	13	67	7	5	10	8	14	9	7	7
Interaction	98	13	10	15	12	10	13	15	10	51	4	5	3	10	10	8	5	6
Affective outcomes	113	14	10	12	20	15	17	11	14	126	17	11	24	10	19	17	19	9
<i>Preferred Physical Activities and Outcomes</i>	176	15	17	22	25	22	27	26	22	138	14	16	24	24	15	21	18	6
Preferred / enjoyed activities	89	6	7	15	14	9	14	13	11	66	3	10	9	10	8	13	8	5
Values & affective outcomes of physical education	87	9	10	7	11	13	13	13	11	72	11	6	15	14	7	8	10	1
<i>Dealing with Disability</i>	17	3	1	0	5	0	5	2	1	21	6	2	0	3	6	1	0	3
(Dis) ability awareness	13	1	0	0	4	0	5	2	1	18	3	2	0	3	6	1	0	3
Adaptation of activity	4	2	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	3	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	550	68	59	60	81	60	83	69	70	457	55	45	65	62	73	68	54	35

¹ PWD designates participant/person with a disability.

² PWOD designates participant/person without a disability.

interviewer and participant met one week later for additional clarifications, deletions, and approval of the transcript (Patton, 2002).

Results

Four higher-order themes called Development of Friendship, Best Friend, Preferred Physical Activities and Outcomes of Physical Education, and Dealing with Disability emerged from this analysis (see Table 2). The same themes were generated for both groups. Pseudonyms have been inserted into quotes where real names were used to conceal the identity and maintain the confidentiality of the participants and their best friend. In other instances a number has been added to PWD or PWOD to indicate a specific person.

The number of meaning units from PWOD ranged from 59 (PWOD2) to 83 (PWOD6). A similar range occurred with the PWDs, from 35 (PWD8) to 73 (PWD5). Although, PWD expressed slightly fewer ideas than PWOD, the difference does not indicate that their perception of friendship and inclusive physical education was less extensive. They were able to respond to the interview guide as proficiently as the PWOD. The slight difference in frequency of meaning units may be attributed to differences in life experiences, thereby influencing their conceptions and expectations of friendship.

Development of Friendship

This category represented the dynamic process of initiating, building, and maintaining friendships. Development of friendship accounted for 12% of the meaning units of both PWOD and PWD. This theme consisted of three properties: compatible/elected playmates, building of friendship, and facilitation of friendship.

Compatible/elected playmates included companions other than the best friend with whom participants engaged. These playmates varied from outside-of-school friends, family, and neighbors to in-school classmates and friends. One PWOD in particular expressed the value of playing with all students at the ABC School regardless of their differences.

At recess I like it that everybody takes turns playing with the ABC School regulars and including them. At my old school there was one disabled kid and they would always exclude him, so it's like really nice that everybody at the ABC School plays together and gets along. (PWOD6)

Unlike PWOD, the PWD limited their comments to school playmates. One PWD did not specify anyone at school with whom he liked to engage, "There is no one in my class that I like to play with" (PWD4).

Building of friendship encompassed the dynamic psychosocial chain of events through which friendships were initiated, formulated, and cultivated. All PWOD reported that they met their best friend at the ABC School, with the exception of one participant who indicated sport. Six of the eight PWD met their best friend at the ABC School and two at residential summer Camp ABC.

Best friends were not restricted to the two groups. Six of eight of the PWOD identified their best friend as a student without a disability. The best friend of

PWOD4 and PWOD6 had a physical disability, both with cerebral palsy who they met at school. Five of the PWD nominated a best friend with a disability at school, while PWD1 and PWD5 named a student without a disability. A camp counselor was selected by PWD6.

Awareness of the concept of a best friend, beyond the characteristics of their personal best friend, was clearly articulated by all participants. PWOD made reference to ideas relating to affective outcomes and interactions as well as time spent with a best friend. For example, "I know when I have a best friend because they [best friends] care about me, listen to me, do things with me, and they don't just ignore and don't do anything" (PWOD4). In addition, several PWOD acknowledged expressions of help and guidance, care and concern, and loyalty. PWD expressed many of the same ideas but also noted that best friends look beyond a disability.

