

ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis: A QUALITATIVE DESCRIPTION OF THE PHYSICAL
EDUCATION-BASED LIVED EXPERIENCES OF NON-
AGGRESSIVE SOCIALLY ISOLATED STUDENTS

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Teachers perceive non-aggressive socially isolated (NASI) students to be socially estranged from a majority of their peers. Unfortunately, these students are often actively or passively removed from the social aspects of school because they demonstrate self-isolating behaviors or face the exclusionary behaviors of peers. This qualitative research examined four, fifth grade NASI students' physical education-based lived experiences. Participants were the researcher, who was also the physical education teacher, two fifth grade teachers, and 51 fifth grade students with varying degrees of peer-related social acceptance. Data were collected over an 11 week period using interviews, journal entries, and observations and analyzed using open, axial, and selective coding. Results indicated that NASI students seemed to experience elements of social estrangement while participating in collaborative learning tasks. Although NASI students, at times, appeared to be social estranged, they chose to connect with a select few close friends who helped them to feel included.

A QUALITATIVE DESCRIPTION OF THE PHYSICAL EDUCATION-BASED
LIVED EXPERIENCES OF NON-AGGRESSIVE
SOCALLY ISOLATED STUDENTS

by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	ii
List of Figures	vii
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....	1
Conceptual Framework.....	1
Constructivist Theory	2
Sociometry	3
Social Isolation	5
Learned Helplessness and Alienation	8
Care as an Intellectual and Moral Construct	9
Summary	12
Statement of the Problem.....	13
Research Questions	13
Definition of Terms.....	13
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE.....	18
Constructivist Theory.....	18
Constructivism	19
Social Constructivism	19
Socially Developed Tools	21
Zone of Proximal Development	22
Scaffolding	24
Summary	24
Sociometry.....	25
Sociometric Judgment	25
Principles of Sociometry	26
Acceptance and Rejection	27
Social Preference and Social Impact	28
Summary	30
Social Isolation.....	30
Friendship	30
Loneliness	31
Isolation	32
Characteristics of Accepted, Rejected, and Neglected Children	34
Summary	37
Psychological Constructs of Learned Helplessness and Alienation.....	38
Learned Helplessness	38
Alienation of Students	40
Summary	41
Care as a Moral and Intellectual Construct.....	42
The Ethic of Care	42
Components for an Ethic of Care in Education	43
The Relational Zone	45

Summary	48
Conclusion.....	49
CHAPTER 3: METHODS.....	50
Participants.....	50
Researcher-Teacher	51
Fifth Grade Teachers	51
Fifth Grade Students	52
NASI Students	53
Highly Accepted Students	53
Setting.....	54
Physical Education	55
Research Design.....	56
Entry into the Setting and Informed Consent	56
Timeline for Data Collection	61
Data Collection.....	65
Fifth Grade Teachers' Interviews	65
NASI Students' Interviews	68
Socially Accepted Students' Interviews	70
Formal Independent Observations	71
Researcher Observations	72
Student Journals	73
Researcher/Teacher Journal	73
Data Analysis.....	74
Fifth Grade Teachers' Interviews	76
NASI Students' Interviews	76
Socially Accepted Students' Interviews	77
Student Journals	77
Formal Independent Observations	77
Researcher Observations	78
Researcher/Teacher Journal	78
Trustworthiness.....	79
Personal Biography and Philosophy	79
Personal Biases	81
My Role as Researcher	82
Reliability	82
Validity	85
Triangulation	87
Summary	89
Chapter Summary.....	89
CHAPTER IV: RESULTS.....	91
Selection of the Interviewed Students.....	91
NASI Students	92
Highly Socially Accepted Students	94
Summary	95

Teachers' Descriptions of the Interviewed NASI Students.....	96
Jill	96
Linda	97
Mike	99
Sally	100
Summary	101
NASI Students' Descriptions of Their School and Physical Education	
Experiences.....	102
Accepting Friends	102
Individual, Creative, and Imaginative Activities	103
Aggravating Classmates	105
The Challenges of Partner Selection	106
Motivation to Participate	108
Exclusionary Behaviors of Peers in Physical Education Class	109
Fanciful Retaliation to Perceived Injustices	111
Summary	112
Teachers' Descriptions of NASI Students' Experiences.....	113
Disconnection	113
Existing at the Edge	114
Introspection	116
Selectively Attending to Friends	118
Creativity and Imagination	119
Self-selected Isolation	120
Summary	122
Highly Socially Accepted Students' Descriptions of NASI Students	
Experiences.....	123
Positive Interactions with Classmates	123
Variety in Partner Selection	125
Deserved Isolation	126
Summary	130
Conclusion.....	130
CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION.....	132
The Impact of Collaborative Learning Strategies on NASI Students.....	132
Collaborative Learning	133
The Prevalence of Collaborative Learning Classroom Practices	136
The Impact of Collaborative Learning and Table Groups for	
NASI Students	137
Summary	141
Were NASI Students Socially Estranged?	143
Personality Characteristics Leading to Social Estrangement	144
NASI Students, Social Estrangement, and Friends	147
Summary	149
Good Friends: The NASI Students' Defense Against Social	
Estrangement.....	150
Group Identity as a Means to Minimize Stressors	151

NASI Students' Use of Coping Mechanisms	154
Summary	158
Chapter Summary.....	159
Conclusion.....	161
CHAPTER VI: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS	167
Summary.....	167
Background Research	169
Constructivism and Collaborative Learning Practices	169
Isolation	170
Alienation	171
Summary	172
Methodology	172
Results	173
Discussion	174
Conclusions.....	175
NASI Students Experienced Discomfort with Collaborative Learning	175
NASI Students' Isolation was Due to Self-Isolating and Peer Exclusionary Behaviors	177
NASI Students were Socially Estranged in Some but Not All Situations	179
Summary	181
Recommendations.....	181
Recommendations for Principals and Teachers	181
Get to Know Your NASI Students	181
Articulate NASI Students with Friends	182
Create Collaborative Activities that Meet the NASI Students' Preferences and Educational Needs	182
Monitor NASI Students Involved in Collaborative Learning without Friends	183
Recommendations for Other Researchers	183
Researchers May Need to Establish a Relationship with the NASI Student	183
Observations Should Center on One Student at a Time	184
Examine Possible Gender Differences Among NASI Students	184
Longitudinal Studies	185
Summary	186
APPENDIX A – Qualitative Social Dynamics Tasks	187
APPENDIX B – Completed Qualitative Social Dynamics Tasks	189
APPENDIX C – Sample Interview Questions and Journal Prompts	191
REFERENCES	196

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Sociometric Status Groups	29
Figure 2. Timeline for Data Collection	61

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Students arrive at school everyday with strengths, weaknesses, goals, and expectations for themselves and the school. Although a classroom can have thirty or more students in its confines receiving the same lesson, each student can leave class with a different conception of the knowledge that was made available to them, and speak of a variety of positive and negative social experiences that they encountered. School is a social institution where knowledge construction and social interaction become intertwined.

Conceptual Framework

Unfortunately, some students are actively or passively removed from the social aspects of school because they face peer rejection or neglect on a daily basis. Although scholars have studied social isolation, few have examined socially isolated students' school experiences. These students' experiences need to be understood if educators are to develop and utilize meaningful strategies to help alleviate the social isolation occurring in almost every school, if not every classroom in the United States.

The physical education classroom could be used as an anchor or focal point for studying the lived experiences of the socially isolated. A physical education setting is primarily a platform that blends the teaching and learning of the cognitive and physical domains. A secondary feature of physical education is that it takes place in an inherently social environment where student interaction plays a vital role in every task and learning opportunity. Some physical educators, including myself, see the affective aspects of physical education to be as important, and at times, even more important than the

cognitive or physical aspects. Physical education provides opportunities for students to engage not only physically, but also cognitively and affectively in constructing their understanding of the learning experience.

Constructivist Theory

To fully understand the socially isolated students' physical education-based experiences, it makes sense to start by examining how knowledge is constructed. There are two major views of constructivism: psychological and social. Psychological constructivism is based on the Piagetian view that meaning-making and learning are *individualistic*. Psychological constructivists focus on the individual as the sole agent in the learning process (Richardson, 1994). Conversely, social constructivism is defined as intellectual development directed by the social consensual interpretation of reality (Cottone, 2001). This implies that what an individual perceives as being "real" evolves through *interpersonal* interpretations of "facts". "Realness" is not based on objective facts, but it is discovered through interpersonal construction. Glassman (2001) argued that humans are inherently social beings that develop their sense of self, others, and "facts" through social relationships.

Social constructivists transfer decisions from an intrapsychic process into an interpersonal realm (Cottone, 2001). Therefore, decisions are viewed not as a personal or internal process but as a relational process influenced by social interactions. In other words, decisions are not made alone and every decision is influenced by the social context. Views of "right" and "wrong" are defined through a social consensual aspect of absolute truths in a society.

Much of Vygotsky's work centered on how a child co-constructs meaning through social interaction and the role of word meaning in the development of thinking (Mahn, 1999). Vygotsky (1978) developed the construct of the "zone of proximal development" to highlight a central component of sociocultural learning theory --- the interdependence of social and individual processes in the construction of knowledge (Mahn, 1999). The zone of proximal development is defined as the distance between the actual developmental level of an individual problem-solver and the potential level of that problem-solver under the guidance of a more capable person (Vygotsky, 1978). This more capable person can be an adult (teacher) or child (classmate). Effective and productive instruction occurs within the two thresholds of the zone of proximal development (Mahn, 1999). Goldstein (1999) emphasized that the thresholds of the zone are personal, flexible, and constantly changing, meaning that the goal of a teacher or more capable peer is to ensure that the child's task falls within the child's zone. The zone of proximal development is a place of cognitive potential created by the relationship and interaction between two people.

Sociometry

Thus, unlike the Piagetian perspective, knowledge creation from a social constructivist's point of view is a very social undertaking. Collaboration between individuals is a vital element in this endeavor. Some individuals in social groupings are more collaborative or involved than others in group interactions. In 1934, Jacob Moreno conceptualized a discipline called sociometry, and later in 1953, defined it as "a method of how to gather the really vital facts about the interindividual relationships among

people living in social groups” (p. lxxix). A more current view of sociometry portrays it as a study of individuals’ choices to affiliate with others (Kindermann, 1998).

The examination of individuals’ preferences to affiliate with others tends to gravitate toward two fundamental constructs of acceptance and rejection. Acceptance is typically synonymous with liking, while rejection is generally synonymous with disliking. These two constructs are *not* polar opposites. The opposite of being accepted is not being accepted, while the opposite of being disliked is not being disliked. This conceptualization allows for the construct of indifference to be added and defined as a condition occurring when an individual is neither liked nor disliked (Bukowski, Sippola, Hoza, & Newcomb, 2000).

The constructs of acceptance, rejection, and indifference were used by Peery (1979) to create a framework of sociometric classification based on two dimensions – social preference and social impact. Social preference is an index of *relative likableness* and is defined as the difference between one’s acceptance and rejection by the peer group. Social impact is an index of *visibility* or *notice* and is defined as the sum of one’s acceptance and rejection by the peer group.

The two dimensions of social preference and social impact allowed scholars to distinguish and list individuals in five status or social groups: popular, rejected, controversial, neglected, and average (Cillessen & Bukowski, 2000). The popular group consisted of children who received many positive nominations and few negative nominations from peers. The rejected group consisted of children who obtained many negative nominations and few positive nominations. The controversial status is attained if many positive and negative nominations are acquired by a child. A neglected child

received few positive and few negative nominations. Finally, the children who received an average number of positive and negative nominations were considered to be average. The popular, rejected, and average groups represented social preference, while the neglected and controversial groups corresponded to social impact (Maassen, van der Linden, Goossens, & Bokhorst, 2000).

Social Isolation

Children who are sociometrically classified as rejected or neglected also could be considered social isolates because they receive either low preference or low impact nominations by their peers. Therefore, their peers tend to dislike them (reject) or ignore them (neglect). A lack of friends could place a child at risk for increased loneliness, low self-esteem, and an inability to develop the social skills necessary to effectively navigate social situations (Bullock, 1992). Loneliness is an interpersonal deficit that is a result of having less satisfying personal relationships than one desires (Ponzetti, 1990).

Conceptually, it is possible for a person with a number of friends to still be lonely, while a person with no friends may not necessarily experience loneliness (Page & Scanlan, 1994).

When some children are not able to develop peer relationships or be accepted by peers, they will experience social isolation. Bowker, Bukowski, Zargarpour, and Hoza (1998) viewed social isolation from two dimensions: active isolation and passive withdrawal. Active isolation occurs when children are either forced out of a group or have been unsuccessful in their attempts to enter a group. Passive withdrawal occurs when the isolation is due to a child's social shyness, anxiety, or extreme social sensitivity. People

who are actively isolated typically correspond to the rejected status group, while passively withdrawn people generally represent the neglected group.

Harrist, Zaia, Bates, Dodge, and Pettit (1997) divided these two dimensions of social isolation into four subtypes: unsociable, passive-anxious, active isolates, and sad/depressed. These four subtypes or clusters give a more vivid picture of social isolation. These researchers used Asendorpf's (1990) approach/avoidance conflict conceptualization as a tool to describe the four subtypes. 'Approach' reflects the desire or motivation of the child to play or interact with other children, while 'avoidance' reflects the inhibition of a child to enter into social interaction with other children.

Unsociable children often appear to be socially competent in almost every respect. They demonstrate low social approach, but are not fearful of social interaction. Their teachers feel they exhibit the fewest signs of social problems when compared to other socially isolated subtypes.

Passive-anxious students are described as highly timid, anxious, and self-isolating. These children exhibit the classic approach/avoidance conflict. They want to be part of a group, but internal factors are preventing them from entering the group. These children have average social approach motivation and high social avoidance motivation.

The teachers of active-isolate students reported that their level of immaturity, lack of restraint, and anger was the greatest of all of the social isolates. This subtype is characterized as having high approach motivation and low avoidance motivation. Active-isolates seem to have the highest degree of social dysfunction and were the most rejected subtype of students in the elementary school.

The final socially isolated subtype discussed by Harrist et al. (1997) was the sad/depressed student group. Teachers described these students as self-isolating, timid, and immature. The kindergarten rejection of the sad/depressed students by their peers evolved to a high level of peer neglect in future grades.

Conversely, studies (Byrnes, 1984; Byrnes & Yamamoto, 1983; French & Waas, 1985; Matthews, 1996; Tani & Schneider, 1997; Wentzel & Asher, 1995) also have been conducted that define the characteristics of accepted, rejected, and neglected children. Accepted students are more likely to exhibit friendship-making skills, display behavior that is appropriate to the norm of the group, and dispense positive reinforcement to peers, while rejected students exhibit more aggressive behavior, attempt to assert control over peers, and are more disagreeable (Matthews, 1996). Wentzel and Asher (1995) found two subgroups of rejected students: aggressive-rejected and submissive-rejected. When the aggressive-rejected students were compared to the average children, they were discovered to be less interested in schoolwork, perceived by teachers to be less independent, more impulsive, less considerate, less compliant, and more likely to start fights. Aggressive-rejected students were less likely to be preferred by their teachers and to be nominated by their classmates as being good students. Conversely, the submissive-rejected children did not show any characteristics that were significantly different from the average students for the categories listed above (Wentzel & Asher, 1995).

Further, Wentzel and Asher (1995) found that neglected students tend to have solid academic reputations and are highly functional in the classroom. They may be well accepted by their peers, but maintain very few friends or enemies (French & Waas, 1985). Likewise, Byrnes and Yamamoto (1983) identified three subgroups of neglected

children: (a) talented but distant, (b) tuned out, and (c) lost in the crowd. The “talented but distant” students appeared bright, mature, and creative, but their talents were rarely productive in the classroom and often served to further alienate themselves. The “tuned out” students demonstrated no special talents and were not shy or unassertive, but they were described by teachers and peers as being a little strange or different. Finally, the “lost in the crowd” students were described as shy, timid, or unassertive loners, but generally seen by parents, teachers, and peers in a positive manner.

Byrnes (1984) contended that neglected students are often forgotten and ignored because others rarely complain about them due to their passive, shy, and compliant dispositions. Socially neglected children are usually characterized as having more internal difficulties than external issues (Tani & Schneider, 1997). Byrnes (1984) declared that peer neglect leads to low self-esteem, feelings of powerlessness, blocked creativity, extreme shyness, defensiveness, and discouragement.

Learned Helplessness and Alienation

Students who experience social isolation may also struggle with other psychological effects, including learned helplessness and alienation. Social isolates may repeatedly be denied in their attempts to enter into a group. Portman (1995) asserted that chronic failure leads to learned helplessness. Learned helplessness occurs in situations when a person perceives little or no control over outcomes related to the situation (Walling & Martinek, 1995). Learned helplessness can lead to a “why even bother trying” attitude. Page and Scanlan (1994) acknowledged that feelings of helplessness contribute to children taking self-derogatory blame for peer and friendship inadequacies.

Goetz and Dweck (1980) advanced the construct of learned helplessness to apply to social settings. They defined social learned helplessness as a person's perceived inability to overcome social isolation. Perceived personal incompetence as the cause of social isolation was found to be the most severe disruption in a person's attempt to gain social approval (Goetz & Dweck, 1980).

Continued feelings of learned helplessness may lead children to feel alienated by not only their peers, but also from the institutions in which this learned helplessness is fostered. Carlson (1995) proposed that alienation is the persistent negative feelings experienced by students related to the states of meaninglessness, powerlessness, and isolation in a particular situation. Meaninglessness refers to an individual's lack of hope because of the absence of goals or values, while powerlessness is an individual's strong sense of not being able to control events. The feeling of powerlessness can be used interchangeably with the feeling of learned helplessness because both are concerned with a lack of personal control over situational outcomes. Finally, isolation refers to an individual's feeling of separation from a group or institution. Alienated students withdraw emotionally, mentally, or physically from the situations that give rise to these persistent negative feelings (Carlson, 1995).

Care as an Intellectual and Moral Construct

Educators are continually seeking ways to alleviate the development of social learned helplessness in children and decrease the number of students who feel alienated from their peers. The creation of caring educational settings may provide an opportunity to invite isolated and neglected students to interact positively with others. One goal of feminist moral theory is to develop a deeper understanding of what is meant by "care"

and “caring relationships”. A vision of care as an intellectual and moral construct in schools could provide an educational setting that limits the occurrences of the previously defined psychological constructs of learned helplessness and alienation.

The ethic of care is a theoretical framework developed extensively by Nel Noddings (1988, 1992). The ethic of care is based on a relational dyad that includes the One-caring and the Cared-for. The One-caring responds to the needs of the Cared-for in a dynamic role that is characterized by engrossment for and motivational displacement to the Cared-for. Engrossment occurs when the One-caring focuses their total attention on the Cared-for. Motivational displacement occurs when the One-caring places the goals, actions, and projects of the Cared-for ahead of their own. The Cared-for also has defining characteristics or responsibilities to acknowledge the efforts of the One-caring, including reception, recognition, and response. The Cared-for demonstrates reception by showing desire and openness to be taken care of by someone, while recognition is any acknowledgement given by the Cared-for to the One-caring for entering into the caring relationship. Within this framework, response is defined as any verbal or nonverbal, active or passive expression of gratitude by the Cared-for to the One-caring.

Noddings (1992) proposed four components of the ethic of care essential to its implementation in the educational setting: modeling, dialogue, practice, and confirmation. Modeling involves the demonstration of how to care and how to be cared for by others. Teachers must model care by developing genuine caring relationships with their students. Dialogue entails open-ended discourse between individuals in which the outcome of the discourse is not predetermined. Dialogue creates strong bonds between people that help to maintain and foster caring relationships. Practice provides individuals

the opportunity to gain the skills necessary to become involved in care giving and being cared for. The final component of the ethic of care, confirmation, is defined as affirming and encouraging the best in others. Confirmation encourages future caring interactions, while increasing an individual's feeling of being cared for. Confirmation represents an indirect link with modeling because the One-caring's conformation is an additional demonstration of appropriate caring behaviors.