I know I have a best friend when they help out, they play with you, and they don't care that I'm in a walker. They [best friends] understand that I can do some things better than them and they can do some things better than me. (PWD1)

Facilitation of friendship included circumstances and involvement of others that enabled or prevented friendship growth and persistence. Many PWOD spoke about physical barriers preventing them from spending time with friends (best friend or a friend) who had a physical disability. "It would be difficult for some of my friends other than Julie to come to my house because I have stairs and with the electric wheelchair it's pretty hard" (PWOD3).

Many of the ABC students are bused from the city's extremities, making it additionally difficult to arrange social opportunities outside of school. "I just play with Frank at school because I live really far and it would take forever to get there" (PWD3).

Parental involvement in best friendship was also noted as a barrier to interaction by both the PWOD and the PWD. "Well it's hard for me to get over to Eddie's house without a car. My dad works and he gets tired. But we can talk on the phone" (PWD2).

I don't see Melissa outside of school because my parents don't let kids come to our house without knowing their parents. Well like if our parents can meet each other and get to know each other a bit and maybe if they feel comfortable with it they could let Melissa come over to play. (PWOD8)

Best Friend

The theme Best Friend focused on positive and negative characteristics and attributes of one's best friend. It generated the greatest number of meaning units, 53%, for both groups. Best Friend included three properties: description, interaction, and affective outcomes.

Description of best friend included personal attributes and qualities. While some participants described physical characteristics, positive personality traits were more frequently expressed. Some examples of traits valued by the PWOD

were energetic, active, kind, nice, caring, attentive, trustworthy, helpful, playful, friendly, lovable, and funny. They also noted the awareness and sensitivity exhibited by their best friend toward peers with a disability.

A few participants from both groups recounted some negative best friend characteristics or specific negative best friend actions which occurred infrequently. For example, "Lisa bothers me sometimes when she does things I don't like. Well like she'll bother me or she'll just be smart with me, but it's not often" (PWOD4).

Conflict resolution in best friendship surfaced as affective outcomes in best friendship for both groups; however, PWOD expressed these aspects three times more often than did the PWD. Reflections by PWOD suggested that conflict seldom exists with a best friend, and on the rare occasion that arguments ensued, they were almost always resolved.

We don't really fight that much. I don't remember the last time we had a fight because Ashleigh is the sort of person who hates being in fights. Like if she could fight with somebody, she doesn't know what to say like she just stays out of it. She tries to fix the problems. (PWOD1)

Interaction with a best friend involved pastimes and activities at school and at home. Of significance was the location of activities and pastimes. All participants engaged with their best friends in class, at recess, and during lunchtime. Six of the PWOD interacted with their best friend at each other's house while only four of the PWD did so. While all participants engaged in a variety of activities with their best friends, differences were observed in the types of activities. PWOD spent time actively playing physical games and sports with their best friends at home, while PWD more frequently spent time being physically inactive at home; for example, they would play board games, watch movies, and engage in computer activities.

Time spent with a best friend was also significant. Many participants reported spending as much time as they could with their best friend. "Michelle and I want to go to do stuff and everything. We always want to be around each other and spend as much time together as we possibly can" (PWD5). Two PWOD noted several occasions in which the time spent with their best friend with a disability was restricted. At the ABC School several participants with a disability spent time in therapies or in a bicycle program at recess. This prevented interacting with their best friend.

Affective outcomes with a best friend pertained to feelings, attitudes, values, and social behaviors. Both groups described anticipated feelings such as sadness and loneliness if their best friend were to move as well as missing someone to play with, to talk to, to have fun with, and to joke with. Relationship benefits from friendships were noted frequently. These included companionship and stimulation, care and concern, sharing, disclosing thoughts, conflict resolution, help and guidance, and humorous interactions.

She's my top friend because she's actually a best friend to me and I like best friends that see what's inside and that's what counts. She always sees what's inside and she asks me what's the matter and listens to what I want to say. (PWD5)

PWOD stressed more importance on sharing things in common with their best friend than did the PWD. The following quotation is an example:

It's sort of like Joanne and I are twins but we don't look the same, like we could probably switch houses and our parents wouldn't notice. It's really weird. Like one time I said, "Okay, you're going to freak out because I like this food!" and I told her that I like dipping marshmallows in peanut butter, it tastes like Reeces Pieces. She said, "I love doing that!" It's so funny because we always make stuff sound really disgusting and everyone's like, "Eewww-weeee!" and we'll say, "Ohhhh, that's so good." (PWOD5)

Disclosing thoughts, feelings and secrets were highlighted as meaningful interactions by both groups. "Sometimes when someone hurt my feelings or when I felt like I wasn't wanted somewhere, Joanne won't like start laughing or something. We'll always share stories and our deepest feelings and stuff" (PWOD5). "I tell my friends personal stuff, like if something is bothering me or I like somebody or stuff" (PWD1).

Best friends also served as sources of help and guidance. Two forms of help and guidance surfaced, instrumental and emotional. Helping with homework or providing physical assistance were examples of instrumental help. "My best friends help me get into my walker and they turn the chair" (PWD1). Emotional help would be offering advice on how to get along with parents, teachers, and other peers.

Well if I'm feeling like sad or something Wendy makes me feel better. If I'm feeling sad or mad about something she'll help me like forget about it. She just sees it happening. (PWOD2)

Finally, both groups recalled instances where they engaged in humorous behavior with their best friend, suggesting its value in their relationship.

When me and Ashleigh talk, we just say things very randomly like, "Potato!" or sometimes we have little fights. Well, not fights that are real, but we just bug each other for fun. We'll randomly say, "You're a pineapple!" and then after she's like, "Oh, you're a tomato!" or something like that. (PWOD1)

Acceptance of best friends' shortcomings was also identified as a dimension of friendship. For instance, if a PWOD argued with their best friend they articulated that the disagreement did not provide the grounds to terminate the friendship. Furthermore, conflict with a best friend was resolved with strategies including playing games to decide between two options, talking it over, apologizing, and in some cases just forgetting about the argument.

Preferred Physical Activities and Outcomes of Physical Education

This category represented preferred activities engaged in for interest and pleasure and associated feelings, attitudes, and values. It constituted 32% of the data for PWOD and 31% for PWD. There were two properties, preferred/enjoyed activities and values and affective outcomes of physical education.

Preferred/enjoyed physical activities were described in three contexts by both groups: community, school recess, and school physical education. At the community level, six PWOD expressed frequent involvement in recreational or competitive sport. Not one of the PWD participated in organized sport outside of school although several expressed a desire to be involved.

All participants took part in games and sports at home. PWOD liked games such as soccer, football, basketball, and hockey, while the PWD were involved in adapted hockey, adapted handball, ball games, and dancing. Yet, PWD described many sedentary activities such as computer and video games, and watching TV. Specifically, PWD4 and PWD7 made reference to a lack of involvement in physical activity at home. "At home I don't really play sports. I like to play on the computer. I like to play video games. I like to play my game-boy advance. I like to watch TV" (PWD7).

All participants listed a multitude of games and sports that they preferred and enjoyed in the context of recess, although the list generated by PWD was not as extensive as that of PWOD. Furthermore, some PWD participated in the organized bicycle and gait trainer programs at recess.

Well at recess sometimes I do exercises, but right now I really, really want to focus on running in my gait trainer because everybody can swim in my class and I think that they swim very good but the challenge for me is the running because it pumps up your heart, you've got to keep focused. (PWD6)

Regrettably, some PWD were sedentary at recess, and one expressed spending recess alone. "I don't usually play any sports at recess. I spend recess alone, like usually I just wheel around and like look at what everybody is doing." (PWD4)

Participants expressed a plethora of preferred games and sports in physical education. They also articulated several benefits of physical activity regardless of context: skill development, knowledge acquisition, exercise, social interaction, and friendship development.

Values and affective outcomes of physical education included specific feelings, attitudes, and social behaviors experienced by children in relation to their best friend in physical education. Most frequently reported were instances of encouragement and reinforcement, help and guidance, and team play. Encouragement and reinforcement accounted for 25% of the values and outcomes reported by PWOD and 35% by PWD. Both verbal gestures such as, "good job," "nice pass," "great work," "keep on going," and "you can do this" and physical gestures, such as high fives, were reported as sources of encouragement and reinforcement.