Noddings (1984) defined two forms of caring based on the motivation behind the act. She declared that natural caring occurs when the "I must" that an individual feels towards an act is indistinguishable from the "I want". When natural caring is not occurring, the "I must" is not aligned with the "I want". In these situations, an "I ought" feeling can be paired with the "I must". This is called ethical caring because the "I ought" can be viewed as a moral aspiration or sentiment.

Goldstein (1999) hypothesized that the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978) is more than a construction zone for knowledge, it is also a relational zone based on caring. Teachers that enter into caring relationships with their students experience both natural and ethical caring. Goldstein (1999) argued that the interpersonal features of the zone of proximal development should be separated into two simultaneously occurring dimensions: the interpsychological dimension and the interrelational dimension.

Vygotsky (1978) defined the interpsychological dimension as the intellectual space created by the mentor and mentee in the zone of proximal development. Goldstein (1999) defined the interrelational dimension as the shared affective space created by the mentor and mentee in the zone of proximal development. When the zone of proximal development is viewed as both an affective and intellectual endeavor, the ways that a

mentor and mentee contribute and are affected by the experience can be more clearly identified. Researchers and educators can use this theory to develop the importance of the relational dyad between the teacher and student. This view of the zone of proximal development challenges the teacher to provide students with a worthwhile educational experience centered on bringing the students closer to socially-created ethical ideals (Goldstein, 1999).

Summary

Constructivist theory emphasizes the importance of interpersonal relationships within the educational setting (Vygotsky, 1978; Vygotsky, 1997; Vygotsky & Luria, 1993). Interpersonal relationships among peers in school take on a great importance in the eyes of social constructivists. Some students are rarely involved in interpersonal relationships with their peers because they experience social rejection or neglect. This social isolation may limit these children's ability to understand the educational concepts presented in school and reduce students' odds of developing the social skills necessary to navigate successfully in society.

The socially isolated students will be at greater risk for alienation from not only their peers, but from the school in which this isolation takes place on a daily basis. Strategies should be utilized by educators to end social isolation in the classroom and hope that the reduction of social isolation permeates beyond school contexts. Developing "caring" schools based on the ethic of care as an intellectual and moral construct may be one way of alleviating some of the social isolation that leads to student alienation. The perspectives or voices of socially isolated students should be heard and used to inform strategies to ease their transition back into their social group of interest.

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this investigation was to discover the physical education-based lived experiences of non-aggressive socially isolated students. My research question was “What are the physical education-based lived experiences of non-aggressive socially isolated students?” Specifically,

- (a) How did the non-aggressive socially isolated students describe their social interactions with their peers?
- (b) What were the perceptions of the children who were not socially isolated towards their non-aggressive socially isolated peers?
- (c) How did teachers view their non-aggressive socially isolated students?

The significance of this study is that it may provide valuable information regarding the lives, thoughts, and feeling of non-aggressive socially isolated students. This is vital to understanding this group of students so that strategies can be developed and implemented that reduce the potential for future social isolations to occur or persist. The limitations to this study are that the subject field is limited to two fifth grade classes in one elementary school and the physical education teacher is also the researcher. These limitations will be discussed in Chapter 3.

Definition of Terms

Active isolation – condition in which a child is either forced out of a group or has been unsuccessful in his or her attempts to enter a group (Bowker et al., 1998).

Aggressive social behaviors – behaviors seen as attempts to assert control on others by demonstrating a high degree of disagreeableness and impulsiveness, or

demonstration of less independence, consideration, and compliance than others in the group (Matthews, 1996; Wentzel & Asher, 1995).

Alienation – “the persistent negative feelings some students associate with actively aversive or insufficiently meaningful situations” (Carlson, 1995, p. 467).

Average students – children who receive an average number of positive and negative sociometric nominations (Cillessen & Bukowski, 2000).

Cared-for – an individual in a relationship that exhibits reception, recognition, and response for a caring act (Noddings, 1988).

Caring relation – “a connection or encounter between two human beings – a carer and a recipient of care, or cared-for. In order for the relation to be properly called caring, both parties must contribute to it in characteristic ways” (Noddings, 1992, p. 15).

Collaborative learning – situations where two or more students are required to work together to complete a task.

Collaborative seatwork – low-cooperation group tasks that simply require students to share information or divide the labor so that each person’s contribution can be joined together as a final product (Cohen, 1994).

Confirmation – affirming and encouraging the best in others (Noddings, 1992).

Constructivism – a learning theory based on the interaction of what is already known by an individual with new ideas and phenomena that are currently being experienced (Richardson, 1994).

Controversial students – children who receive many positive and many negative sociometric nominations (Cillessen & Bukowski, 2000).

Cooperative learning – “students working together in a group small enough that everyone can participate on a collective task that has been clearly assigned” (Cohen, 1994, p. 3).

Dialogue – open-ended discourse between individuals in which the outcome is not predetermined (Noddings, 1992).

Engrossment – “an open, nonselective receptivity to the Cared-for” (Noddings, 1992, p. 15).

Ethical caring – when the “I ought” feeling towards a caring act is paired with the “I must” to elicit the caring response (Noddings, 1984).

Friendship – “represents a mutual selection in which a child chooses and is simultaneously chosen by another as a preferred friend” (Doll, 1996, p. 166).

Learned helplessness – the effects of chronic failure (Portman, 1995) that lead individuals to perceive little control over achievement outcomes during the performance of physical or academic tasks (Walling & Martinek, 1995).

Loneliness – an interpersonal deficit that exists as a result of having less satisfying personal relationships than one desires (Ponzetti, 1990).

Meaninglessness – a dimension of alienation demonstrated by an individual’s lack of connectedness between the present and the future (Mau, 1992).

Modeling – demonstrating how to care and how to be cared for (Noddings, 1992).

Motivational displacement – “the sense that our motive energy is flowing towards others and their projects” (Noddings, 1992, p. 16).

NASI – an acronym standing for “non-aggressive social isolates”.

Natural caring – when the “I must” that the individual feels towards the act of caring is indistinguishable from the “I want” (Noddings, 1984).

Neglected students – children who receive few positive and negative sociometric nominations (Cillessen & Bukowski, 2000).

Normlessness – a dimension of alienation indicated by the individual's belief that socially disapproved behaviors are necessary to achieve valued goals (Mau, 1992).

One-caring – an individual who responds to the needs and initiations of the cared-for with engrossment and motivational displacement (Noddings, 1988).

Passive withdraw – when isolation from a group is due to a child's social shyness, anxiety, or extreme social sensitivity (Bowker et al., 1998).

Peer acceptance – “operationally assessed by determining the degree to which members of a group like a child and want to spend time with him or her” (Doll, 1996, p. 166).

Popular students – children who receive many positive and few negative sociometric nominations (Cillessen & Bukowski, 2000).

Powerlessness – a dimension of alienation occurring when a person places great value on a set of goals but concurrently has low expectations of meeting those goals (Mau, 1992).

Practice – the opportunity provided to individuals to gain the skills involved in both care giving and being cared for (Noddings, 1992).

QSDT – an acronym standing for the “qualitative social dynamics task”.

Reception – the desire and the openness to be cared-for (Noddings, 1992).

Recognition – any acknowledgement given by the Cared-for to the One-caring for entering into the relationship (Noddings, 1992).

Rejected students – children who receive many negative and few positive sociometric nominations (Cillessen & Bukowski, 2000).

Response – any verbal or nonverbal, active or passive expression of appreciation by the Cared-for to the One-caring (Noddings, 1992).

Social constructivism – an intellectual movement that directs a social interpretation of reality (Cottone, 2001).

Social estrangement – a dimension of alienation referring to a person's lack of participation or involvement in a friendship network and/or participation in school, especially in the social context (Mau, 1992).

Social impact - an index of visibility or notice within the peer group defined as the sum of one's acceptance and rejection scores (Peery, 1979).

Social preference - an index of relative likableness defined as the difference between one's acceptance and rejection by the peer group (Peery, 1979).

Socially developed tools – “a means of influencing one's own mind or behavior or another's” (Vygotsky, 1997, p. 87).

Sociometry – “the study of people's ‘choices’ for affiliation with other people” (Kindermann, 1998, p.55).

Zone of proximal development - "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86).

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The review of literature is divided into five sections that examine constructs that describe and impact the lived experiences of non-aggressive socially isolated students. In the first section, a review of Vygotsky's major educational constructs of constructivism examines the social construction of knowledge and the importance of this social dynamic in the educational setting. The second section in this chapter examines the literature surrounding the field of sociometry. Sociometry, conceptualized by Jacob Moreno, describes peer social choices that impact individual placement into social status groups. The third section examines social isolation as a result of peer social choice and as an aid in the understanding of the causes, nature and level of occurrence of social isolation, and characteristics of socially accepted, neglected, rejected, and isolated children. In section four, two psychological constructs, learned helplessness and alienation, facilitate a deeper understanding of social isolation. The fifth section opens with a discussion of Nel Noddings' ethic of care construct and ends with a view of the zone of proximal development through a caring perspective.

Constructivist Theory

Constructivism based primarily on the writings of Vygotsky (Vygotsky, 1978; Vygotsky, 1997; Vygotsky & Luria, 1993) is an educational theory that demonstrates the importance of interpersonal relationships within the educational setting. The keys to understanding this theory are the concepts of social constructivism, socially developed tools, the zone of proximal development, and scaffolding.

Constructivism

Constructivism cannot be viewed as one large agreed upon concept. The two most divergent perspectives are the Piagetian view of psychological constructivism and the situated social constructivism grounded in the theories of Vygotsky (Richardson, 1994). The two perspectives do agree that constructivism is a learning or meaning-making theory based on the interaction of what is already known by an individual with new ideas and phenomena that are currently being experienced in an educational setting. Psychological constructivists focus on the individual as the sole or primary agent in the process of constructing and reconstructing meaning with the purpose being higher levels of understanding and analytic capabilities (Richardson, 1994). From the perspective of psychological constructivists, teachers facilitate this learning by creating a learning environment in which individual students experience a certain amount of cognitive dissonance and devise tasks that lead students to a reorganization of existing cognitive understandings (Richardson, 1994). Learning, however, is a relatively isolated process that occurs within the child as she or he interacts with the educational task.

Social Constructivism

Conversely, social constructivists theorize that learners construct their understanding while working socially or interpersonally with others. Unlike, psychological constructivists, social constructivists view social interactions as central to the learning process. For example, Cottone (2001) defined social constructivism as an intellectual movement directed by a social consensual interpretation of reality. Generally, social constructivism implies that what is "real" evolves through interpersonal interpretation and

agreement on the "facts". "Realness" is not based on objective facts, but is discovered through social (interpersonal) construction.

Glassman (2001) argued that human beings are born social creatures and develop their sense of self, others, "facts", and their environment through their social relationships. When encountering new situations, an individual's thinking will be transformed. This transformation will take place through an interaction with either another individual(s) or cultural tool(s) produced by society. Vygotsky (Vygotsky & Luria, 1993) viewed the classroom as a microcosm of the larger social community with the classroom and the larger social community acting as the agent for change in the individual.

Social constructivists view decisions not as a personal or internal process but as a *relational* process influenced by social interactions. Social constructivists transfer decisions from an intrapsychic process into an interpersonal realm within a social matrix (Cottone, 2001). In other words, individuals do not make decisions alone. Instead, every decision is influenced by the social context. Social constructivism defines the view of "right" and "wrong" through a social consensual aspect of absolute truths in a society. Kohlberg (1981) acknowledged that values, opinions, and rules are relative to different groups in a society, and a group's values, opinions, and rules should be upheld and recognized until they begin to undermine the core principles and values in which the society is rooted. Kohlberg contended that some rights and principles, particularly those associated with life and liberty should not be debated or questioned within societies. Cottone (2001) stated that the "understanding that there can be competitive absolute truths (a logical contradiction) helps to clarify the distinction between social constructivism and objectivism (in which there is one absolute truth) and relativism (in

which truth is relative to each individual)" (p. 40). This view permits truth to be constructed by people who are directly involved in the discussion about what should be seen as truth. It allows for individuals to blend their concepts through dialogue to create meaningful and powerful truths for the person involved in the construction of the truth.

Socially Developed Tools

Vygotsky (1997) believed that people encounter many devices or tools for mastering their own mental processes. He stated:

Psychological tools are artificial formations. By their nature they are social and not organic or individual devices. They are directed toward the mastery of [mental] processes – one's own or someone else's – just as technical devices are directed toward the mastery of processes of nature. (p. 85)

Language, writing, and works of art are some examples of the psychological tools developed by society. Vygotsky emphasized that the artificial acts driven by these artificial psychological tools should be considered natural acts as well. He continued by claiming that "[psychological tools are] a means of influencing one's own mind or behavior or another's [sic]" (p. 87). Vygotsky addressed education in relation to the use of psychological tools by declaring that the child is an educable being and will be influenced by the psychological tools developed by society.

Glassman (2001) defined tools as the "means for specific, culturally approved consequences that act as way stations on the path to a socially defined end" (p. 5). Society develops tools and symbols to enable its members to achieve a higher level of cognitive awareness. Mahn (1999) stressed that the ability of individuals to use tools is the key to the acquisition of consciousness.

As stated previously, psychological tools appear in a variety of forms, but the most influential tool is language. Vygotsky's work focused on how a child co-constructs meaning through social interaction and the role of word meaning in the development of thinking (Mahn, 1999). Vygotsky felt that the educational process should be used to teach the members of the social community how to use the culturally developed tools effectively (Glassman, 2001). Vygotsky spoke minimally about individual free inquiry because he felt the parameters of all inquiry are set by the culture and manifested through its tools and symbols (Glassman, 2001).

Zone of Proximal Development

Vygotsky (1978) developed the concept of a zone of proximal development to highlight a central component of sociocultural learning theory --- the interdependence of social and individual processes in the co-construction of knowledge (Mahn, 1999). In other words, individuals come together to use the socially constructed psychological tools to create knowledge. Vygotsky defined the zone of proximal development as "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (p. 86). In learning environments, a zone of proximal development can occur when a teacher or more proficient classmate is guiding a student through a developmentally appropriate problem with knowledge creation as the goal of the interaction.

Effective and productive instruction occurs within the two thresholds of the zone of proximal development (Mahn, 1999). The thresholds of the zone are personal, flexible, and constantly changing, meaning that the role of the teacher or peer is to ensure the

child's task falls within the child's zone (Goldstein, 1999). The teacher must have a firm idea of the possible directions the task can take and establish tasks and situations of interest to the student that enhance the student's role in society (Glassman, 2001).

Within the zone of proximal development, the teacher or more capable peer acts as both a guide and mentor. Once the child notices a problem, the mentor develops the possible direction(s) that the child can use to establish solutions to the problem (Glassman, 2001). Glassman (2001) stated that working within the zone of proximal development should establish the tools necessary to serve the child's social purpose. Teachers and more competent peers use their experiences to facilitate this process. Glassman postulated that there are three common threads indicative of the present conceptualizations of the zone of proximal development:

- 1) there is an emphasis on joint attention between the adult/mentor and the child/neophyte; 2) there is some recognition on the part of the adult of a (socially determined) goal to the activity and an attempt to set up sub-goals to reach that goal; and 3) there is a focus on the social relationship between the adult/mentor and the child/neophyte in reaching that goal. (p. 7)

Traditionally, the zone of proximal development has been presented as a value-free construct leading to positive educational outcomes (Goldstein, 1999). The zone of proximal development is, by definition, a place of cognitive potential created by the relationship and interaction of two people. When two people are involved in this type of caring relationship, one could make the argument that the zone of proximal development is not free of ethical and/or moral issues.

Scaffolding

Scaffolding is used as a metaphor for the knowledge building process that occurs between a teacher or more capable peer and the child within the zone of proximal development. The educational building process reflects the creation of new knowledge, development of creativity, and ability to use the social cues that have been culturally developed and established. The mentor (teacher or peer) builds this new understanding piece-by-piece leading the child to engage the concepts independently (Glassman, 2001). Wood, Bruner, and Ross (1976) stated that:

teachers engage in the following activities while scaffolding [knowledge for] their students: recruitment of the child's interest, reduction in degrees of freedom, direction maintenance, marking of critical features in the task, frustration control, and demonstration of idealized solutions. (p. 98)

Although, Wood et al. focused on the teacher, a child's peers also would be able to engage in the same scaffolding activities.

Summary

The importance of social interactions and knowledge construction in the educational setting is demonstrated in these four constructs defined by Vygotsky. Social constructivism is the social and consensual interpretation of reality. Socially developed psychological tools contribute to this interpretation of reality. These psychological tools intentionally and unintentionally influence a person's mind or behavior. The zone of proximal development is the distance between an individual problem-solver's developmental level and the problem-solver's potential developmental level under the tutelage of a more capable person. The zone of proximal development provides an

opportunity for the co-construction of knowledge to take place. Children, as well as teachers, can act as mentors to those individuals that are seeking to create knowledge. Peers may be able to convey information to other children in ways that could be overlooked by adult mentors. Therefore, they should be considered vital partners in the creation and development of knowledge.

Sociometry

Sociometry is a discipline conceptualized by Jacob Moreno (1934, 1943, 1953). He defined sociometry as “a method of how to gather the really vital facts about the interindividual relationships among people living in social groups” (1953, p. lxxix). This section begins with the four themes, determined by Moreno, to be the essential components of sociometric judgment. The explanation of themes is followed by a description of the five principles that define sociometry as a discipline. The third section examines the constructs of acceptance and rejection and links them to the sociometric classification dimensions of social preference and social impact. These dimensions are used to introduce the discussion of sociometry’s five status groups.

Sociometric Judgment

In 1934, Moreno postulated an innovative framework for making sociometric judgments. The framework was composed of four general themes: (a) attraction and repulsion, (b) consideration of the perceiver, (c) multiple sociometric groups, and (d) group and judgment dynamics that explained how individuals acting within groups make judgments. The first theme centered on two basic dimensions of interpersonal judgment – attraction and repulsion. Attractions bring people together, while repulsions drive

people apart. A third dimension, indifference, viewed as neither being attracted to nor repulsed by another individual created an additional avenue for sociometric judgments to take place.

Moreno's second theme focused on the consideration of the perceiver, or how one sees others as well as how one is seen by others. He believed that sociometric judgments based on the dimensions of attraction, repulsion, and indifference should be seen from both points of view. He believed this would give a more genuine picture of the social interactions among a group of individuals.

The determination of multiple sociometric groups was Moreno's third theme. He proposed that how an individual sees others and is seen by others forms the basis for multiple sociometric groups. These sociometric groups serve as a way to describe individuals who fall into certain categories. This theme differs from the previous theme by placing the perceptions into classifications that can be used to describe individuals. The final theme centered on the dynamic nature of groups and how that corresponds to the dynamic nature of sociometric judgments. In this theme Moreno acknowledged that social group dynamics, as well as individuals' appearances and perceptions, are constantly fluctuating, with changes in sociometric judgments and choices almost certain to follow.

Principles of Sociometry

Sociometry was conceptualized by Moreno (1943) as a discipline defined by five important principles: (a) sociometry is focused on the two-way relations between entities, (b) participants in a sociometric study should be drawn together by at least one criterion, (c) the measurement construct should be defined in such a way that the participants can

respond with a great deal of spontaneity, (d) respondents should be motivated to give sincere responses, and (e) the construct selected for testing should be strong and definite.

Moreno's principles serve as a guideline when undertaking sociometric studies. The first principle acknowledges that sociometry is focused on the two-way relations between entities. These relationships, subject to sociometric judgments, lead to interpersonal feelings of attraction, repulsion, or indifference. Second, the participants in a sociometric study should be drawn together by at least one criterion, or common organizational structure. There should be a link between individuals so that a relationship can be viewed as relevant. In the third principle, Moreno (1943) stated that the measurement construct should be defined in such a way that the participants can respond with a great deal of spontaneity. Greater spontaneity can be achieved by using concise measurement tools over a time limited data collection period. The goal is to produce honest responses, not socially desirable ones. Fourth, the respondents should be motivated to give sincere responses. The sociometric participants need to have given enough thought to the construct being measured to have formed prior opinions of others in relation to the construct. Finally, Moreno stated that the construct selected for testing should be "strong, enduring, and definite, not weak, transitory, and indefinite" (p. 327).

Acceptance and Rejection

More recently, Thomas Kindermann (1998) defined and described the current view of sociometry as:

...the study of people's "choices" for affiliation with other people, offer[s] an intuitively appealing, methodologically flexible, and conceptually straightforward

method for assessing social links among individuals – namely by using people’s preferences for associations with other people. (p. 55)

The examinations of people’s preference tend to gravitate towards the two fundamental sociometric constructs of acceptance and rejection. Acceptance is typically synonymous with liking, while rejection is generally synonymous with disliking. Bukowski et al. (2000) expanded on the concepts of acceptance and rejection by emphasizing that they are not polar opposites. The opposite of acceptance is not being accepted, while the opposite of rejection is not being rejected. This conceptualization allows the construct of *indifference* to be added and defined as a condition occurring when an individual is neither accepted nor rejected.

Social Preference and Social Impact

Using the constructs of acceptance and rejection as a framework, Peery (1979) described a system of sociometric classification based on two dimensions - “social preference” and “social impact”. Social preference is an index of *relative likableness* and is defined as the difference between one’s acceptance and rejection by the peer group. Social impact is an index of *visibility or notice* within the peer group and is defined as the sum of one’s acceptance and rejection scores.

These two dimensions permit scholars to distinguish five status groups. Cillessen and Bukowski (2000) listed and described the five status groups in the following manner:

- (1) popular – children who receive many positive nominations and few negative nominations (high impact, high preference);
- (2) rejected – children who receive few positive nominations and many negative nominations (high impact, low preference);
- (3) neglected – children who receive few positive and negative

nominations (low impact); (4) controversial – children who receive many positive and many negative nominations (high impact, mid-range on preference); and (5) average – children who receive an average number of positive and negative nominations (mid-range on both variables). (p. 6-7)

Figure 1 outlines the two dimensions of sociometry, as well as the five status groups. Maassen et al. (2000) added that the average, popular, and rejected groups represent

Figure 1. Sociometric status groups

	High Social Preference	Middle Social Preference	Low Social Preference
High Social Impact	Accepted	Controversial	Rejected
Middle Social Impact		Average	
Low Social Impact		Neglected	

social preference, while the neglected, controversial, and average groups correspond to social impact.

Summary

Sociometry is the study of people's "choices" for affiliation with other people within a certain criteria. Acceptance is linked to "liking" and rejection is linked to "disliking". Indifference is a third construct that reflects neither acceptance nor rejection. It serves an essential function in sociometry because acceptance and rejection are not polar opposites. Social preference (relative likableness) is the difference between acceptance and rejection. Social impact (visibility or notice) is the sum of acceptance and rejection scores. Five status groups can be derived when focusing on social preference and impact.

Social Isolation

This section begins with a discussion of the differences between peer acceptance and friendship. It also demonstrates the important links between the two constructs. Loneliness is the second topic to be examined because of its apparent link to not having friends. Isolation, the third topic in this section, is broken into four distinct subtypes or clusters: (a) unsociable, (b) passive-anxious, (c) active-isolates, and (d) sad/depressed. This section concludes with a discussion of the characteristics of accepted, rejected, and neglected children.

Friendship

When examining the construct of social isolation, a distinction should be made between peer acceptance and friendship. Doll (1996) separated the two constructs by asserting:

Peer acceptance is operationally assessed by determining the degree to which members of a group like a child and want to spend time with him or her.

Friendship, instead, represents a mutual selection in which a child chooses and is simultaneously chosen by another as a preferred friend. (p. 166)

Bichard, Alden, Walker, and McMahon (1988) studied the cognitive understanding of the conceptions of friendship among socially accepted, rejected, and neglected peers. They found that although the cognitive understanding of the conceptions of friendship increased with age, rejected and neglected children did not demonstrate a developmental lag in their understanding of friendship relative to their socially accepted peers. This finding expressed the notion that knowing about friendship does not translate into acceptance or being able to relate to others.

Doll (1996) explained that the ability to meet and keep friends allows children to better navigate the emotional problems that they will encounter because they are more likely to ask for and receive peer assistance. Peer acceptance can lead to peer relationships and it is from these peer relationships that friendships may form. Maag, Vasa, Reid, and Torrey (1995) stated that peer relationships are an important aspect in the development of prosocial behaviors and positive socialization which is linked to helpfulness, friendliness, conformity to the rules, and positive attitudes towards others.

Loneliness

A lack of friends could place a child at risk for increased loneliness, low self-esteem, and inability to develop the social skills necessary to effectively navigate social situations (Bullock, 1992). Ponzetti (1990) described the feeling of loneliness as an interpersonal deficit that exists as a result of having less satisfying personal relationships than a child

desires. Conceptually, it is possible for a child to have friendships and still be lonely, and, conversely, a child that is physically alone may not necessarily be lonely (Page & Scanlan, 1994).

Asher and Wheeler (1985) designed a study to assess the feelings of loneliness among children in different sociometric status groups. They found that rejected students were the loneliest and the difference was significant when compared to the other status groups. Neglected students' loneliness, on the other hand, did not differ significantly from that of high peer status groups. Asher and Wheeler concluded by asserting that although they identified the loneliest children, large individual differences among these children needed to be examined. Although, the neglected group of children as a whole did not demonstrate an elevated feeling of loneliness, recent research (Harrist et al., 1997) identified considerable clusters or sub-groups of neglected students that may be lonely or even extremely lonely.

Isolation

When children are not able to develop peer relationships or be accepted by peers, they will experience social isolation. Bowker et al. (1998) viewed social isolation from two dimensions: active isolation and passive withdraw. Active isolation occurs when children are either forced out of a group or have been unsuccessful in their attempts to enter the group. Passive withdraw occurs when isolation from a group is due to children's social shyness, anxiety, or extreme social sensitivity. People that are actively isolated are typically relegated to the social status known as rejected. People that are passively withdrawn are generally linked to the neglected group. A study conducted by Hymel, Rubin, Rowden, and LeMare (1990) found that early indices of social withdrawal were

significantly and negatively related to future indices of peer acceptance and self-perceptions of social competence.

Sociometrically rejected or neglected students are the two groups of children that are described as social isolates by Byrnes and Yamamoto (1983). These two groups of social isolates can be divided even further to give a more vivid picture of social isolation.

Harrist et al. (1997) identified four subtypes or clusters of socially withdrawn (isolated) elementary aged children: (a) unsociable, (b) passive-anxious, (c) active-isolates, and (d) sad/depressed. They used Asendorpf's (1990) approach/avoidance conflict conceptualization as a tool to describe the clusters. The term, approach, reflects the desire or motivation of the child to play or interact with other children, while avoidance reflects the inhibition of a child to enter into social interaction with other children.

Unsociable children appear to be socially competent in almost every respect. Their teachers feel that they exhibit the fewest signs of social problems when compared to the other social isolates. They demonstrate low social approach, but are not fearful of social interaction. They comprise nearly two-thirds of the isolated children and are distinguished by high sociometric neglect and solitary play. Although they are seen as socially neglected in elementary school, their behavior may lead to rejection later in life (Waas & Graczyk, 1999).

The study conducted by Waas and Graczyk (1999) centered on the behaviors that lead to peer rejection. They found that younger children were more negative toward disruptive and aggressive behaviors, while older children were more negative toward children demonstrating withdrawn behaviors. Waas and Graczyk declared that girls were

more negative toward externalizing behaviors (e.g., disruptiveness, aggression), and boys were more negative toward internalizing behaviors (e.g., anxiety, shyness).

Passive-anxious students are described as highly timid, anxious, and self-isolating. These children exhibit the approach/avoidance conflict. This means that they have average social approach motivation and high social avoidance motivation. The Harrist et al. (1997) study did not find that these students had elevated rates of neglect or rejection in early elementary school, but stated that they may be at risk for future rejection.

In the Harrist (1997) study, teachers of active-isolate students reported that their level of immaturity, lack of restraint, and anger was the greatest of all of the social isolates. They had high approach motivation and low avoidance motivation. Active-isolates appeared to have the highest degree of social dysfunction and were the most rejected cluster of students in elementary school.

Finally, teachers in the Harrist et al. (1997) study described the sad/depressed cluster of social isolates as self-isolating, timid, and immature. Sad/depressed students were shown by the researchers to have a high level of sociometric rejection in kindergarten that transformed into a high level of neglect in the future grades. Harrist et al. (1997) added that psychopathologists have yet to resolve whether depression is a cause or consequence of social difficulties.

Characteristics of Accepted, Rejected, and Neglected Children

Matthews (1996) acknowledged and listed common behaviors exhibited by children in the accepted, neglected, and rejected status groups. She claimed:

Accepted children are more likely to (a) exhibit friendship making skills, (b) display behavior appropriate to the norms of the group, and (c) dispense positive

reinforcement to their peers. Neglected students are less talkative and participate in fewer incidents of antisocial behavior. Whereas, children who are rejected by their peers exhibit more aggressive behavior, try to exert control during an interaction, and are more disagreeable. (p. 94)

Wentzel and Asher (1995) studied sixth and seventh grade students to develop academic and social profiles of the different sociometric status groups. They reported that when neglected children were compared to average children, they maintained “higher levels of school motivation, were perceived by teachers to be more independent, less impulsive, more appropriate with respect to classroom behavior, and were preferred more by teachers” (p. 758). The study also found that there were subgroup differences among rejected children. When aggressive-rejected children were compared to average children, they were discovered to be:

significantly less interested in schoolwork, were perceived by teachers to be less independent and more impulsive learners, were perceived as being less considerate, compliant, and more likely to start fights. [They] were also less likely to be preferred by their teachers and less likely to be nominated by their classmates as being good students. (p. 759)

The submissive-rejected children did not show any characteristics that were significantly different from the average children for the categories listed above.

Researchers have also neglected the children that are labeled neglected by their peers. There have been few studies conducted that focus exclusively on neglected children. This may be due to the fact that neglected children tend to have solid academic reputations and are highly functioning in the classroom (Wentzel & Asher, 1995). They

are seen by their parents and teachers as having no more problems than popular or average peers and may actually be well accepted by their peers, but maintain few friends or enemies (French & Waas, 1985).

Neglected children are forgotten or ignored because others rarely complain about them and are unnoticed because of their “generally passive, shy, and compliant styles of conduct” (Byrnes, 1984, p.271). Tani and Schneider (1997) asserted that the subjective perspective of the neglected child is often overlooked, yet extremely important because they are unlikely to demonstrate overt behaviors that would be typically noted in parent or teacher reports or detailed in direct observation. Tani and Schneider added that socially neglected children are characterized as having more internalized problems or difficulties than external issues. Byrnes (1984) contended that peer neglect and invisibility lead to low self-esteem, feelings of powerlessness, blocked creativity, extreme shyness, defensiveness, and discouragement.

A study conducted by Byrnes and Yamamoto (1983) attempted to describe neglected students with respect to their characteristics, development, and future. They found that neglected students had lower creativity and self-esteem that decreased with age when compared to higher status peers. The researchers found that many socially neglected students had poor self-images and felt there was little they could do to change themselves or their environment. Byrnes and Yamamoto identified three subgroups of neglected students: (a) talented but distant, (b) tuned out, and (c) lost in the crowd. The “talented but distant” subgroup appeared bright, mature, and creative. The students’ talents were rarely productive in the classroom and often served to further alienate themselves. The students that composed the “tuned out” subgroup demonstrated no special talents and

were not shy or unassertive. Their teachers and peers described them as being a little different or strange. The children that make up the “lost in the crowd” subgroup were described as shy, timid, and unassertive loners. Their peers and parents generally saw them in a positive manner, while teachers viewed them as having normal personalities, but lacking self-confidence or social skills.

Byrnes (1984) continued her discussion of neglected children by naming two distinct subgroups based on self-perception. The children in the “low-low” group were neglected by their peers and reported having low self-esteem. The children in the “high-low” group reported high self-esteem, but were neglected by their peers. The latter group either had difficulty understanding or accepting their status in their peer group, or had found healthy or unhealthy ways of dealing with the neglect or social isolation. They may also, for one reason or another, prefer to be isolated.

Summary

Social isolation can be broken into four distinct subtypes or clusters: (a) unsociable, (b) passive-anxious, (c) active-isolates, and (d) sad/depressed. Active isolation occurs when an individual is forced out of or is not permitted entry into a group of peers. Passive withdrawal occurs when an individual is not part of a group of peers due to social shyness, anxiety, or extreme social sensitivity.

Accepted, rejected, and neglected children all have different social and academic characteristics and profiles. Neglected children are overlooked because they have solid academic reputations, are highly functioning in the classrooms, are not the subjects of complaints, and usually have a passive, shy, and compliant demeanor. Peer neglect leads to low self-esteem, feelings of powerlessness, blocked creativity, extreme shyness,

defensiveness, and discouragement. One study used teacher and peer perceptions to place neglected students into three subgroups: (a) talented but distant, (b) tuned out, and (c) lost in the crowd.

Psychological Constructs of Learned Helplessness and Alienation

Students who experience social isolation may also struggle with other psychological effects, including learned helplessness and alienation. Socially isolated students who develop learned helplessness in social situations may not interact with peers in a way that fosters acceptance or relationships. This lack of social interaction, which may be reinforced by a sense of learned helplessness, can lead students to feel not only alienated from their peers, but also alienated from their social school environment.

Learned Helplessness

Attribution theory (Heider, 1958) is the foundation of the construct known as learned helplessness. Attribution theory focuses on how a person understands perceived causes of events, explains these causes, and predicts future behavior based on these understandings and explanations (Portman, 1995). This theory assumes that people consciously reflect and judge why they succeed or fail at a task.

Portman (1995) asserted that chronic failure leads to learned helplessness. Learned helplessness is caused by repeated failure in task related achievement situations where the individual perceives little or no control over the task related achievement outcomes (Walling & Martinek, 1995). Page and Scanlan (1994) stated that feelings of helplessness and hopelessness contribute to children taking self-derogatory blame for peer and friendship inadequacies. After experiencing a number of failures in certain

situations, students begin to feel that nothing they do will affect the outcome of the situation. Walling and Martinek (1995) refined the construct stating that some students might only exhibit learned helplessness in certain situations, while other students may have it permeate throughout many aspects of their lives. Situation specific learned helplessness occurs when similar reoccurring experiences yield a perceived negative and insurmountable outcome that creates a “why even bother trying” attitude.

Goetz and Dweck (1980) refined the construct of learned helplessness to apply to social settings. They defined social learned helplessness as the perceived inability to surmount social rejection. Conversely, Goetz and Dweck (1980) and Walling and Martinek (1995) defined mastery-oriented students as students who possess a strong sense of control over situational outcomes, develop a variety of problem-solving strategies to overcome challenges, and interpret failure as a cue to escalate their efforts. These students believe that they can overcome difficult situations and obstacles. This belief gives them the desire to problem-solve and increase their efforts until they succeed, which provides them with a greater incentive to attack challenging situations.

Goetz and Dweck (1980) applied definitions of mastery-oriented and social learned helplessness to an examination of fourth and fifth grade student responses to social rejection across popularity levels. They found that children who demonstrated an incompetence attribution scored slightly lower on measures of popularity, but popularity did not prevent helpless responses to rejection. Perceived personal incompetence as the cause of rejection was found to be the most severe disruption in attempts to gain social approval.

Alienation of Students

Seeman (1959) defined alienation as a composition of five dimensions: (a) powerlessness, (b) normlessness, (c) meaninglessness, (d) isolation, and (e) self-estrangement. Powerlessness is an individual's strong sense of not being able to control events, while normlessness describes individuals whose value system and resultant behavior differs from that of society's values. Meaninglessness refers to an individual's lack of hope because of the absence of goals or values, while the term "isolation" refers to an individual's feeling of separation from a group or institution. Finally, self-estrangement is an individual's realization that the outcome or reward is not related to the performance. Carlson (1995) proposed that alienation is the persistent negative feelings experienced by students related to the states of meaninglessness, powerlessness, and isolation in a particular situation.

Alienated students withdraw emotionally, mentally, or physically from a situation (Carlson, 1995). Alienation may stem from students' beliefs or feeling that they cannot control or change the situation. This feeling was previously defined as "learned helplessness".

Calabrese and Seldin (1986) examined alienation in the high school setting. They found that high school females experience a greater sense of alienation from school than males. They asserted that the females' greater feelings of withdrawal or separation may develop as a result of experiencing a female-oriented, elementary school environment before being thrust into a less nurturing "alien" environment (high school).

Trusty and Dooley-Dickey (1993) reviewed the literature to identify possible predictor variables associated with fourth through eighth grade students' feelings of alienation

from school. In their review of literature, no alienation studies of students in elementary or middle schools were identified. Trusty and Dooley-Dickey (1993) postulated:

Alienation from school involves perceptions of students, and these perceptions may or may not be reflective of reality. Students may not manifest the negative effects of low achievement, failure, or incongruence of their culture and the school's culture until their early high school years. Alienation may be a phenomenon that results from experiences in the early elementary and middle school years, but these experiences may not come to bear on students' feelings of belonging with school or valuing of school until adolescence. (p. 239)

Summary

Learned helplessness is a feeling that an individual develops after many failed attempts to perform a task in certain situations. Individuals begin to assume that there is nothing they can do to change the outcome of the situation, and, therefore, stop making attempts to change. Students that are continually isolated in social situations could eventually develop a sense of learned helplessness in social interactions and situations. The social isolation of learned helpless children may further hinder their attempts to generate meaningful relationships or increase peer acceptance. The absence of social bonds or interactions in the school setting could eventually lead students to feelings of alienation from school. From a constructivist point of view, alienation would have a major impact on the entire educational process because social interactions are essential for the social construction of knowledge.

Care as an Intellectual and Moral Construct

One goal of feminist moral theory is to develop a deeper understanding of what is meant by “care” and “caring relationships”. This section looks at the ethic of care through a theoretical framework developed by Nel Noddings (1988, 1992). The ethic of care is introduced as a construct based philosophy that views care as a deliberate moral and intellectual stance grounded in the relationship between the “one caring” and “the cared for”. Modeling, dialogue, practice, and confirmation are identified as necessary components to utilize the ethic of care effectively in the educational setting. Finally, the relational zone can be described as similar to a zone of proximal development from a caring perspective (Goldstein, 1999).

The Ethic of Care

Noddings (1988) postulated that, when the ethical orientation of care is elaborated, it takes the form of what could be called relational ethics. A relational ethic differs from traditional ethics because of the direct concern for the relationship with and the feelings and responses of another. Goldstein (1998) believed that the ethic of care provided a way of thinking about caring as “an action rather than an attribute [and] a deliberate moral and intellectual stance rather than simply a feeling” (p. 259). In Goldstein’s work, the relational ethic centers on a relational dyad.

In one example of a relational ethic, the ethic of care, Noddings (1988) described a relational dyad in detail. The dyad is composed of the care-giver, termed the One-caring, and the care-receiver, termed the Cared-for. The One-caring responds to the needs and initiations of the Cared-for with engrossment and displacement of motivation. Noddings (1992) defined engrossment as “an open, nonselective receptivity to the Cared-for” (p.

15). Engrossment occurs as the One-caring focuses their total attention on the Cared-for. This engrossment may last for only a couple of moments or an extended time period, and it may or may not be repeated. Noddings (1992) defined displacement of motivation as “the sense that our motive energy is flowing towards others and their projects” (p. 16). In motivational displacement, the One-caring places the Cared-for’s actions, goals, and projects ahead of their own. Noddings emphasized that engrossment and motivational displacement do not dictate a course of action. Instead they are compelling characteristics of the One-caring’s conscience.