Sometimes when we are in the gym Joanne will say, "How'd you do that?" or, "That was like really cool!" or "Can you teach me how to do that?" It makes me feel cool, like I'm really good something. (PWOD5)

Help and guidance also accounted for a large proportion of the values and outcomes noted by both PWOD and PWD, 24% and 29%, respectively. Instances of physical assistance, skill and game play instruction, providing a chance to try, strategy instruction, and looking out for one another were all identified as important sources of instrumental help and guidance. PWD reported more instances of

physical assistance, whereas PWOD valued skill, strategy, and game play instruction as sources of guidance.

Dealing With Disability

Dealing with Disability category depicted the means by which individuals cope with their own perceived lack of ability, as well as that of others. The two properties were (dis) ability awareness and adaptation of activity. This category accounted for the fewest meaning units, 3% for PWOD and 4.5% for PWD, but included some very insightful comments.

(Dis) ability awareness was defined as the perceived ability or lack of ability (resulting from impairment) to perform within an expected range for an individual. Specific ideas expressed by both groups toward their best friend and peers with a disability, included concepts such as regard and acceptance of differences, identification of abilities and challenges, and sense of admiration and respect.

Lisa doesn't care if her legs aren't as strong as ours. She wants to be like us so badly, and she can show that she can do it. She can swim with her legs, there's no difference even though her legs are not as strong as ours. (PWOD4)

Although some PWD admitted their best friend occasionally doubted their abilities, more often than not they acknowledged that he/she recognized their capabilities.

Anne understands that I can do some things better than them because they'll say, "Wow you're actually very good at that!" like rock climbing or horseback riding. . . . But sometimes I can do more than my friends and sometimes I can do less than them, but I also think because it's adapted for me I can do it. (PWD1)

Recognition of disability challenges were also highlighted by both groups. They recognized prejudice, unfairness, and injustice. One PWD described the discrimination she confronts on a daily basis.

I have enough courage to go ask others, "Could I be your friend?" and everything and if they say, "No," it doesn't matter. To me it doesn't matter. It's okay if they think that the wheelchair only matters. It doesn't matter to me. . . . People say that I'm in a wheelchair and that I'm dumb and everything, but I'm not dumb. I won't even listen to them. I'm learning the same way as they learn. (PWD5)

Adaptation of activity emerged from both groups who commented on activities to promote inclusion and participation.

While participating in physical education, I think it's important to be helping the ABC School regulars [students with a disability] play, and trying to make the rules fair for everyone. Like when we play tag sometimes in gym it's hard for the ABC School regulars to like run away like fast for the runners so we make rules so that only the ABC School regulars could touch the ABC School regulars and the runners go and touch the runners. (PWOD1)

Discussion

Development of Friendship

Both groups identified companions and playmates but PWOD appeared to have more extensive social networks beyond the school than PWD. With the exception of one PWOD and two PWD, participants met their best friend in school, and two students in each group (25% overall) nominated a person in the other group as their best friend. It appears that the school does provide opportunities for children with and without disabilities to interact and form friendships. Yet, results also indicated that friends and best friends of PWD were often restricted to the school environment. Overall, these results confirm past research, suggesting children with disabilities have less extensive social networks (Castenada & Sherrill, 1999) but provide little support of suggestions that they are often socially isolated or have more difficulties in developing social relationships (Vaughn et al., 1996) in comparison with those without a disability. In addition, they do not appear to be generally ignored by their classmates (Bryan, 1976; Place & Hodge, 2001), have low social status, or have fewer friends (Margalit, 1994). The reversely integrated nature of the school may have affected our results and cannot be generalized to other schools in the educational setting.

Parents were critical to development of friendship. Understandably, parents of PWD have many additional demands on their time because of their child's disability but are consistently identified as playing an important role in sport socialization (Smith, 2003; Weiss & Stuntz, 2004). The findings of this study are consistent with these assertions. Accessibility and proximity of a best friend's house also limited social interaction. The PWOD acknowledged specific barriers in their own homes, such as stairs, which prevented them from having friends with physical disabilities over to play. It is positive that PWOD were able to articulate such architectural barriers, likely a result of inclusion.

Best Friend

Best friends have been identified as instrumental to the healthy social life and adjustment of all children (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Berndt, 1992). Both PWOD and PWD described the positive characteristics of best friends similarly. These qualities correspond to those described elsewhere in developmental literature such as kind, caring, helpful, playful, and friendly, although sometimes using different terminology (Weiss et al., 1996; Weiss & Stuntz, 2004). However, our results are also distinct from others. The PWOD reported that personal disability awareness and sensitivity to peers with a disability are important positive qualities of their best friends. The value placed on these qualities may be exclusive to this sample, given the predominance of disability at the ABC School, but it is encouraging that PWOD recognize these issues.