The Cared-for also plays an essential role and assumes specific responsibilities in this dyad. Noddings (1992) identified three conscience characteristics of the Cared-for: reception, recognition, and response. Reception is the desire and the openness to be cared-for, while recognition is any acknowledgement given by the Cared-for to the One-caring for entering the relationship. Response is any verbal or nonverbal, active or passive expression of appreciation by the Cared-for to the One-caring. Although the response of the Cared-for ends the caring experience in a mature, caring relationship, the two parties may regularly exchange roles. This flow between being the Cared-for and the One-caring becomes easier and more natural with every caring relationship experienced. The characteristics of the One-caring and the Cared-for remain distinct in every caring relationship, but the individual’s roles will change throughout the maturation of the relationship.

Components for an Ethic of Care in Education

Often teachers assume the role of the One-caring while students are frequently in the Cared-for positions, although it is not uncommon to find students in both roles.

Noddings (1992) proposed four components of the ethic of care essential to its implementation in the educational setting. Noddings explained that teachers instruct students to be caring individuals through modeling, dialogue, practice, and confirmation.

Modeling involves demonstrating how to care and how to be cared for. Peers or teachers can exhibit this in educational settings. Teachers first model caring by creating genuine caring relationships with their students. Noddings expanded on the importance of the teacher-student relationship by explaining that “the capacity to care may be dependent on adequate experience in being cared for” (1992, p. 22). Teachers play an important role in the lives of their students because they spend so much of the day with the children and, in some situations, are the most influential person in the child's life.

Dialogue, the second component in the ethic of care, involves open-ended discourse between individuals in which the outcome of the discourse is not predetermined. It allows people to search for and gain understanding, empathy, and/or appreciation of another's perspective. Dialogue also facilitates a connection between individuals and helps to maintain and strengthen caring relationships.

The third component of care, practice, provides individuals with the opportunity to gain skills involved in both care giving and being cared-for. It encourages these individuals to develop the characteristics and attitudes necessary to participate in a mature caring relationship. Noddings asserted that the practice of caring in education has the potential not only to transform classroom dynamics, but also eventually, positively enhance the climate in the school and community.

Noddings (1992) described the fourth component of the ethic of care, confirmation, as affirming and encouraging the best in others. Confirmation does more than acknowledge

a caring action. Confirmation supports and encourages future caring actions and lifts people to their vision of a better self. Confirmation can also increase an individual's feeling of being cared-for. If an individual knows that the teacher is observing them and supporting their vision of self-improvement, Noddings argued that they will know and experience what it means to be cared-for. Ideally, this aspect of confirmation links back to modeling because the person doing the confirming is also modeling appropriate caring behavior.

The Relational Zone

The zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978) also can be viewed from the caring perspective. A distinction, however, should be made between natural caring and ethical caring. Noddings (1984) defined the two forms of caring based on the motivation behind the caring act. Natural caring is driven by love or natural inclination. When natural caring is occurring, the "I must" that the individual feels towards the act of caring is indistinguishable from the "I want". When natural caring is not occurring, the "I must" feeling towards the caring act is not aligned with the "I want" feeling. In these situations, the "I ought" feeling towards the caring act can be paired with the "I must" feeling to elicit the caring response. This caring act can be defined as ethical caring because the "I ought" can be viewed as a moral sentiment or aspiration. Goldstein (1999) clarified the distinction by stating:

the difference between the two is linked to the issues of motive: Natural caring is driven by deep feeling for the cared-for; ethical caring is driven by the one-caring's desire to enhance [his/her] ethical ideal, [their] vision of [themselves] as a moral person. (p. 659)

Goldstein (1999) hypothesized that the zone of proximal development is more than just a construction zone for knowledge, it is also a relational zone built on caring. By using Nel Noddings's work (1988, 1992), Goldstein (1999) emphasized that teachers, who choose to enter caring relationships with their students, experience both natural and ethical caring. By keeping the student/teacher relationship in focus, Noddings (1984) discussed the reciprocity of the interaction by noting the pleasure derived from learning, performing the tasks or activities, seeing the fruits of their labor, and working with one another. Goldstein (1999) postulated that the moral imperative of the teacher combined with the pleasure that arises because of the interaction creates the motivation to enter into a caring relationship with the student. Noddings suggested that teachers should make an attempt "to stretch the student's world by presenting an effective selection of that world with which [he/she] is in contact, and to work cooperatively with the student in [his/her] struggle toward competence in that world" (1984, p. 178).

Goldstein (1999) further argued that the interpersonal features of the zone of proximal development should be separated into two simultaneously occurring dimensions: the interpsychological dimension and the interrelational dimension. Vygotsky (1978) defined the interpsychological dimension as the intellectual space created by the adult and child in the zone of proximal development. Goldstein (1999) defined the interrelational dimension as the shared affective space created by the adult and child in the zone of proximal development. She continued by stating that, "the interrelational dimension facilitates entry into the zone of proximal development, continues during the pair's experience in the zone, and emerges after the learning experience in a transformed and deepened form" (p. 651).

Other scholars have also advocated for a definition of the zone of proximal development that emphasizes “relationships”. Stone (1993, p. 170) stated that "the effectiveness of the interactions (and therefore the potential for new learning) within the [zone of proximal development] varies as a function of the interpersonal relationship between the participants." When the zone of proximal development is viewed as both an intellectual and affective endeavor, the ways that a child and adult contribute and are affected by the experience can more clearly be identified. Goldstein (1999) postulated that, "in addition to being a region of intellectual development - a construction zone - the zone of proximal development is also a region of affective development - a relational zone" (p. 664). This relational zone is grounded in caring, whether it is natural caring, ethical caring, or both.

Viewing the zone of proximal development as a place where intellectual knowledge is stimulated and where relationships act as the facilitating element allows for the zone to be expanded and explored in different ways. Researchers can use this theory to develop the importance of the relational dyad between the mentor and child. Emphasis can expand from understanding where the zone lies for each child to the importance of the caring teacher who creates powerful relationships with his/her students. If the teacher creates a strong, caring bond with a student, the student may not develop feelings of school alienation, and gain an increased knowledge and sense of what it truly feels like to care for others in a positive manner. This knowledge and feeling can empower individuals to care for others, including the students that may be considered social isolates.

Noddings (1992) declared that caring encounters are learning encounters for the Cared-for. One way that people learn to care is by being involved in caring relationships

and being cared-for. An idealistic view would lead to the belief that every caring encounter is a learning encounter and every learning encounter is a caring encounter (Goldstein, 1999). Goldstein (1999) continued to build upon this idea by stating:

Teachers who choose to meet their students in the zone of proximal development, and who have deliberately chosen to look upon the act of teaching as an opportunity to participate in caring encounters, will be teaching their students not only how to solve the intellectual problems at hand but also how to care. (p. 666)

The zone of proximal development has been traditionally seen as a value-free construct that promoted ethically neutral learning. The broadening of the zone of proximal development to include both the interpsychological dimension and the interrelational dimension takes the zone in a caring and moral direction. This view of the zone of proximal development challenges teachers to provide students with a worthwhile educational experience focused on bringing them closer to socially created ethical ideals (Goldstein, 1999).

Summary

Nel Noddings produced a theoretical framework that allows the ethic of care to be viewed as a deliberate moral and intellectual stance. This vision extends the concept of caring beyond that of a feeling to a concrete and definable relational dyad between the One-caring and the Cared-for. Modeling, dialogue, practice and confirmation are the four components identified within the ethic of care that should be integrated into the educational setting for successful implementation to be achieved. The relational zone comes into existence when the zone of proximal development is viewed from a caring perspective. This view focuses on the relationship between the mentor and mentee as a

caring one, which not only fosters intellectual growth, but also interpersonal growth as well. Two types of caring, natural and ethical, are identified in the relational zone and should be used by both the mentor and the mentee throughout their relationship.

Conclusion

There is a clear link between the educational process and social interaction. Social constructivism relies on social interactions and the ability of individuals to meld their ideas and use their socially developed tools to create knowledge. There are choices that children make each day that relate to their affiliation towards others, which may affect the creation of not only academic knowledge, but relational knowledge as well. Peer acceptance, rejection, and indifference play a significant role in the social dynamic. Socially isolated children may be missing out on opportunities to create personal knowledge and voice their important points of view due to their lack of involvement in the collaborative learning environment that classrooms generate. This lack of impact and voice in school and social situations may lead socially isolated children to develop feelings of learned helplessness, which could lead to alienation from peers and school. Education based on care as a moral and intellectual construct may be a way to bring social isolates in from the margins and establish a means of reducing students' alienation from school by focusing on relationships and care rather than disjointed educational concepts.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

The purpose of this research was to develop an understanding of the physical education-based lived experiences of non-aggressive socially isolated (NASI) students. NASI students are described as children who have low social impact. For example, NASI students typically have solid academic reputations, are highly functioning in the classrooms, and usually have a passive, shy, and compliant demeanor. They are not viewed as more impulsive, or less independent, considerate, or compliant than other peers, and are not typically the subjects of complaints. These students are rarely included in the social aspects of the classroom, including peer interaction that leads to knowledge creation and the development of socially accepted behaviors. The research question that guided this study is “What are the physical education-based lived experiences of non-aggressive socially isolated students?” Specifically, (a) How did the non-aggressive socially isolated students describe themselves and their social interactions with their peers? (b) What were the perceptions of the children who were not socially isolated towards their non-aggressive socially isolated peers? and (c) How did teachers view their non-aggressive socially isolated students? In this chapter, I describe the participants, setting, research design, data collection, data analysis, and threats to the trustworthiness, reliability, and validity of the research.

Participants

The participants in this study were the students in two of my fifth grade physical education classes and their homeroom teachers. I will begin by discussing my role as the researcher-teacher in the research.

Researcher-Teacher

I received my bachelor's degree in Kinesiology with a focus on physical education from the University of Maryland, College Park (UMCP) in 1997. My undergraduate training consisted of a focus on skill development, but offered many opportunities to experiment with other models of teaching in physical education. The experience invited us to explore our personal educational philosophies and orientations.

I have been teaching physical education using a movement and themed-base approach at the same school for six years. As the researcher for this study, I collected data from seven sources: (a) a researcher/teacher journal, (b) individual interviews with classroom teachers, (c) individual interviews with NASI students, (d) individual interviews with highly accepted students, (e) student journaling, (f) formal independent observations, and (g) researcher observations. I know the teachers and the students very well, which allowed me the opportunity to comment meaningfully on their reactions and interactions regarding the phenomena being examined. Interviews, student journaling, independent observations, researcher observations, and a researcher/teacher journal were utilized to examine the physical education-based lived experiences of NASI students.

Fifth Grade Teachers

Two of my co-workers, David and Jennifer (all names in this study are reported as pseudonyms), comprised two-thirds of the fifth grade teacher team at the elementary school in which the research was conducted. They were both Caucasian and lived in the school district in which they taught. David was in his late twenties, and received his Bachelor's Degree in Elementary Education in 1996. Jennifer was in her early fifties, and received a Bachelor's Degree in Government Policy in 1971, a Master's Degree in

International Relations specializing in the Middle East in 1973, and another Master's Degree in Elementary Education in 1995.

David had been a teacher for a total of seven years, although this was his third year teaching at this school. Previously, he had two years of first grade and two years of second grade teaching experience before accepting his current fifth grade teaching assignment. Jennifer had 18 years of experience working with children in the elementary setting. She had been a fifth grade teacher at this school for seven years. Before she took this teaching assignment, she was a teaching assistant for eleven years at another elementary school gaining experiences with children from kindergarten to sixth grade.

Fifth Grade Students

Fifty-one of the fifty-four students eligible to take part in the research participated in this study. Thirty of the participants were boys and twenty-one were girls. Of the three students who did not participate, two students were not interested and did not give their assent, and one did not return the parental consent form. The fifth grade students represented several ethnicities, including 78% Caucasian, 15% Asian, 6% Hispanic, and 1% African-American. Only 5% of the fifth grade students were new to the school this year, which was roughly one student in each of the two fifth grade classes. There were no fifth grade students who qualified for the FARM (free and reduced priced meals) program. There were three students in the fifth grade who received ESOL (English for speakers of other languages) services. Two of these ESOL students were in David's class and one was in Jennifer's class. Three students were mainstreamed from special education classrooms into regular physical education classes in the fifth grade. One, fifth grade boy was mainstreamed into David's class for physical education, and two, fifth

grade students, one boy and one girl, were mainstreamed into Jennifer's class for physical education.

NASI Students

Four students (Jill, Linda, Mike, and Sally), two from each participating fifth grade class, were identified as NASI students. Using the qualitative social dynamics task (QSDT) described in the data collection section of this chapter and shown in Appendix A, the teachers placed all of their students on two continua, social isolation and social aggression, based on their observations of cooperative activities that took place in their classrooms. The fifth grade teachers were interviewed about the students whom they placed on the isolated/non-isolated and the aggressive/non-aggressive continua.

Examination of the data gathered in the discussions with the teachers regarding their rationales for student placement on the continua helped the researcher in the selection of the NASI students. Finally, the researcher using these data identified two students from each class who best fit the definition of a NASI student. The students who were viewed by his/her teacher as being the most socially isolated students with the isolation not generated by social aggression were defined as NASI student participants from each class. The diagrams of the teachers' completed and overlapping QSDT for social isolation and aggression are presented in Appendix B.

Highly Accepted Students

There were four students (Keith, Elizabeth, Jimmy, and Karen), two from each participating fifth grade class, identified as highly accepted students. Using the QSDT, the teachers placed all of their students on two continua, social isolation and social aggression based on his/her observations of cooperative activities that take place in their

classroom. In the same interview described above, the fifth grade teachers described the characteristics of the students they placed on the isolated/non-isolated and the aggressive/non-aggressive continua. Examination of the data gathered in the discussions with the teachers regarding their rationales for student placement on the continua aided the researcher in the selection of the highly accepted students. Finally, the researcher identified two students from each class who best fit the definition of a highly accepted student. The students who were viewed by his/her teacher as the most socially accepted, with a social aggression assignment above and below the teacher's perceived threshold for potentially isolating behaviors due to that social aggression, were the two students chosen from each class as the highly accepted students.

Setting

The research setting for this study was an elementary school located in an upper-middle class suburb of a large metropolitan school district on the East coast. The school had an enrollment of 492 students. The ethnic breakdown for the school student population was 74% Caucasian, 15% Asian, 8% Hispanic, and 3% African-American students. Seven percent of the students received ESOL (English for speakers of other languages) services. Two percent of the school population qualified for the FARM (free and reduced priced meals) program. The student mobility rate for the 2000 - 2001 school year was five percent. The school housed twenty-three homeroom classes. Four of these homeroom classes were special education classes. The remaining nineteen classes were dispersed evenly from kindergarten through fifth grade with second grade maintaining four homeroom classes.

Physical Education

The school had a multipurpose room and adequate field space for physical education classes. The kindergarten classes received physical education once a week for thirty minutes. The first and second grade classes received physical education twice a week for a total of an hour of instruction. The third, fourth, and fifth grade classes received physical education once a week for forty-five minutes. The equipment and supplies available for physical education included large and small equipment, manipulatives, etc.

The multipurpose room was about 45' x 90' with a 10' ceiling. The walls of the indoor space were lined with folded lunchroom tables. The outdoor field space was very large and accommodated four regulation soccer fields. There was a large blacktop area behind the school that could be used if the fields were too wet or snow covered.

I try to keep my physical education curriculum grounded in three "E's": experimentation, exploration, and enjoyment. The kindergarten, first, and second grade students were engaged in units and lessons based on Laban's Movement Framework (Laban & Lawrence, 1947). The third and fourth grade students' physical education units were composed of large skill themes, such as kicking, overhand throwing, and striking with the upper body. The fifth grade students were given the opportunity to place all of the skills that they had developed throughout their years in physical education at the school into semi-competitive modified games. Each semi-competitive modified game unit was four to five weeks long and consisted of a skill evaluation on the first day and game play for the remainder of the unit.

Research Design

This research study was conducted over an eleven-week period. This section includes a description of my entry into the setting, including the introduction of the research to the parents, teachers, and students, and the timeline for data collection. The two following sections give detailed information about the methods used for data collection and analysis and an explanation of the ways in which threats to the trustworthiness of the research were addressed in the research design.

Entry into the Setting and Informed Consent

I met with the principal and explained the purposes of the study and my concerns about the learning environments encountered by NASI students. I explained that the main purpose of this study was to examine the physical education-based experiences of NASI students. I stated that my main concern was that the NASI students' school and physical education experiences may be limited because of their detachment from peers. These negative experiences could be leading to disengagement from some of the more socially and cognitively enriching activities the school had to offer. I emphasized that, from a social constructivist perspective, peer engagement in the creation of new knowledge or skills may be a crucial link to engaging and enhancing the NASI students' school- and physical education-based school experiences.

The principal and I discussed the research design issues and informed consent procedures. There were three issues that needed special attention. The first major concern was the procedures agreed upon in this proposal used to recruit the NASI students' and their parents' consent to participate. I explained the rationale for the need and importance of their participation and requested the principal's support and

cooperation in the NASI students' recruitment and gaining parental consent. The second issue was the manner in which the entire fifth grade student population and their parents/guardians were informed of the research study and invited to participate. This topic was addressed following the school's protocol for information distribution. Typically, this protocol involved parents/guardians receiving school information via written correspondence sent home with the students.

The third issue dealt with the nature of my explanation about the study that was given to the students, parents, and guardians. Divulging too much specific information could have biased the data because students and teachers might have changed the way they behaved towards the NASI students. A majority of this issue's discussion time was given to the protection of the eight students' (i.e., NASI or highly accepted) anonymity when discussing this research with staff members, parents, and other fifth grade students. Because the children were aware of and could have discussed the individual interviews among themselves, it was critical that I provided ways to make these interviews private and the conversations confidential. Although the fact that these students were being interviewed could have been discovered, I did not disclose the labeling of these students as NASI or highly accepted. It was my aim to tell the fifth grade students that some of their peers were interviewed to give a diverse perspective of physical education experiences. I told the students involved in the interviews that I would keep all discussions confidential, and that they should do their best to do the same. The principal agreed to sign the informed consent letter for the school and it was included with the Institutional Review Board (IRB) documents.

After the principal gave consent to conduct the study and the independent observer agreed to perform two observations of the fifth grade students in physical education class, I approached the fifth grade teachers and explained the purpose of the study and their potential role. I informed the teachers that I was examining the physical education-based lived experiences of fifth grade students. I notified them that they would be requested to participate in two 30 to 60 minute individual interviews, allow me to observe their classroom for 60-minutes, and administer four, 10-15 minute writing tasks in their classrooms. I advised them, that during the audio taped interviews, I would ask them to complete a two-part QSDT and answer questions relating to the social dynamics of their classroom and students.

After I introduced the research design to the principal, independent observer, and the two fifth grade teachers and they gave their consent for me to proceed, I used a written letter approved by the University of Maryland Institutional Review Board and hand carried home by all fifth grade students to notify parents/guardians of the study. This letter informed them of the general purpose of the study (i.e., examining the physical education-based lived experiences of fifth grade students) and made them aware that all students would be observed and asked to write anonymous journal entries based on open-ended questions, focusing on the many different realms of physical education class, school, and/or social dynamics. I requested that parents/guardians sign the attached IRB form, and return it via the student to me. The students and their parents were reminded that this research study would in no way affect the student's grade in physical education class. I addressed any student or parent/guardian concerns through direct meetings, phone discussions, or e-mail communications.

On the day that the IRB consent letter was sent home with all of the fifth grade students, I explained to the students that I was conducting a study on fifth grade students' experiences in physical education class. I gave all of the eligible fifth grade students assent forms to sign. I explained that all fifth grade students would be asked to write journal entries to help me conduct this research. I informed the students that some fifth grade students would be individually interviewed because of my need to find diverse perspectives of and experiences in physical education class. I stressed that these interviews would aid me in developing a deeper understanding of their experiences in physical education. I emphasized that their participation could help improve the quality of physical education at their school and be of great value to the students that attend this school in the future. I highlighted that this study may lead to a better understanding of how students experience physical education and allow me to create improved physical education experiences for students at the school. I took the time to answer any questions that the students had and urged the students to return his/her assent and the parental permission form to me as soon as possible. Finally, I stressed their importance in making this research a success and asked them to read and sign the assent form.

The parents/guardians of the NASI students received a permission form in a sealed envelope. This form invited their child to participate in two individual interviews for the research study and explained that their child was chosen because of the researcher's desire to gather data from students with potentially diverse perceptions of physical education class. The form explained that I, as the researcher/teacher, would be focusing my questions on peer relationships in the classroom setting and school, and their personal physical education experiences. Finally, the parents/guardians were informed that the

interviews would be audio taped and the fifth grade students would be told that some students were chosen for interviews because of their potentially diverse perspectives on physical education to protect their anonymity.

The parents/guardians of the highly accepted students received a permission form in a sealed envelope. This form invited their child to participate in two individual interviews for the research study and explained that their child were chosen because of the researcher's desire to gather data from students with potentially diverse perceptions of physical education class. The form explained that I, as the researcher/teacher, would ask questions focusing on peer relationships in the classroom setting and school, and their personal physical education experiences. Finally, the parents/guardians were informed that the interviews would be audio taped, and that the fifth grade students would be told that some students were chosen for interviews because of their potentially diverse perspectives on physical education.

I emphasized in all IRB permission letters that I wanted the physical education environment to be both an inviting and a socially and emotionally safe place to learn. The students and their parents were reminded that this research study would in no way affect the student's grade in physical education class. I explained to parents that it was crucial that I examine all students' perspectives to generate curriculum that is sensitive to all of my students' needs. Every student would be given a voice that would be respected and kept anonymous. Therefore, the students, teachers, and parents were kept unaware of the NASI and highly accepted classifications used in this study. I, as the researcher, was the only person who was aware of the NASI and highly accepted classifications. I

addressed any student or parent/guardian concerns through direct meetings, phone discussions, or e-mail communications.

Timeline for Data Collection

The eleven-week study included researcher/teacher journaling, fifth grade teachers' interviews, NASI students' interviews, the highly accepted students' interviews, student journaling, two observations by an independent observer, and eight observations by me. Data collection followed the timeline presented in Figure 2. A detailed chronological breakdown of the individual weeks follows the timeline. Additional detailed information about each of these data collection methods is discussed in the next section.

Figure 2. Timeline of data collection

	Weeks										
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Teachers' Interviews	x										
NASI Students' Interviews				x						x	
Accepted Students' Interviews					x	x					
5 th Grade Student Journaling			x			x			x		x
Independent Observations					x					x	
Researcher Observations						x	x		x	x	
Researcher/Teacher Journaling		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Data Analysis	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x

Week 1. During the first week of the study, the fifth grade teachers were interviewed twice, and given a two-part QSDT in the middle of each interview requesting them to

place each of their students on a continuum based on his or her observations of cooperative activities in his/her classroom. During each 30 to 60 minute open-ended interview, the sorting aspect of the QSDT took place. After the QSDT was completed, the teachers discussed the students at the margins of the sorting aspect of the task. Using the QSDT and the interviews, the researcher/teacher identified two NASI students and two highly accepted students from each of the teacher's classes. I introduced the study to the participating fifth grade students and answered all of their questions about the research. Permission letters were sent home to all of the fifth grade students' parents or guardians and the fifth grade students were asked to sign assent forms. Data analysis was conducted to identify emerging themes and address the research questions.

Week 2. Permission forms were sent home to the parents or guardians of the students I identified as the NASI and highly accepted students. I wrote a journal entry in the researcher/teacher journal after I taught each of the participating fifth grade physical education classes. Data analysis was conducted to identify emerging themes, reinforce previously discovered themes, and address the research questions.

Week 3. The fifth grade students recorded their responses to reflection questions in their physical education journal. These reflections were completed during a fifteen-minute period in their homeroom with their classroom teacher. I wrote a journal entry in the researcher/teacher journal after I taught each of the participating fifth grade physical education classes. Data analysis was conducted to identify emerging themes, reinforce previously discovered themes, and address the research questions.

Week 4. The four NASI students were individually interviewed for 20 to 30 minutes. I wrote a journal entry in the researcher/teacher journal after I taught each of the

participating fifth grade physical education classes. Data analysis was conducted to identify emerging themes, reinforce previously discovered themes, and address the research questions.

Week 5. Three of the four highly accepted students were interviewed for 20 to 30 minutes. The interviews started with the same questions that were asked during the first NASI students' individual interviews. The remainder of the interview was spent probing the responses and examining emerging themes. The independent observer conducted a 45-minute physical education observation of David's fifth grade class. I wrote a journal entry in the researcher/teacher journal after I taught each of the participating fifth grade physical education classes. Data analysis was conducted to identify emerging themes, reinforce previously discovered themes, and address the research questions.

Week 6. The last of the four highly accepted students was interviewed for 20 to 30 minutes. The interview started with the same questions that were asked during the first NASI students' individual interviews. The remainder of the interview was spent probing the responses and examining emerging themes. I conducted three, 30-minute, and formal observations of David's class during their lunch and recess time. The fifth grade students recorded their responses to reflection questions in their physical education journal. These reflections were completed during a fifteen-minute period in their homeroom with their classroom teacher. I wrote a journal entry in the researcher/teacher journal after I taught each of the participating fifth grade physical education classes. Data analysis was conducted to identify emerging themes, reinforce previously discovered themes, and address the research questions.

Week 7. I conducted one, 60-minute, and formal observation of Jennifer's class during a structured, but social art activity. I wrote a journal entry in the researcher/teacher journal after I taught each of the participating fifth grade physical education classes. Data analysis was conducted to identify emerging themes, reinforce previously discovered themes, and address the research questions.

Week 8. I continued to write journal entries in the researcher/teacher journal after I taught each of the participating fifth grade physical education classes. Data analysis was conducted to identify emerging themes, reinforce previously discovered themes, and address the research questions.

Week 9. I conducted three, 30-minute, and formal observations of Jennifer's class during their lunch and recess time. The fifth grade students recorded their responses to reflection questions in their physical education journal. These reflections were completed during a fifteen-minute period in their homeroom with their classroom teacher. I wrote a journal entry in the researcher/teacher journal after I taught each of the participating fifth grade physical education classes. Data analysis was conducted to identify emerging themes, reinforce previously discovered themes, and address the research questions.

Week 10. The four NASI students were individually interviewed for 20 to 30 minutes. I used this interview to probe further into their responses during their first interview and to examine themes that emerged during other data collection procedures. The independent observer conducted a 45-minute physical education observation of Jennifer's fifth grade class. I conducted one, 60-minute, and formal observation of David's class during a structured, but social writing and social studies activity. I wrote a journal entry in the researcher/teacher journal after I taught each of the participating fifth grade

physical education classes. Data analysis was conducted to identify emerging themes, reinforce previously discovered themes, and address the research questions.

Week 11. The fifth grade students recorded their responses to reflection questions in their physical education journal. These reflections were completed during a fifteen-minute period in their homeroom with their classroom teacher. I wrote a journal entry in the researcher/teacher journal after I taught each of the participating fifth grade physical education classes. Data analysis was conducted to identify emerging themes, reinforce previously discovered themes, and address the research questions.

Data Collection

There are seven sources of data that were collected for this research: (a) fifth grade teachers' interviews, (b) NASI students' interviews, (c) socially accepted students' interviews, (d) formal independent observations, (e) researcher observations, (f) student journals and (g) the researcher/teacher journal.

Fifth Grade Teachers' Interviews

Two of the three fifth grade teachers, David and Jennifer, were formally interviewed for this study. A copy of the formal, initial interview questions is located in Appendix C. They were each asked to participate in two individual interviews. David and Jennifer's interviews were conducted in a quiet place at their convenience during the first week of the study and lasted from 30 to 60 minutes. The fifth grade teachers' interviews were audio taped while I took anecdotal notes. The tapes and notes were transcribed for analysis.

The focus of the interviews was based on their awareness, perception, and influence on the social dynamic of peer acceptance and isolation in their classrooms. David and Jennifer were not given any formal definitions from literature nor did the researcher reveal the criteria pertaining to social isolation and aggression unless their definitions were dramatically different than the definitions that were being used in this study. During each interview, the teachers were presented with a qualitative social dynamics task (QSDT).

The QSDT required them to place all of their students on two continua, social isolation and social aggression, based on his or her observations of cooperative activities in their classroom. The teachers were given index cards with all of their student's names printed on them. David and Jennifer were asked to sort the students in his/her class into piles or groups. For the QSDT focusing on social isolation (QSDT-I), the initial sort consisted of three piles that were labeled: low social isolation (left pile), average social acceptance (middle pile), and high social isolation (right pile). Once David and Jennifer completed the first sort and were satisfied that his/her students were in the appropriate pile, a second sort was conducted for each pile. There were two piles utilized for the second sort and any subsequent sorts that occurred. These piles were labeled: less socially isolated (left pile) and more socially isolated (right pile). After each sort, David and Jennifer were asked if they were satisfied with the groups that his/her students were in and allowed to readjust the piles. The sorts continued until each pile had between four and six student's names in them or the teacher felt that he/she could not sort a pile any further. At this point, the piles were numbered starting with the pile on the far left and

ending with the far right pile. The pile number was listed on the back of each student's name card for future researcher identification.

When this stage was reached, the teacher was asked to place the children in each pile on a continuum with one margin labeled low social isolation (left margin) and the other labeled high social isolation (right margin). David and Jennifer placed students at the same place on the continuum if they were unable to distinguish between students. The teachers were permitted to switch student's positions as they saw fit until they were satisfied with the placements that they have chosen for their students. Once the teacher was satisfied with the continuum, the student's cards were labeled left to right using the alphabet. If two or more students maintained the same position on the continuum, they received the same letter to distinguish their position. At the end of the sorting task, each student's card had a number representing a pile and letter representing a position on the continuum placed on the card's back.

For the QSDT focusing on social aggression (QSDT-A), all of the protocols remained the same for sorting, placing students on continua, and coding the cards. The difference was the labeling of the groups and margins on the continuum. The initial sort consisted of three piles that were labeled: low social aggression (left pile), average social aggression (middle pile), and high social aggression (right pile). There were two piles utilized for the second sort and any subsequent sorts that occurred. These piles were labeled: less socially aggressive (left pile) and more socially aggressive (right pile). When it was time to place the students in each pile on the continuum, one margin was labeled low social aggression (left margin) and the other labeled high social aggression (right margin).

During the first individual interview with David and Jennifer, they were asked to complete the QSDT-I and were encouraged to discuss the individual students located towards the margins of the sorting aspect of the task. The teachers were asked for examples of the behaviors and characteristics of these students. During the second individual interview with David and Jennifer, they were asked to complete the QSDT-A and were encouraged to discuss the individual students located towards the margins of the sorting aspect of the task. The teachers were asked for examples of the behaviors and characteristics of these students. The QSDT-I was the *primary* instrument used to classify students who were either socially isolated or highly accepted. After students were identified in each category, the QSDT-A and the teachers' interviews were utilized as a *secondary* instrument to make the final decisions on the students who were interviewed for this research. Finally, the teachers were asked to give instructional, managerial, and social strategies that they have used or are interested in using to engage the NASI students and to infuse them back into the social framework of the class.

NASI Students' Interviews

The four students who were identified by the researcher/teacher as best fitting the criteria of a non-aggressive social isolate were formally interviewed in weeks four and ten. A copy of the formal, taped interview questions is located in Appendix C. These were individual interviews conducted in a quiet room during either the student's lunch or recess time based upon his/her request. Each interview lasted about 20 to 30 minutes. The initial questions for each interview were prerecorded using a voice that was unrecognizable to the students to eliminate some of the power relationships that exist between teacher and student. The students were told that it was a voice of another

researcher and professor from the University of Maryland. I asked probing questions after the student was done responding to each audio taped question. The NASI interviews were audio taped while I took anecdotal notes. The tapes and notes were transcribed for analysis.

The week four interviews were more general than the week ten interviews. The week four interview questions were used to develop a rapport with the students, show the students how the dialogue would take place, and allowed students the time to become comfortable with the interview process while the researcher searched for underlying themes in the students physical education-based lived experiences that were probed in more detail during the week ten interviews. Topics for questions were generated from the interviews conducted with the fifth grade teachers, and the social isolation research reviewed in Chapter 2. The questions focused on the overall school experiences of the NASI students during structured and non-structured classroom activities, physical education class, recess, and lunch while taking into consideration the students' views of the social dynamics with and among their peers.

The week ten interviews were more specific because they probed themes that were generated by the fifth grade teacher's interviews, accepted students' interviews, NASI students' first interviews, fifth grade journals, and observations. All interviews were semi-structured providing a specific direction to the questioning while allowing the flexibility to have different conversations with different people. The NASI students were made aware at both interview sessions that honest and thoughtful responses were both needed and valued and that their physical education grade would not be affected in any way due to their participation in this study.

Socially Accepted Students' Interviews

The four students who were identified by the researcher/teacher as best fitting the criteria of a highly socially accepted student were asked to partake in individual interviews during weeks five and six. A copy of the formal, taped interview questions is located in Appendix C. This interview was conducted in a quiet room during either the student's lunch or recess time based upon his/her request. The interview lasted about 20 to 30 minutes. The initial questions for the interview were prerecorded using a voice that was unrecognizable to the students to eliminate some of the power relationships that exist between teacher and student. The students were told that it was a voice of another researcher and professor at the University of Maryland. I asked probing questions after the student was done responding to each audio taped question. The highly accepted students' interviews were audio taped while I took anecdotal notes. The tapes and notes were transcribed for analysis.

The interviews were semi-structured providing a specific direction to the questioning while allowing the flexibility for the accepted students to move the dialogue towards areas or points that they felt were important to discuss. The highly accepted students were made aware that their honest and thoughtful responses are both needed and valued and that their physical education grade would not be affected in any way due to their participation in this study. The questions were almost identical to the questions that were given to the NASI students in their week four individual interviews. The questions focused on the overall school experiences of the highly accepted students during structured and non-structured classroom activities, physical education class, recess, and lunch while taking into consideration the student's views of the social dynamics with and

their among peers. Topics for questions were generated from the interviews conducted with the fifth grade teachers, the research about social isolation reviewed in chapter 2, the fifth grade journals, and the NASI students' responses in their week four interviews.

Formal Independent Observations

An outside observer conducted two 45-minute observations of the fifth graders during their physical education classes. The observation of David's fifth grade in physical education class took place during the fifth week of the study while the observation of Jennifer's fifth grade in physical education class was conducted during the tenth week of the study.

These observation data were collected as field notes and were written in a field note journal. The field notes gathered were descriptive, non-evaluative in nature and focused on what was happening during the time of the observation. The pages of the field note journal were divided in half by a vertical line, with objective observations placed on the left side of the line, while subjective notes were placed on the right side of the line.

The outside observer was a staff development teacher and colleague currently employed at the elementary school. The staff development teacher's position routinely affords her the opportunity to observe and take notes on different classes in the school. She was a former elementary school classroom teacher who has completed significant coursework towards an administrator's certification.

The outside observer was asked to observe the NASI students' behaviors and interactions with their peers, while monitoring the behaviors of the other students towards the NASI students. She was informed that this research was examining the social dynamics in physical education class, and made aware of the two students in each class

that she should center her attention on during the physical education class. The independent observer was requested to make unannounced entrances into the physical education setting. She did not tell the researcher/teacher when she was coming to observe so that the researcher/teacher would not consciously or subconsciously bias the data by organizing the classes in a special manner. I set up the parameters of her observations (one observation in the first six weeks and one observation in the second six weeks), but I was kept unaware about the specific day of entry.

Researcher Observations

I conducted two 60-minute observations of the fifth grade graders in their classrooms, four 30-minute observations of the fifth graders at recess, and two 30-minute observations during lunch. Two recess observations and one lunch observation took place in week six for David's class. Jennifer's class was observed for 60-minutes in week seven during a structured, but social art activity. During week nine, two recess observations and one lunch observation took place for Jennifer's class. David's class was observed for 60-minutes in week ten during a structured, but social writing and social studies activity. These observations were collected as field notes and were written in a field note journal using a format similar to that used by the outside observer.

The observations took place in two very different settings. Some of the observations took place in a structured, yet social classroom environment. The other observations took place during the fifth graders' unstructured lunch/recess hour. I focused on all of the students' behaviors towards the NASI students, but concentrated on the behavior of the NASI students and their interactions with the peers in their class.

Student Journals

All fifth grade students wrote journal entries during a fifteen-minute period in their homeroom with their classroom teacher in weeks three, six, nine, and eleven of the study. A copy of the journal questions and/or prompts is located in Appendix C. The students were asked not to place their names on any of their journal entries or responses to the reflection questions. These journal entries allowed me to not only obtain the NASI and highly accepted students' perspectives, but also obtain the perspective of all students that fell somewhere in the middle of the two margins of being highly accepted and socially isolated. The reflection questions and prompts were open-ended and focused on many different realms of physical education class, school, and/or social dynamics. Specific topics and questions were generated after reviewing and analyzing the data collected in the previous weeks.

Researcher/Teacher Journal

I kept a researcher/teacher journal during the data collection period that recorded my responses to specific questions about teaching and student learning and behavior in the two fifth grade physical education classes. I wrote two journal entries each week following each of the fifth grade classes that were the focus of the data collection. Specifically, each journal entry would include responses to six specific reflection questions: (a) At any point in the class, was there a student that seemed to be socially isolated? (b) What characteristics indicated that this student was socially isolated? (c) What circumstances, if any, led to this student's social isolation? (d) If there were socially isolated students, what strategies, if any, did they use to attempt to end this isolation? (e) What specific context of the lesson might have led to, permitted, or

facilitated the isolation to have occurred? and (f) Were there any instructional, management or social strategies I might use in the future to minimize the isolation?

Data Analysis

The data analysis focused on the creation of concepts, categories, sub-categories, and themes reflecting the perspectives of the NASI students. I used open, axial, and selective coding to analyze the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Open coding is the first step in the analysis process where journal entries, interview transcripts, and observer comments are examined closely to identify relevant concepts. The concepts were grouped into categories that reflected the lived experiences of NASI students in physical education and compared or triangulated across the seven data sources for similarities and differences. Category conceptualization is the beginning phase of theory building (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). During this process, I identified concept properties associated with the NASI students and located the properties along various dimensions such as reasons for isolation.

Strauss and Corbin (1998) considered axial coding to be the next step in theory building. Axial coding is the process of relating categories to their subcategories to give more complete and precise explanations of the phenomena under study. A category represents a phenomenon. In coding, a phenomenon is a problem, issue, event, or happening that is significant to the respondents. The category or phenomenon has the potential to explain what is occurring. The process of axial coding begins to reassemble data that may have been fractured during open coding. The subcategories answer the questions of “when, why, how, and with what consequences” in relation to the category.

Subcategories can uncover the relationships among categories and relate the structure and the process of the phenomenon. During axial coding, concepts are grouped into families and relationships are elaborated to address the research questions in the study.

The third step in theory building is called selective coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This process occurs when categories are integrated and refined. Selective coding occurs over time and often begins with the first bit of analysis and continues until the final writing is completed. The major goal of integration is deciding on a central category. The central category should represent the main theme of the research. It is achieved by pulling the categories together to form an explanatory whole, taking into account variations within and among categories. Refining the theory consists of reviewing the theory for internal consistency and for gaps in the logic, filling in the poorly developed categories, trimming the excess categories, and validating the theory. Comparing the raw data to the theory or presenting the theory to the respondents and requesting their responses and reactions to the theory are two ways to validate the theory. Selective sampling – choosing respondents that will maximize the opportunities for comparative analysis – enhances the validation process because variation is built into the design of the study.