Best friends served as reliable allies for participants. Reliable allies can be described as dependable, loyal, and trustworthy (Asher & Parker, 1989; Newcomb & Bagwell, 1995). An awareness of a reciprocal partnership with a best friend was described by many PWOD and PWD. One PWOD participant described feeling confident in her best friend to "stick up" for her, to help her, and to stay

with her if she were being bullied; this suggests that having a reliable friend helps a child feel less vulnerable to the social stressors of life (Rose & Asher, 2000).

Participants' expressions of care and concern provided insight into some additional affective outcomes of having a best friend. These findings parallel past conclusions about the nature of emotional security and support, loyalty, commitment, or nurturing found in the developmental psychology literature of friendship (Furman & Buhrmester, 1985; Parker & Asher, 1993; Weiss et al., 1996). Both children with and without a disability articulated deep genuine care and concern for their best friend.

Self-disclosure, which Berndt (2002) describes as the hallmark of an intimate friendship, was emphasized as a necessary condition of friendship by both groups. Mutual exchanges of personal thoughts, inner feelings, and secrets were reported often and support the notion that intimacy expressed through self-disclosure is a central feature to the best friendships in both groups.

PWD reported significantly less instances of conflict, which could reflect differences in opinions about the nature of best friendship. Perhaps the PWD do not associate conflict and best friendship. Such differences may also indicate that the best friendship of PWOD has progressed toward a shared understanding of the meaning of each other's behavior, unlike the PWD who are perhaps not as aware. Friendship histories may not be as extensive in PWD compared with PWOD. The ability to resolve conflict promptly and amicably distinguishes close personal relationships from other peer relationships (Laursen & Hartup, 1989). Although PWOD mentioned isolated instances of conflict, it is important to note that these interactions were infrequent with their best friend. As Furman and Buhrmester (1985) point out, conflicts with best friends are uncommon, because these relationships would cease if frequent conflict occurred.

Preferred Physical Activities and Outcomes of Physical Education

There were no major differences in the physical activities selected as enjoyable by the two groups, but PWOD were more physically active than PWD at recess and in their home community, findings consistent with Longmuir and Bar-Or (2000). Strategies to reduce these differences should be sought. As such interventions are conceived, it is important to note that skill development, knowledge acquisition, benefits of exercise, social interaction, and friendship development were identified as valid motives for game play and sport involvement by both groups. It appears that they recognized the rewards of physical activity, resonating with Goodwin and Watkinson (2000), that students value the goals of physical education.

The perceived values and affective outcomes of physical education echoed the work of Weiss et al. (1996) in sport. Important outcomes for our participants were encouragement and reinforcement, help and guidance, team play, and partnership. The results complement past research, which suggests that friends exert a major influence on attitudes toward and motivated behavior in physical activity (Weiss & Ebbeck, 1996), self-perception (Weiss et al., 1996), and affective responses in sport (Weiss et al., 1996).

Research in physical education highlights the positive effects of encouragement and reinforcement from classmates and peers (Goodwin & Watkinson, 2000; Hutzler et al., 2002). Both groups in this study reported direct intrinsic rewards of encouragement and reinforcement through comments such as, "I feel cool, like I'm really good at something," and "I feel happy." Recognition of accomplishments, praise, and self-esteem support from friends contributed to a positive physical education experience.

Help and guidance was also highly valued. Predictably, PWD reported more instances of physical assistance than did PWOD. While some studies suggest that physical educators have had limited success in promoting acceptance and empathy from students without a disability toward their peers with a disability (e.g., Goodwin & Watkinson, 2000), the results of this study suggest that such success is achievable. PWOD in this study described many occasions whereby they offered help and guidance to classmates with disabilities while participating in physical education.

Dealing With Disability

The participants described their perception and awareness of their own ability or lack of ability as well as that of others. Prejudice and ignorance of others was acknowledged by both groups. Encouragingly, and potentially unique to the ABC School environment, both groups expressed acceptance of differences, identified a variety of abilities and challenges, and showed a sense of admiration and respect toward their best friends and peers with a disability. Previous research has highlighted negative attitudes and behaviors marked by insensitivity and exclusion toward children with a disability within inclusive physical education (e.g., Blinde & McCallister, 1998). Conversely, our results suggest a much more positive and respectful environment.

PWD remarked that they valued opportunities to demonstrate their abilities. Therefore, the current findings support the recommendation that motor skill acquisition should remain a central goal in physical education (Goodwin & Watkinson, 2000) to promote enjoyment and commitment to a physically active lifestyle.

Conclusions

The purpose of the study was to investigate friendship in inclusive physical education from the perspective of students with and without disabilities. Four specific questions were initially posed. First, do friendships between students with and without disabilities actually develop? The simple answer is clearly, yes. Two children from each group nominated a peer in the other group as a best friend. Furthermore, all participants clearly articulated desirable characteristics of a best friend and spoke with genuine concern about the qualities of their best friend. To focus the children on a specific person rather than an idealized best friend, we required them to nominate a best friend and respond to the questions with this person in mind. Had we asked about other children as a friend, although not necessarily a best friend, we assume that more children without a disability would mention children with a disability, and vice versa. Future research might wish to

assess this claim. Second, what factors support or function as barriers in friendships that emerge? The school environment itself and the physical education program in particular promoted interactions and possibilities of friendships. The extent to which the friendships extended outside of school appeared to depend upon parental support and accessibility of homes. Sensitivity to disability was also a critical factor to successful friendships. Third, do friends in inclusive physical education play an important role in critical self-perceptions such as competence, self-esteem, and enjoyment as suggested in sport and exercise psychology? Both groups articulated a number of meaningful outcomes with a best friend such as sharing, disclosing thoughts and feelings, help and guidance, as well as support in physical education. It would certainly appear that positive self-perceptions of all students were enhanced through the inclusive physical education. Fourth, is this instance of inclusive physical education associated with social isolation or having difficulty developing social relationships on the part of individuals with a disability? The answer to this question is largely, no. With the exception of one child with a disability who indicated a camp counselor as a best friend, they did have friends, were not ignored and were not socially isolated. The children without a disability did, however, have more extensive social networks outside of school than the students with a disability.

Implications to the Friendship Literature and Adapted Physical Activity

The present work extends the knowledge base of friendship and physical activity in three interconnected ways: personal development, the nature of friendship, and practice in adapted physical education. Importance of friendship on children's social development, psychological adjustment, and personal well-being is extended to those with a physical disability. Friendship and peers are under researched as social agents of physical activity (Weiss & Stuntz, 2004), and the present findings highlight their role for those with a physical disability in physical education.

The current study extends research about the nature of friendship. For example, PWOD reported that personal disability awareness and sensitivity to peers with a disability were important positive qualities of their best friends. PWOD placed more value on emotional help, whereas PWD valued instrumental help. By and large, students with a disability stressed the importance of friendship as a source of helpfulness, fun, and entertainment, while the students without disabilities placed more value on intimacy in friendship. This may have been confounded by males being only in the group of PWD. These findings reinforce the diversity believed to exist in children's friendships and in their conceptions and expectations of friendship.

The current research broadens the knowledge base of inclusive physical education. Previous research has reported some negative attitudes and behaviors toward children with a disability within inclusive physical education, while the current results suggest a more positive environment is possible. The results suggest that the physical education teacher at the ABC School embraced the abilities of students and ensured that all students were included and participated meaningfully in physical education. The nature of our research does not permit a causal

statement, but it seems that both the physical education teacher and best friends contributed to an encouraging physical education experience for both groups.

Limitations and Future Research

Since 16 interviews were conducted, we did not collect field notes, interview the teacher, or make any formal behavioral observations of interactions and participation. These would be productive lines of inquiry. With only three males in PWD we were restricted in making gender comparisons, a fruitful area of investigation. We recognize that the reversely integrated nature of the school may constrain our conclusions, but extending friendship research to other inclusive settings would be highly desirable. Several conceptual models of peers and friends exist (Weiss & Stuntz, 2004) and future researchers could explore their implications. Given a best friend's influence in physical activity for students with and without a disability, it appears critical that inclusive physical educators strive to adopt strategies to promote social interaction and friendship development and of course empirically validate their effectiveness.

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