Strauss and Corbin (1998) stressed the importance of remembering that the concepts that reach the status of category are abstract representations of the stories of many people or groups not of one individual or group's story. Therefore, the categories should be defined in general terms and have relevance for and be applicable to all or many of the cases involved in the study. A researcher's task is to present an account of the participants' views as fully and honestly as possible. Rossman and Rallis (1998)

explained that what has been learned in the study is essentially the researcher's interpretation of the participants' interpretations. Therefore, the truth-value of the study is dependent on how adequately the multiple understandings of the phenomena are presented.

Once all data from the current study were collected, there were seven data sets to be analyzed separately and then triangulated and compared: (a) fifth grade teachers' interviews, (b) NASI students' interviews, (c) socially accepted students' interviews, (d) student journals, (e) formal independent observations, (f) researcher observations, and (f) the researchers/teacher journal. The data were analyzed to identify emerging themes that vividly describe the physical education-based lived experiences of non-aggressive social isolates.

Fifth Grade Teachers' Interviews

The fifth grade teachers' interviews and the QSDT were used by the researcher/teacher to identify the NASI students and the highly accepted students. The interviews were analyzed to uncover characteristics of the NASI students, provide examples of NASI behaviors, and identify how accepted children behave toward the NASI students. Any descriptive data pertaining to the NASI students' school- and physical education-based experiences were useful in the defining the phenomena in this study.

NASI Students' Interviews

The NASI students' interviews were analyzed to gain incite into the realm of consciousness of the NASI students within the school- and physical education-based setting. The NASI students' responses and stories generated a subjective view of a NASI

student's experiences from the first person point of view. Knowledge of peer relationships, dialogue about interactions within structured and non-structured activities, and discussion of emotions allowed for greater incite into the NASI students' experiences.

Socially Accepted Students' Interviews

The highly accepted students' interviews were analyzed to identify the characteristics and describe the experiences of the NASI students from an alternative perspective. The use of accepted students was a helpful strategy in understanding how the social dynamic of the classroom is viewed from a different angle. This discussion generated themes to be addressed in the second NASI students' interviews.

Student Journals

The physical education student journals were analyzed to find any similarities or differences among students when posed questions about their social interactions in physical education class. Thus data were not limited to just the NASI or highly accepted students involved in the interviews. Therefore, the more mainstream students' voices that are between the margins of the socially isolated and highly accepted were used in the study to look for alternative perspectives.

Formal Independent Observations

The field note data collected by the independent observer were analyzed to find characteristics and behaviors of the NASI students. The data were also examined to discover the NASI students' peers' reactions to the NASI students and interactions with the NASI students in the physical education setting.

Researcher Observations

My observations were analyzed to examine if the social behavior characteristics of the NASI students and their peers were exhibited in other school based settings besides the physical education classroom. My field notes were also analyzed to find characteristics and behaviors of the NASI students, while monitoring their peers' reactions to the NASI students and interaction with the NASI students in two distinctly different school based settings. Two observations took place during a structured, yet social, lesson within a traditional classroom environment, while the other observations took place during the most natural and unstructured time during the school day – lunch and recess. As a result, these observations provided further insight into the lived experiences of the NASI students.

Researcher/Teacher Journal

The researcher/teacher journal focusing on the fifth grade physical education classes was analyzed for characteristics and behaviors of the NASI students and their peers in physical education class. Data were examined to identify if NASI students are isolated for any period of time, describe the factors leading to the isolation, the reaction of the student to the isolation, and the reaction of the non-isolated peers towards the isolated student. The data were also analyzed to determine the characteristics in the physical education classroom structure leading to the isolation and the intervention strategies that were used or could have been used in the future.

Trustworthiness

According to Rossman and Rallis (1998), qualitative researchers are searching for many context-relevant truths, not one universal Truth. Therefore, reality is an interpretive phenomenon where the participants construct meaning as they live their lives. In order for a qualitative study to be considered trustworthy and give accurate and honest accounts of the participants' views, several strategies should be used to address threats to the trustworthiness of the research. Strategies to improve the trustworthiness of the research include reliability issues of replication as well as validity issues of accuracy of the results to reflect the participants' perspective within the context or setting.

Rossman and Rallis (1998) described six strategies that enhance the trustworthiness of a study. The strategies are: (a) acknowledging how personal history and philosophy can bias the findings, (b) designing the study so that the data are collected over a period of time rather than in a snap-shot fashion, (c) sharing the findings with members in a "member-check", (d) designing the study to be active or participatory from the beginning of the study to the end, (e) triangulating the data from several data sources, and (f) understanding that the findings are conditional and approximate parts of a complex social phenomena. I have tried to address each of these strategies in my research design.

Personal Biography and Philosophy

As far back as I can remember my school experiences were positive. I was an above average student with above average athletic ability. I cannot recall a time when I was lonely or felt socially isolated from my peers. I would say that I was very lucky and content in regards to my academic, athletic, and social prowess. There are times when I

reflect on my time in school and feel bad about the mistreatment of socially isolated classmates by others and me.

I graduated cum laude from the University of Maryland in 1997 with a B.S. in Physical Education. My student teaching experiences left me with the desire to teach in an elementary school setting. Because of my background in athletics and other previous experiences, I left the University of Maryland with a focus on disciplinary mastery in the physical education setting.

I accepted an elementary school teaching position with a large suburban school district on the East coast. Although I have part-time experiences at other schools, my “base” elementary school has remained the same for all six years of my professional teaching career. My “base” school was the setting for this research. I have taught most of these fifth grade students for their entire public school educational experience.

I have grown a great deal as a teacher over the last six years and feel that I have improved as an educator every year. My disciplinary mastery focus has faded and I consider myself to lean more towards a self-actualization orientation (Jewett, Bain & Ennis, 1995). My philosophy of physical education is centered on the enjoyment of moving while learning the basic skills necessary to enjoy sport. I expect effort, self-control, care, and empathy from my students.

It is from this focus on fun and enjoyment that my interest in socially isolated students developed. These students, at worst, were made fun of, and, at best, were just ignored. I am not satisfied with either of those alternatives. I have spent my last four years trying to make my teaching and learning environment as physically and emotionally safe an environment as possible. I have just recently come to the realization that I cannot expect

to help these socially isolated individuals if I do not understand their lived experiences. Maybe they do not need or want my help!

Personal Biases

I must acknowledge my biases so that this research can be deemed more trustworthy. A majority of my elementary, middle, and high school educational experiences were rooted in the Piagetian theory of psychological constructivism. My classmates and I spent most of our class time sitting quietly in rows and individually finding out answers to questions and solving problems. I enjoyed this way of learning because I liked doing school related tasks by myself. I have always felt that I learn better when I take the time to work alone. It seems that the focus of education, since my departure from high school and my return as a teacher, has shifted to more of a focus on Vygotsky's theory of situated social constructivism. The students sit at large tables, discuss questions, and perform group experiments to solve problems. This emphasis on the social creation of knowledge makes student interaction more important than when I was a student. For me to view education from a social constructivist perspective, I feel the need to view students' social interaction and the quality of those interactions.

I have a deep feeling of care for all of my students. I feel that students who are socially isolated are struggling to enjoy their childhood, and are missing out on some of the greatest assets that the school has to offer. I feel the greatest asset is the opportunity to develop long lasting friendships and bonds that foster the knowledge and social skills necessary to effectively function in society.

I want to develop influential strategies to bring the socially isolated child in from the margins, but, first, I must first try to understand these socially isolated children. These

children may be just as happy remaining socially isolated. I believe that my biases should be viewed as a benefit to this research. I am searching for the truth. I want to discover and analyze the real and vital lived experiences of the NASI student so that relevant strategies can be developed to enrich their lives.

My Role as Researcher

In this research, I assumed a dual role in that I was the fifth grade students' physical education teacher as well as the researcher for this study. The challenge that this role created was that great care had to be taken not to bias the data. When collecting and analyzing the data, I had to report objectively what I found and analyze it based on my understanding of socially isolated children, the physical education setting, and the whole school environment. My involvement could have posed a threat to the reliability of the research as it related to the reproducibility and objectivity of the research. I addressed these threats by using specific steps that were elaborated in the following sections.

Conversely, the knowledge of the participants, their personalities, and the school proved to be an asset to this research because it allowed me to make more effective connections with the participants. As a researcher/teacher, my authentic instructional decisions and role as an established figure within the school's community contributed to the external and internal validity of this research.

Reliability

LeCompte and Priessle (1993) defined reliability as the extent to which a study can be replicated. They stated that there are two aspects of reliability that should be addressed when qualitative research is conducted: external and internal reliability. External reliability centers on the uniqueness or complexity of the phenomena being examined in

context. Internal reliability focuses on whether or not multiple observers would agree about the meanings and findings based on the phenomena.

When conducting qualitative research, LeCompte and Priessle (1993) listed five problems that need to be addressed to strengthen the external reliability of the data. The problems deal with the (a) researcher status position, (b) informant choices, (c) social situations and conditions, (d) analytic constructs and premises, and (e) methods of data collection and analysis. The status of the researcher among the group of participants being examined will affect the data being collected. In this study of the physical education-based lived experiences of NASI students, the status of the researcher was vitally important. In this study, I had the dual role of teacher and researcher in the school where all of the data were being collected. Therefore, a researcher attempting to replicate this study would need to be in a teaching position that permitted them to (a) teach fifth grade students physical education at least once each week, and (b) develop long-term relationships in previous years with the students.

For a study to be replicated LeCompte and Priessle (1993) explained that future studies needed to have a clear description and understanding of the school context in which these data were collected. Therefore, I endeavored to provide a detailed description of the school, teachers, and students in this study. The emerging themes and interpretations also were described in detail. In this study, two fifth grade teachers, four NASI students, four highly accepted students, fifth grade students with varying degrees of social acceptance, and the researcher/teacher were the participants. A detailed description of the entry into the setting explained how the primary participants were recruited, and the literature review discussed the characteristics of socially accepted and

isolated students. The choice of participants can be replicated with the exception of the cultural characteristics of the students.

The social situations and conditions in which data were gathered is another external reliability concern. LeCompte and Priessle (1993) stated that the “delineation of the physical, social, and interpersonal contexts within which data are gathered permits comparative ethnographies” (p. 335). In this study, all individual interviews were conducted in private rooms with the fifth grade students receiving the primary interview questions from a prerecorded, unrecognizable voice. The student journals were written anonymously and completed during a classroom activity supervised by a homeroom teacher during specified weeks. Finally, formal observations were placed into field notes and conducted at pre-selected times during the scheduled week.

The issues of the analytic constructs and premises, along with, the methods of data collection and analysis are closely related. The analytic constructs and premises refer to the assumptions, definitions, terminology, and units of analysis dealing with the phenomena being studied. The constructs and premises should be clear and sufficiently lacking in idiosyncrasy to be considered to be reliable (LeCompte & Priessle, 1993). In this study, the vital constructs and premises included terminology in constructivism, sociometry, social isolation, and an ethic of care. The review of literature concerning these topics was extensive and thorough, and increased the measure of reliability of the study. Likewise, the issue of the methods of data collection and analysis refer to the clear presentation of how the data were collected and analyzed. In this study, the main questions asked during the individual interviews and the fifth grade reflection questions for use in the physical education journals were included in Appendix C.

Internal reliability is concerned with if the findings would be seen the same way by another observer. I increased the internal reliability by focusing on three strategies. First, I used low-inference descriptors to present and defend my findings. Using verbatim accounts of participant conversations and descriptions phrased as concretely as possible will increase the internal reliability (LeCompte & Priessle, 1993). Second, LeCompte and Priessle (1993) stated, “the optimum guard against threats to internal reliability in ethnographic studies is the presence of multiple researchers” (p. 338). In this study, I used an independent observer to record field notes. The independent observer recorded data on the NASI students and their peers’ reactions to and interactions with them. Lastly, I manually recorded the data. I used a tape recorder along with handwritten notes during all individual interviews. These audiotapes and notes were transcribed verbatim for analysis.

Validity

Validity depends on the demonstration that the propositions generated match what occurs in human life from the perspective of the participants (LeCompte & Priessle, 1993). In other words, the research should reflect real-life situations. Internal validity relates to the accuracy of the observations and interpretations of the findings from the participants’ perspectives, while external validity is concerned with to what extent the themes, categories, propositions and theories generated are applicable in similar settings (LeCompte & Priessle, 1993). In qualitative research, the measures of validity are usually high because the research occurs in a real life context as opposed to a context or setting manufactured by the researcher. However, this study contained a threat to the internal validity because the researcher was also a teacher in the school and had previous

relationships with the informants. I have taught at the school for six years and observer effects could have been an issue. The students and teachers, acting as informants, may have presented an ideal self or told me what they thought that I wanted to hear. The data and responses could have been tainted by the ideals that I bring to school each day.

The participants were informed that the best answer is an honest answer and, hopefully, sufficient probing questions led to truthful responses. Questions were also centered on real life examples and narratives. Therefore, fictitious responses were not as easily generated or were unproblematic to discover. Students completed anonymous journal entries without me being present to reduce the power relationship between teacher and student. Also, to aid in the reduction of this power relationship, all of the primary questions asked during the students' individual interviews were prerecorded using a voice that was not recognizable to the students.

A threat to the external validity of the study was the selection effects. Selection effects refer to the fact that "some constructs cannot be compared across groups because they are specific to a single group" (LeCompte & Priessle, 1993, p. 349). The characteristics exhibited by NASI students and the peer reactions towards the NASI students are not limited to this research setting, although it is from this setting that the data were collected and analyzed. This study was constrained to two fifth grade classes within one elementary school in a highly affluent suburban neighborhood. Nevertheless, the phenomena that explain NASI students are not limited to this setting. Although some results may not be transferable to another school or set of students, other findings can be applied and are evident regardless of the demographics of the population.

Triangulation

The traditional view of validity is that the findings are accurate. But in ethnographic research, findings should be accurate from the participants' perspective. In this research, although the primary participants were the NASI students, each of the participants, including the researcher/teacher, should have a legitimate voice (provide influential data) in the discussion of these phenomena. Thus, addressing this balance or the validity of the triangulation within the analysis is to assemble a plan to philosophically weigh each data source to determine the essence of the NASI students' lived experiences in physical education.

In order to strengthen the internal validity of this study, I triangulated, or compared, data from several different sources, methods, and investigators (Rossman & Rallis, 1998). Participants in this study included a researcher, who was also the physical education teacher at the school, two fifth grade teachers, fifth grade students with varying degrees of social acceptance, as well as an outside observer who in sum provided four diverse perspectives on the phenomena being examined. The fifth grade students' perspectives can be separated into three different viewpoints: NASI students, highly accepted students, and other fifth grade students who are typically socially accepted by their peers and fall on the social dynamic class continuum between the socially isolated and highly accepted. I triangulated the data from the fifth grade teachers' interviews, NASI students' interviews, socially accepted students' interviews, physical education student journals, formal independent observations, researcher observations, and a researcher/teacher journal to determine the participants' perspectives related to the research questions guiding this research.

Data triangulation is vital in determining the accuracy (validity) of the findings and ensuring that the emerging themes in the research have been saturated. The fifth grade teachers' interviews provided the teachers' perceptions of the NASI students' experiences in a regular classroom setting. The NASI students' interviews yielded a first person account of the phenomena, while the highly accepted students' interview supplied an alternative perspective of the same phenomena. The formal independent observations gave a view of the NASI students and their interactions with their peers in physical education class by an impartial professional who had minimal connections with the students.

Conversely, the researcher observations yielded a view of the NASI students and their peer interactions during some of the most unstructured times in the regular school day. In the researcher/teacher journal, I addressed predetermined questions about teaching and student learning and behavior in the two fifth grade physical education classes. Finally, the student journals gave a voice to all of the fifth grade students and allowed their ideas and comments on school, physical education, and social dynamics to be heard and collected.

When data were consistent from all four perspectives and from the seven different sources, I was confident that the findings reflected that the participants understood a common view of the setting and the NASI students' perspective. However, in cases in which data from one or more participant perspectives or methods disagreed or were inconsistent, I was less convinced of the validity. I needed to examine the findings further by asking additional questions of the participants.

Summary

The research design included many strategies to address the threats to the trustworthiness of the results. This study has internal validity because it was conducted in the school environment that is the focal point for the participants' perceptions and responses. An effort has been made to provide detailed descriptions of the participants and the setting to provide adequate information for future researchers to replicate the study and gain knowledge on these particular phenomena. Because of the unique characteristics of this elementary school, researchers examining different settings may not find an identical situation. Assuring participants of the value of their true and honest responses enhanced the authenticity of their responses, and the power relationship between the students and the researcher/teacher were reduced through the use of audio taped interview questions and anonymous responses to reflection questions under the direction of another teacher. The use of four different perceptions (researcher/physical education teacher, fifth grade teachers, fifth grade students, and independent observer) and the triangulation of seven sources of data collection increased the internal validity of the study. An independent observer observed physical education classes to provide an external perspective on the phenomena. With these precautions in place, a substantial effort has been made to address the trustworthiness, reliability, and validity of this study.

Chapter Summary

This study examined the physical education-based lived experiences of non-aggressive socially isolated students. The study took place in a public elementary school in an upper-middle class suburb on the East coast. The participants in this research were the

researcher/teacher, the students in two fifth grade classes, their homeroom teachers, and an outside observer. The fifth grade teachers were given a qualitative social dynamics task during their interviews that provided sufficient data for the researcher/teacher to identify the NASI and highly accepted students in each class. Data were collected during this eleven-week study through individual interviews with the fifth grade teachers, NASI students, and highly accepted students; student journaling by all fifth grade students, field notes from independent and researcher observations, and researcher journaling. The data were collected from the seven sources previously stated and triangulated to ensure the validity of the phenomena being examined and explained. The data were analyzed using open, axial, and selective coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The purpose of this research was to examine the physical education-based lived experiences of NASI students. The research design centered on the perception of these experiences from three perspectives: (a) NASI students, (b) teachers, and (c) highly socially accepted students. Interviews and observations were the main source of data collection. This chapter begins with a description of the selection of students to be interviewed. The next section presents a brief portrait of each interviewed NASI student as provided by his or her teacher. The final three sections of this chapter provide descriptions of the NASI students' school and physical education experiences through the eyes of the NASI students, their teachers, and their highly socially accepted peers.

Selection of the Interviewed Students

I identified four students fitting the criterion of non-aggressive socially isolated students and four students corresponding to the criterion of highly socially accepted students. I used data from the Qualitative Social Dynamics Tasks for Social Isolation (QSDT-I) and the Qualitative Social Dynamics Task for Social Aggression (QSDT-A) along with the interviews with the students' fifth grade teachers, Jennifer and David, to determine students that best exemplified the two student groups. The QSDT-I was the *primary* instrument used to classify students who were either socially isolated or highly accepted. After students were identified in each category, the QSDT-A and the teachers' interviews were utilized as a *secondary* instrument to make the final decisions on the students who were interviewed for this research. Ideally, teachers would classify NASI

students in the highest numbered groups (Groups 6+) for social isolation and in the lowest numbered group (Group 1) for social aggression. In actuality, while Jennifer and David assigned the NASI students to their highest number group for social isolation as expected, their social aggression assignments ranged from Groups 1 to 3, due to the teacher's perception that low to moderate socially aggressive tendencies were not isolating in nature. This practical accommodation to the school environment permitted the researcher to use the QSDT-I as the *primary* instrument for identifying student participants who would be interviewed for this study. The completed and coded QSDT data for social isolation and aggression for David and Jennifer's classes can be found in Appendix B.

NASI Students

Two students from each class were selected as the NASI students for interview purposes. David differentiated his class into six social isolation groups with Group 1 being the least socially isolated (most accepted) and Group 6 being the most socially isolated. David placed three students into Group 6. The child that David positioned as being the most isolated student in his class was not chosen as a NASI student because David stated that "when he interacts with kids...the way he interacts with them is often socially aggressive, which they don't like." Consistent with this description, David placed this child in Group 3 on the QSDT-A, declaring that students placed on the QSDT-A in Groups 3 through 6 could demonstrate aggressive behaviors alienating them from other classmates. According to the definition of NASI students used in this research, students were targeted who were isolated, but not aggressive. Thus, this student did not meet this criterion.

The second and third most isolated students (QSDT-I: Group 6), Jill and Linda, were chosen as the NASI students to be interviewed from David's class. Jill, who was Japanese, and Linda, who was Caucasian, had both attended this school for six years. David placed Jill in Group 2 for the QSDT-A (social aggression), while he positioned Linda in Group 1 for the QSDT-A. Therefore, both of the selected students met the criteria identified in the definition of NASI students; they were highly socially isolated and relatively socially non-aggressive.

The second teacher, Jennifer, differentiated her class into seven groups or levels of social isolation, with Group 1 being the least socially isolated (most accepted) and Group 7 being the most socially isolated. Jennifer placed four students into Group 7. Similar to the rationale for David's classification, one of the four children whom Jennifer positioned in the most socially isolated group was not selected for interview because, as Jennifer stated, "He is always striving to be accepted. And he does it so that he winds up aggravating people around him." Congruent with her comment, Jennifer placed this student in Group 7 on the QSDT-A, making him ineligible for selection. Jennifer explained that the students she placed on the QSDT-A in Groups 6 and 7 could demonstrate aggressive behaviors alienating them from other classmates. The third student Jennifer positioned in Group 7 on the QSDT-I also was not chosen to participate in the interviews. Although Jennifer classified this student in Group 3 on the QSDT-A, within the acceptable level of aggression, this student was more aggressive than the fourth student whom she positioned in Group 1.

Mike and Sally were the two NASI students selected to be interviewed from Jennifer's class. Jennifer placed both students in Group 7 on the QSDT-I. Mike and Sally were

both Caucasian and also had attended this school for six years. Mike was the most socially isolated student in the class, while being assigned to Group 3 on the QSDT-A, suggesting his moderate level of social aggression did not alienate him from his peers. Sally was positioned as the fourth most isolated student while being situated in Group 1 for the QSDT-A, suggesting she was one of the most non-aggressive students in the class.

Highly Socially Accepted Students

The opposite ends of the bipolar QSDT- I and A scales were used to select highly socially accepted students to be interviewed. Similar to the NASI student selections, two students were chosen from each class whom their teachers categorized as highly socially accepted by their peers. David placed six students into Group 1 for the QSDT-I. Consistent with the procedure used to select NASI students, the socially accepted students were then evaluated for social aggression based on the QSDT-A and teacher interviews. Both David and Jennifer agreed that a child could be highly socially accepted while still exhibiting socially aggressive behaviors that could alienate some classmates. I decided to use one highly socially accepted student from each side of the aggression threshold from each class to sample a wider range of student perspectives. David explained that students positioned in Groups 3 through 6 on the QSDT-A could demonstrate aggressive behaviors that could alienate them from other classmates. Elizabeth, one of the socially accepted students chosen for this research, was placed in Group 1 on the QSDT-A, below David's aggression threshold, while Keith, the other socially accepted student was classified in Group 6 on the QSDT-A, well above the Group 3 threshold.

Jennifer placed five students into Group 1 for the QSDT-I. The researcher then evaluated each student using the QSDT-A and teacher interviews. Jennifer explained that students positioned in Groups 6 and 7 on the QSDT-A could demonstrate aggressive behaviors that could alienate them from other classmates. Jennifer classified one of the socially accepted students, Karen, who I chose to interview for this research, in Group 4 on the QSDT-A, below Jennifer's aggression threshold. Jennifer categorized the other socially accepted student participant, Jimmy, in Group 6 on the QSDT-A. Jimmy was one of the most socially aggressive students in her class, and above the Group 6 selection criterion.

Therefore, to examine the NASI students' school- and physical education-based lived experiences, I interviewed one highly socially accepted student from each class who fell above and one who fell below the social aggression threshold. I made this decision so I could gather data from a potentially more diverse student perception of the phenomenon. Because NASI students and their experiences were the focus of this research, it is important that the socially isolating characteristics of each NASI student be clarified and understood from multiple perspectives.

Summary

The NASI students selected to be interviewed fit the definition of NASI students used in this research: they were students who were socially isolated but not aggressive. The teachers classified all of the NASI students into the highest group for social isolation, while their QSDT-A placements suggested they were not socially aggressive. The teachers classified the highly accepted students selected for interviews in Group 1 for social isolation, indicating they were the least socially isolated or most accepted students

in the class. Both of the teachers, however, agreed that students could be highly socially accepted while simultaneously exhibiting socially aggressive behaviors or tendencies that fell above or below the social aggression threshold set by the teachers. This threshold separated moderate to high socially aggressive behaviors that could alienate some students from their peers. The next section provides a brief portrait of each NASI student as described by his or her teacher.

Teachers' Descriptions of the Interviewed NASI Students

Characteristics of the four NASI students, Jill, Linda, Mike, and Sally, were discussed during the teacher interviews as they provided rationales for their student classifications on the QSDTs. In this section each of the students' NASI characteristics will be discussed from her or his teacher's perspective.

Jill

David classified Jill in the most socially isolated group while being characterized as rarely displaying social aggression (QSDT-I: Group 6; QSDT-A: Group 2). During the interview that focused on social isolation, David described Jill as:

...a very bright kid, but she has very little interest in social interaction.

When you do engage her in conversation, she can be very bright. She has friends, and she interacts with them well. I mean she has good interaction skills with her friends, and [acts] appropriately. However, she does not seek out interaction with others. Her friends come to find her. And she does not initiate interaction with peers. She is very happy just not talking to you. It is kind of the best way that I can explain it. But at recess times she will

have people to play with, but they will often ...avoid recess. They will often go to the library as well, but they will go together. She will have somebody that she is going with.

When discussing characteristics of social aggression, David portrayed Jill as a student who:

... is kind of an interesting case because I think she probably could be more socially aggressive. She is just not very interested in it. She is a kid that does not feel any need to get engaged in what is happening. If we are in the middle of a lesson, even though it is stuff that she might find interesting, she feels no need to get engaged. She is much happier looking inside her desk. Now it is not a malicious thing, it's really not an attention thing, she is just much happier doing whatever else. Therefore, I think that there is a potential there that she could be a little more socially aggressive, but she does not feel much need to engage in it.

Thus, David described Jill as an individual whose isolation appeared to be by her choice. She interacted with others on her own terms and when she desired. She was not socially aggressive, although at times she chose to passively reject the teacher's tasks to pursue activities that were more relevant to her. She was not confrontational and did not disrupt the class.

Linda

David also categorized Linda in the most socially isolated group, while being one of the least socially aggressive students in his class (I: 6; A: 1). During the interview that focused on social isolation, David described Linda as:

...a very nice kid. I think she makes appropriate interactions with the other kids. I think that she has friends. I think that the other kids are accepting of her. I think that she has trouble because she is younger. And that brings up some maturity issues. I think... the way she interacts can feel a little forced to the kids. I think that is something that she is dealing with. And I think that she has some habits.... Things like skipping to and from the closet area. Almost like a gallop. That takes place pretty often and the other kids see that and even though they wouldn't respond to it, they wouldn't react to it, it affects social interaction.

Linda was again discussed during David's explanation of his social aggression classifications:

[Linda is] very well meaning, very kind. She is very trusting and I think that there is potential there to be a problem because I think that if somebody did tease her or wrong her in some way exclude her or make her the butte of the joke, she would be very forgiving. While I think that is the right thing to do, I think that can lead to her getting teased again.

Thus, Linda was characterized as an individual whose isolation appeared to be fostered by her classmates' perceptions. She interacted appropriately with others, although her peers may have felt that some of her interactions were forced and not natural. Her teacher perceived her to be very kind, innocent, trusting, and forgiving. These characteristics would occasionally result in her being teased or mocked by her classmates.

Mike

Jennifer classified Mike in the most socially isolated group, and perceived him as moderately socially aggressive (I: 7; A: 3). During the interview discussing social isolation, Jennifer described Mike as a student who:

...tends to not be aware of what is going on around him at times. He daydreams.

He is off task a lot, but not necessarily interfering with other students.... He just is in his own world doing his own thing. He doesn't know where he is. So if you are asking a question, the other students are aware that he doesn't know what is going on. So they don't necessarily want to be grouped with him or work with him because he is not on task a lot. But he is very nice. He doesn't do anything to anybody else, it's just that he does [not] focus on what is going on around him and the other kids realize it.

While participating in the interview focusing on social aggression, Jennifer talked about Mike as someone who "is in his own world a lot of the time and doesn't know what's going on around him because he's dreaming about or thinking about something else." Jennifer proclaimed that Mike "doesn't realize when he is off task," but he can be redirected back on task very easily, even if only for a short time period.

Thus, Jennifer characterized Mike as an individual whose isolation appeared to be fostered by his classmates' perceptions of him and his own lack of focus, leading to his exclusion. He often daydreamed and frequently was confused by the tasks that he was presented. Mike was perceived to fall off task, although his off task behavior rarely interfered with his peers. Even though his teacher thought Mike was one of the nicest

students in her class, his peers tended to exclude him because they perceived him to be very confused.

Sally

Similar to the other NASI students, Jennifer categorized Sally in the most isolated group while being one of the least aggressive students in the class (I: 7; A: 1). Jennifer described Sally in the interview on social isolation as:

...very intellectual and a lot of times would rather be by herself. [She] is sometimes intellectually more secure around some of the young men, especially in math [which] is her strong suit. She thinks very strategically because of her chess background with her father. [She] is not excluded to the point of “we don’t want you.” It is just that no one thinks to ask her. She is never selected with one of the girls.... She would rather be with her academic peers [or those] she perceives as her academic peers. Very nice, extremely quiet. So a lot of the time she is just lost because she is so quiet.

In the interview focusing on social aggression, Jennifer continued by saying that Sally is:

... a very quiet, introverted person. Even when she is talking to you in a one on one situation, it is difficult to hear her because she has such a quiet voice.

Quietness tends to be around her all of the time. Even if you were trying to pull her off task, she probably would [not] participate in it because you wouldn’t understand her. She tends to be a loner, she tends to be by herself. She wants to do well, she is not exactly organized, and she needs to maintain her concentration to keep herself on track.... And she seems to be just as happy to read a book as she would to go play with somebody.

Thus, Sally was characterized as an individual whose isolation appeared to be by her choice. She interacted with others on her own terms and the interactions tended to be academically motivated. She was extremely quiet, almost to the point that you could not hear her speak. Sally's quietness seemed to facilitate her being forgotten by her classmates. Her teacher perceived her as very nice and very happy being by herself. Although Sally clearly met the criteria of a NASI student, limited data representing her voice were used in this research because efforts to dialogue with her proved to be very difficult. She appeared unable, or possibly unwilling, to reflect and respond to many of the interview questions.

Summary

Teachers perceived the NASI students in this study to be social isolated and non-aggressive. They felt their behaviors contributed to their social isolation. Social isolation appeared to result from peer exclusion or self-isolating behaviors. Exclusion seemed to occur when peers perceived different or unusual behaviors. Similar to students this age, they were reluctant to accept behaviors that deviated from the norm and were unwilling to accept the NASI students into social situations.

Clearly, teachers perceived that the NASI students had unique identities. During interviews, these students responded to questions about their school and physical education experiences that contributed additional insights into the rationales for their behaviors.

NASI Students' Descriptions of Their School and Physical Education Experiences

The NASI students responded to a variety of topics during their interviews with me. The data gave rise to seven themes that describe how they perceive themselves and their classmates in the school and physical education setting. The seven themes were: (a) accepting friends, (b) individual, creative, and imaginative activities, (c) aggravating classmates, (d) the challenges of partner selection, (e) motivation to participate, (f) exclusionary behaviors of peers in physical education class, and (g) fanciful retaliation to perceived injustices.

Accepting Friends

Friends play an important roll in most children's school experiences. They seem to be an even more important factor and stabilizing influence to NASI students. Mike supported this claim when he was asked about the importance of friends, Mike replied:

...it is actually very important to me because without teachers or your friends, you're not really part of the school because nobody would help you with your homework. You wouldn't have any friends. If you didn't have any friends, well you would just be left out.

Linda reinforced the importance of friends when she was asked if she liked to work with classmates to complete tasks, she responded, "*Sometimes* I want to work with my peers, especially if I do not know some of it. Then they can help me. I like to work with my friends *all* of the time when I am given the chance." Linda took time to emphasize why she would want to work with her friends exclusively, "because we do a little bit of girl chat, and we work, and we know what each other are having difficulties at.... They are able to help me better than people I don't know as well."

The NASI students were asked if they would like to have more good friends. Linda responded, “I do not think so. I think that I have a lot of friends. I have five best friends.” She concluded her thought by saying that only two of the five went to her school. Mike claimed, “I only have three friends basically in this whole school.... I would like to have more friends because then I won’t get so lonely when all [three] of my other friends are out sick.” Jill responded to the question in a slightly different manner. She said, “Sometimes I think that I have lots of friends and sometimes I don’t.” She explained:

At recess everyone is there. But then in the class, I do not have any friends in the class. I don’t have any friends in the class for some reason. I have maybe three and one doesn’t talk any English.

Jill’s comment about recess was reoccurring with many of the NASI students. Many of their friends were in other classes and the times that they could spend with them were valued. When asked what the best part of his day was, Mike stated, “Just hanging out with my friends at recess, hanging out with them at lunch, just talking.”

The NASI students valued the time they were able to spend with their friends. Most felt that they had enough friends, but it was the time they were apart that contributed to feelings of isolation. They were most comfortable with their friends, and adapting to work with other people tended to be a struggle either because the NASI students did not want to work with other peers or their peers were not as receptive of them.

Individual, Creative, and Imaginative Activities

Jill spoke about friends as people who have “the same interests as you.” Some NASI students appeared to have interests and engaged in activities that were different from their

peers. When asked why she interacted with certain people, Jill replied, “[they] don’t really care if you like something kind of different from everyone else because we all have something in common.”

Signs of creative and diverse behaviors were found in the self-described activities NASI students chose to engage in with friends when they were outside playing. When Sally was asked about the last game she remembered playing outside, she responded, “I don’t know. It gets made up on the spot.” When asked for an example of the games that she would play, she explained, “Well, sometimes the younger friend likes to do things with fairies and kings and queens and stuff.” Jill responded to the same question by saying, “Tag, racing, or sometimes just pretend games where you just make stuff up.” When probed to find out what “pretend games” she would play, Jill clarified, “we take sticks and sometimes polish them and stuff and we make pots out of clay.”

When asked about their interests, the NASI students were very eager to share and explain them. Sally declared, “I like chess and free reading because that is specifically what I do at home.” Jill spoke of “drawing, daydreaming, cats, and Japanese animation.” Jill conceded that she and her friends “all like drawing, and we like daydreaming and stuff like that.” Linda chose writing and music as her favorite things to do. She explained, “I like writing because I am really imaginative... I can think of good stories and good things for the prompts.” When elaborating on music, she continued, “many people think that I have a talented voice. Personally, I think so too, and I like to practice my voice to try to make it better.”

Animals seemed to be an interest and focus for Linda and Jill. When asked about how they would change physical education to make it better, they brought up animals. Jill’s

response was “have cats.” Linda spoke about horses, dogs, cats, and guinea pigs. She elaborated, “I would get thirty horses and stable them in the field. Dog training and everybody brings their dogs.... Dog agility, I am trying to train my dog.”

A NASI students’ individuality appeared to be one factor potentially leading to their isolation. Much of their individuality was exhibited in a creative and imaginative sense. They focused intensely on their unique interests, which often were not shared by other students. Some peers may have perceived these interests as outside the norm. Likewise, NASI students interacted almost exclusively with people or friends who appeared to share or accept their interests. NASI students seemed to find acceptance with a limited number of friends and built strong bonds with their friends that appeared to create a sense of safety or security to be oneself.

Aggravating Classmates

When discussing his classmates, Mike stated, “Well, from my perspective, there are kind of more people [in my class] that are mean than nice.” Mike continued, “Some people do like kind of pick on me and stuff.” When probed for more details about what he meant by that statement, he continued, “Well like calling people, ...well like calling me stupid. Stuff like that.” After being asked for his definition of “mean,” Mike replied, “They just don’t hang out with you. They call you names or something.”

Mike labeled the students that teased him “bullies.” When asked to define what he meant when he called people “bullies” and how they affected his day, Mike responded, “Well, like people that are being very mean and selfish.... Well, they just call me names, they bother me, and they really irritate me.” Mike mentioned that there were only two groups of children at this school – “good friends and bullies.” When pressed for another

group of students, Mike conceded, “Well there are some that are like neutral. They are sort of nice to you some days and then some days they are kind of mean to you.” Mike said that he did not have any good strategies for dealing with “bullies” when they were in his group, but added, “[You] just try to get along the best that you can.”

In one interview with Linda, the subject of dominating peers in classroom situations arose. Linda proclaimed, “I like to work alone because sometimes the people get into my face when I am trying to do something.” When probed for an example of this behavior, Linda said:

Say I am doing a math problem, like long division or something or like averaging, and it is really hard, and so my partner says, “Are you done yet! Huh, huh, huh, huh, huh are you done!” I mean that is really annoying. And then I forget where I have been and I have to do it all over again.

NASI students reported that classmates and peers affected them negatively. They complained about teasing and socially aggressive behaviors that they were forced to endure. For NASI students, friends acted as a buffer and a safe escape from some of the negative peer-related experiences. This may have been one reason why the NASI students preferred to choose their partners during classroom activities. By selecting friends or other accepting individuals they could minimize the problem and buffer themselves from “bullies” by having at least one good “friend” in their group.

The Challenges of Partner Selection

The NASI students demonstrated convincingly that self-selection of partners and groups was critical to their learning and emotional security. Although the four NASI students who were interviewed preferred choosing their partners, other students described

concerns when required to select a partner. When fifth graders were asked to write in their physical education journals about the challenges of not being able to find a partner, a child gave an example:

When my class got to pick their own seat, I was in the middle of the room. There were two tables. One kid ran to pull out a chair for me so I wouldn't sit with him.

I had to sit with kids who weren't nice until the teacher let me move.

One reason that Linda gave for wanting to choose a partner dealt with peer exclusion. She stated, "Well sometimes if we *choose* groups I am usually *not* left out because sometimes Ann and Jill, they [*sic*] fight over me." Linda spoke of her favorite way to practice skills in physical education when she continued, "I think in partners because then the partners are just focusing on each other." This comment revealed that Linda felt isolation was more prevalent when students were placed in groups of more than two because it permitted students to ignore some peers while participating in the task with others. Conversely, when two students were given a task, the partners needed to rely on one another, which made the partners the focus of each other's attention. Further, in response to a question dealing with grouping, Linda stated:

I want to be with people who, number one; they understand if I really stink.

Number two; some of them might be in the same position as I am. So I want to be with some people in the same position as me and some people who are understanding.

Mike exclaimed that he also wanted to work with only three or four students in his class. He explained that people should be able to choose their partners because "if they are with somebody that they like, then it is pretty much fun; [but] if you are assigned,

and you don't really like that person, [and] that person is your bully, then it is not very fun." Mike cautioned by stipulating, "You have to be really wise with picking partners [because] you [can] get stuck with someone that is a bully or that just doesn't really like you." Sally responded that she wanted to choose her partners because "that way I have at least one person that I am friends with. But if I were assigned, I don't know that I would [have any friends]." Finally, Jill demonstrated her discontent with being assigned to a partner by proclaiming, "If it is an assigned partner, I would rather work alone. But if you were able to pick, I would like to." When asked why this was the case, Jill responded, "Because I do not know who [my partner] is and sometimes I do not like the person who I am paired with." NASI students made it very clear that choosing their partners and groups provided them with the opportunity to avoid exclusion and work with students who understood and were nice to them. They explained that when they were not permitted to work with friends, sometimes they were not motivated to do much work at all.

Motivation to Participate

If NASI students are placed into a situation in which they feel insecure and/or anxious, it can be detrimental to their motivation to participate fully in classroom activities. When responding to a question that asked her how important it was to have friends working with her, Jill responded, "Really, really important. I think I sometimes do better with friends. With people I am not really comfortable with, sometimes I do not do as well." When Jill was asked if she would rather choose or be assigned to a group of students in physical education class, she stated that she preferred to choose because "I do more stuff. Sometimes when I am with someone I do not know, I hardly do anything at all. I just sit

and watch and once in a while do something. With friends I just do more.” When Jill was asked how her classmates react to her quietness and lack of motivation to participate in groups that do not contain her friends, she responded, “Sometimes the other person doesn’t really notice.” Jill replied to a question that asked her how her classmates respond to her silence and if they talk to her. She answered, “Sometimes. They are friendly, but they are not as nice as my friends.”

The unavailability of a “friend” in partner and group work situations can adversely affect the motivation of the NASI student to actively participate in class activities. This reaction may be internally or externally triggered. A reduction in effort may be a passive way of protesting the situation in which they have been placed, or an active way of distancing themselves from students who are demonstrating exclusionary behaviors or are not treating them in a caring manner. The later are discussed in the following section focusing on the physical education setting.

Exclusionary Behaviors of Peers in Physical Education Class

Discussions with NASI students’ about physical education led to meaningful reflections on their experiences throughout the year. One theme that the NASI students acknowledged and spoke about in their interviews was the exclusionary behaviors of their peers that led to feelings of isolation.

When asked about how they felt they were treated by their peers in physical education, Linda commented, “When we are broken up into team[s]... I usually get left out.” When probed of what kinds of physical education situations led to other students not allowing her to participate, Linda responded, “You know like football. Like games where you’re on a team and you really don’t have rotations.” Linda continued her thoughts on why

people were left out of activities in physical education by acknowledging, “Some people do not know the rules and they’re just getting used to it.” While other, more socially accepted, students might feel more comfortable asking a peer for help and be more confident that they would get a positive response, NASI students did not appear to have that luxury. Linda described those situations when she did not understand an activity as stressful because “Other people are like, ‘You should know this.’ Or like sometimes if I am supposed to be somewhere and I am not there, they are like, ‘Linda, get over here!’ I don’t like it at all.” I followed these responses by asking Linda how she handled those situations. Linda answered, “I ask my partner or someone nearby.” When she was asked how classmates responded, Linda replied, “Some [try to help me], but then sometimes I just get on their nerves... and then they just stop helping me.”

Jill acknowledged that she also has experienced being left out of activities in physical education class. When probed for more detail, she replied that the exclusion made her feel “like if it [is] a group of all everyone else’s friends and I am just in there.” When speaking of being ignored in physical education, Mike declared, “Sometimes when there is somebody ... that I don’t really know... they just kind of don’t talk to you. They like do things on their own.” Linda gave a specific example of a time when she experienced exclusion and felt isolated:

... like in volleyball and badminton, I was in a group with some other people, and me and another girl were getting left out because we were not as good as the other people. But some people try to get it, but they just can’t because someone else already got it.... I think that it makes us feel we might not be like part of the group and we want to be part of the group.

NASI students admitted that their peers excluded them to the extent that they felt isolated and alone in physical education class. Although the NASI students may have clarifying questions to ask their peers, they may feel uncomfortable doing so or receive negative feedback from their classmates. The feeling of being surrounded by peers, yet being alone, can lead to the NASI students' perception that they were being treated unjustly. It appeared that in response to this perceived injustice, the NASI students created scenarios in which others are the victims of injustices rather than themselves.

Fanciful Retaliation to Perceived Injustices

There were times during the interviews in which a NASI student spoke about fantasies that ended with the possibility of peer injury. For example, when Linda suggested that we add a variety of animals to physical education class to make it more enjoyable, I asked her how she thought her classmates would react to these additions. She replied, "Most of my classmates would say, 'This is Linda's class isn't it?' And Jill would just go, 'Awesome!' And Anne would just grab a horse and go riding off in the huge soccer field." She continued, "We would do it on Friday and when all of the people go to the soccer fields, and we would run over all of those guys." I asked why she wanted to do this. Linda stated while laughing, "I don't know. They take over the field." This scenario seemed to be a subtle way of wishing harm to the people who were different from or aggressive towards her.

Linda also exhibited anger, not in her tone of voice, but in her choice of words when she spoke about another fantasy. She was again speaking of animals, specifically horses, in the physical education setting when she said, "Like if we put Alex on a horse, well he would be O.K., but if we put Bob, it would be so funny. He would just go 'Whoa ho!'"

and the horse would buck him off.” When asked why that would be funny, Linda, who is an avid rider of horses, responded, “I don’t know, because he knows a lot about football and stuff.” Thus, she may have felt justified by placing these students in an anxiety-producing situation similar to those she had experienced in team sport physical education.

NASI students appeared to be adversely affected by the way that they were treated by their peers. Even Linda, who was perceived by her teacher as being very kind, innocent, trusting, and forgiving, demonstrated resentment for the way that she was treated.

Although NASI students are labeled as non-aggressive in the literature, this fanciful retaliation shows in a creative way the extent to which the social neglect hurts.

Summary

NASI students valued the time they spent with their good friends and felt more secure in their presence. The NASI students’ creative sense and unique interests were accepted almost exclusively by their friends who seemed to cultivate the security needed for the NASI students to be themselves. NASI students reported being treated negatively by other classmates and complained about teasing and other socially aggressive behaviors. To avoid these situations, the NASI students stated that the self-selection of partners and groups were important to them. When not partnered with an accepting friend, NASI students reported lower motivation to participate in classroom activities and increased feelings of isolation that occasionally led to the creation of fanciful retaliation scenarios involving their peers. In the next section, many of the NASI students’ self-reflections and autobiographical statements were supported by the teachers’ description of the NASI students’ experiences.

Teachers' Descriptions of NASI Students' Experiences

Elementary teachers are in a position to observe their students' responses to a range of daily experiences. These data gave rise to six categories that describe how teachers perceive the NASI students' experiences in the school setting and physical education environment. The six categories were: (a) disconnection, (b) existing at the edge, (c) introspection, (d) selectively attending to friends, (e) creativity and imagination, and (f) self-selected isolation.

Disconnection

When asked to describe characteristics of socially isolated students, David responded, "When I typically think of the kids that I characterize as socially isolated in my class... I think of how they would react to me putting them in a small group activity." David described socially isolated students participation in small group activities in the following manner:

Typically, they are disconnected. They are not doing it. They are not participating. They have found something else to catch their attention. Off-task. And the rest of the group work without them and so it takes a lot of prompting from me to get them back on task. Other kids will even go and engage [them] and say, "Why don't you join us? Why don't you help us out with this?" Sometimes that will get them interacting and sometimes it won't.

While the collaborative workgroup and learning literature (Fuchs, Fuchs, Kazdan, Karns, Calhoon, Hamlett, & Hewlett, 2000) suggests that students can work effectively in groups as large as four, I recorded in the researcher/teacher journal that when NASI students were in these groups, it seemed "just being placed in groups of more than two

people permits social isolation to occur.” During one class I observed and noted, “There were ten groups of two and two groups of three. The two apparent isolation situations occurred in the groups of three.” In these two cases, two students were partnered with a NASI student, creating a group of three, and the NASI student was subsequently excluded from most activities. It appeared that this situation could be avoided when an even number of students were partnered, thus forming 2 vs. 2 situations. These pairings permitted the NASI students to be the primary focus of the partner’s interaction, minimizing the NASI student’s perception of isolation. The opposite occurred when NASI students were asked to work in small groups. When a NASI student was placed in a group of three or more students without a friend, social isolation was likely to occur. This lack of interaction with classmates, other than friends, is examined in more detail in the next theme.

Existing at the Edge

During my observation of Sally and Mike during a social classroom activity, I noted, “Sally and Mike did not say one word to any other classmate during the entire hour of art.” The fifth grade teachers supported this observation with statements made during their interviews. David explained how isolation occurs in his class:

When I [organize the class] in a whole group, there are more of my kids who I would say [are] socially accepted, and they will tend to dominate and let the socially isolated kid just fall by the wayside. And I do not think it is a malicious thing, or a intentional thing, but they just are such task oriented kids that they want to get the job done and so they will just step up and get it done.... They are

working to get a job done, but in the process, they are totally dominating the group.

Jennifer addressed the role of the non-aggressive student in this interaction when she expressed:

Then you have the person that goes to the other extreme who is the real introvert. Just keeps to themselves because they are that quiet and they are [an] insecure person. They don't want to be combative. They don't even want to be around somebody that is really aggressive because they don't want to draw attention to themselves. So they back away because they don't know how to deal with it and they are not secure in their own self-esteem [or] educational values that they can challenge that person.

David continued,

The kids who are more socially aggressive will... kind of prey upon the kids that are less. And use them as the butte of the joke. Conversely, a student that is non-socially aggressive from the negative standpoint would be one who is often the one who is the butte of those jokes or is the victim of that exclusion. They can be kind of trusting because they don't ever kind of seem to see it coming.

Jennifer focused on this quiet, non-aggressive behavior in a different manner when she added:

The person who is really quiet.... its not that they're totally ostracized, it's that people just forget about [them]. It is like they are so nice or so quiet that people do not realize that they're there. They forget. It's more like a really nice person, but they are so quiet that they won't say anything so they won't be selected. And

it's like "Oh, that person's there, you know I did not think of them." Yes, it's not that no one likes them, but they are just so introverted, people do not think about them.... Or it's somebody that is so quiet they can pass between the cracks because nobody notices that they are there.

The NASI students seem to be either dominated or forgotten by their classmates. Although domination can be intentional, it also can occur unintentionally when other children are focused intently on the task. At these times, the NASI students may go unnoticed because of their quiet disposition or lack of interest in the activity being completed.

Introspection

NASI students appeared to focus most of their attention toward themselves, rarely acknowledging the value of other's interests or ideas. David discussed this phenomenon within his classroom and how it affected student interaction and isolation:

Somebody that is truly accepted by all their peers, typically, in my experience, it is someone who has the social skills to be able to interact effectively with a wide variety of students. They can speak about things that are interesting to them or they can also join another group and if their interests rest some place else, they can adapt to that. It is the reverse of the socially isolated student. With the socially isolated student, they have one interest and they have no interest in participating in what you find interesting. Whereas, the reverse of that the person who is socially accepted, they have a wider variety of interests and they are able to take interest in what you are doing whether it is their first choice or not.

He was able to give an example of this type of behavior from his classroom when he recalled:

Just the other day I have kids playing at recess.... There was a situation where a couple of kids were playing a card game. And they tried to get a couple of other kids to join the card game. And I saw some of my kids, who I would describe as more socially isolated, say, "I do not know how to play the game" and walk off. Whereas my kids that are more socially accepted will walk up and say, "Well, teach me". And they would sit down and learn.

When discussing socially isolated students, Jennifer supported David's position when she stated, "It could be somebody that is extremely quiet and so introverted they don't socialize, they don't speak out, they're just always by themselves. They would rather be alone than with other people." David explained that a NASI student is:

A child that [*sic*] is just happy letting the world take place around them. They can be in a group, and if they are doing a small group activity, they feel no need to make their thoughts be known about what their group is doing. They're just happy letting the group [go] and they will move along with it, but they don't feel any need to give it any direction.

These teachers argued that it is difficult to engage students in a topic or activity if they are not internally motivated to do so. If children do not feel the need or desire to expand their interests to include what other people find interesting, they limit themselves to interacting with only a select few. The children selected by the NASI students as "friends" may not always be available, resulting in perceptions of social isolation and exclusion.

Selectively Attending to Friends

The NASI students valued free time, such as lunch and recess, because they were able to find and focus on their friends without worrying about other people or occurrences. When I observed Mike, he spent the thirty-minute recess with two of his friends, neither of whom were in his homeroom class. They engaged exclusively with one another, sitting on a bench, standing on the playground equipment talking, or chasing each other around the blacktop area. I observed similar patterns during Linda's recess observation. Linda ran outside where she met two friends, Ann, from her class, and Chloe, from another fifth grade class. They played exclusively with each other for the thirty-minute period, skipping, galloping, and running while holding hands. They spent a majority of their time playing on the otherwise unoccupied baseball diamond with no other students within fifty yards. Likewise, during Jill's recess observation, she was in the library with two classmates, Chloe and Lucy, who were the media assistants for the day. Jill spent the period talking, laughing, and interacting with the other two girls. They seemed to have a lot of fun and did not appear to be isolated from others.

The NASI students' sought additional opportunities to be with their friends at lunch in the All Purpose Room (APR). Mike sat with his same two friends and continued to smile, talk, and laugh with them. Linda and Jill sat at the same lunch table and interacted with the same girls Ann and Chloe (with Linda) and Chloe and Lucy (with Jill). All five students were talking, laughing, or engaged in whole group or partner discussions for most of the thirty-minute time period. Sally had lunch in the media center with two other students. She seemed to be much more vocal and noticeable in this setting than when she was in the classroom or physical education whole group setting.

The NASI students' recess and lunch periods appeared to provide a chance to interact solely with classmates they perceived as "friends." The NASI students seemed to enjoy this time and the freedom that came with it. They appeared secure in their own groups and confident in their individuality.

Creativity and Imagination

A student's individuality stems from personal differences that each student possesses. At times, it seemed that the NASI students' interests, knowledge, or wit, which did not fit into the mainstream ideas possessed by their peers, advanced their individuality. During Jill's recess time in the media center, I observed her interacting with two of her friends. At the beginning of this time, Jill was leading most of the discussion. She was "talking about dreams and telling stories." About half way through their recess time, the three girls ducked down under the main media center desk so they were "hidden and isolated from the other 20 – 30 people in the media center." They kept poking their heads up and laughing. The activity seemed to be almost "peek-a-boo" in nature. They drew caricatures of their faces and propped them on the counter of the media center desk with signs saying, "Ask us for help." The others in the media center largely ignored this highly creative and self-stimulating behavior. Another fifth grade student came up to check out a book and asked, "Are you guys going to help me? You are so weird." The three students, including Jill, laughed while the other fifth grade student mocked their laughter and left.

David gave a specific example from his classroom of a student who was isolated because of her inability or lack of desire to read social cues:

We would do a current discussion and we would present these topics, she just couldn't control her reaction to it. I mean uncontrollable laughing when the rest of the other kids are looking at each other thinking what's funny, because she got the irony of the situation and she just couldn't control her laughter about it....

This is a child I would characterize as brilliant and so she probably did see a humorous situation where most kids wouldn't, but not to be able to pick up the social cue that the other kids are seeing this and not really getting what you are getting. [This] is what kind of isolated her socially.

Individuality is reflected in self-expression and the development of unique interests. Children's interests mold their actions, behaviors, and attitudes toward various stimuli. It is these actions, behaviors, and attitudes that make each child a special individual. If an individual is too detached from the mainstream, there is a chance that the child may be socially isolated when he/she is apart from others with the same interests. This appears to be the case with the NASI students in physical education.

Self-selected Isolation

My observations as well as those of the independent observer of the NASI students in the physical education setting yielded data that centered on isolation. I stated in the researcher/teacher journal that the socially isolated students "were disengaged from the [group] interaction" and the NASI students frequently "seemed to be the last people to know what was going on in the groups." In the researcher/teacher journals, it was noted that the socially isolated students "lose track of what is happening because they are looking at the grass or playing in puddles" or are "looking around and not ready to participate unless prompted by their classmates."

I observed that even when a socially isolated child would “do what they needed to do,” the student was “never approached by other teammates or classmates during the activity.” In contrast, I noted on several occasions the socially isolated children “would remain close enough to people to remain connected with the activity, but far enough away so that any interaction would be difficult”, or they “would be positioned close to other students, but no interaction occurs and his/her peers might not even realize their presence.”

I commented, “The socially isolated students did not seem to have any strategies to end the isolation. They actually seemed to facilitate it by placing themselves in areas where they would not have to react.” I noticed that one socially isolated student “would stay out of any debates or discussions among or between teams even if it had to do with them.” During one observation, I noted, “The [socially isolated] student was not focused on the immediate task, let the partner do all of the fielding, or purposely placed themselves in places where they felt the ball would not come.”

The independent observer supported my observations with her perceptions of the NASI students in physical education class. She remarked that Jill “sat herself at the back of the row separated by a person length in distance in the AP room.” She continued, “As the game began other children were chatting and interacting. Jill said nothing.” During the activity, “She maybe said 2 words, but participated when she had to do it.” The independent observer noted that when Jill went with her team to play the game, “She was given the least important RF, [right field], role.” The independent observer noted, Jill “moved toward the ball but kept playing with her hair. Her hands made no attempt” and “during her time on 1st base she followed the game with her eyes but did nothing.” Jill would stand “in the back pulling at hair and chewing nails.” Likewise, while observing

Mike, the independent observer noted, “his body language seems to indicate low interest – hands on head, yawning, and crossing of arms.” She also noted that he would “mumble to no one” and pump his arm and cheer for himself when he thought he did something good.

The physical education setting seemed to be no different for the NASI students than the other parts of the structured day. They experienced social isolation because of two very different reasons: others excluded them at times and other times they exhibited self-isolating behaviors. The peer-generated exclusion coupled with the self-isolating behaviors that the NASI students demonstrated created a seemingly unbreakable cycle of social isolation. The NASI students frequently did not interact with people who were not their “friends” nor did they exhibit interest in the activity. The NASI students’ classmates chose not to associate with people that did not find the activities interesting and who did not put forth adequate effort or exhibit skill competency.

Summary

Teachers perceived NASI students to be disconnected from small and large group activities. NASI students seem to be dominated, ignored, or forgotten by their peers. The NASI students focused their attention toward their own interests and a select group of accepting friends with similar interests. The NASI students valued the times with their friends and appeared more secure and confident in their individuality when they were with them. The NASI students’ high level of creativity, imagination, and wit appeared to detach them from the mainstream and foster isolation from the majority of their peers. The NASI students experienced social isolation in school and physical education due to self-isolating behaviors and peer exclusion. In the final section of this chapter, some of

the NASI students' highly socially accepted peers presented their feelings on classmates, partner selection, and why some classmates are excluded from social tasks and activities.

Highly Socially Accepted Peers' Description of NASI Students' Experiences

The highly socially accepted students spoke about their ability and willingness to work with *most* people in their class. At times, they explained that working with a variety of classmates was actually more fun than working with the same few. The highly accepted students did acknowledge that some people were socially isolated and commented on those students. Themes emerged that described how highly accepted students perceived the NASI students' experiences and how they related to them in the school and physical education environment. The three themes were: (a) positive interactions with classmates, (b) variety in partner selection, and (c) deserved isolation.

Positive Interactions with Classmates

The highly accepted students perceived their classmates in a different way than the NASI students. The highly accepted students spoke about friends and partner selection in a more positive manner. They seemed to feel more comfortable with others and were more willing to work with a more diverse group of peers. Both the highly accepted students and NASI students were asked if they would want more good friends. Both groups of students replied that they were comfortable and happy with the number of friends that they had. The highly accepted students gave reasons to support their response, whereas the NASI students proclaimed satisfaction with the friends they had. Karen responded to the question of wanting more good friends by stating, "not really because I have a lot of friends and even if I am not like good friends with those people,

they are still friendly and we get along well.” Speaking from the same perspective, Keith added:

Not really at all. Because I have a lot of good friends I think. Everyday I play with like different people. Like one day I may play with like Crockett, Benny, and Kelvin, like jumping off hills. And the next day I will play basketball and stuff with like Tom and Travis.

The students perceived to be highly accepted by their teachers reported interactions with a number of classmates during lunch. When asked who she spent time with at lunch, Karen spoke of talking with various people, “I usually interact with the people at my table, so it is different people each day.” While playing at recess Elizabeth emphasized, “if I want to, I have other friends that are not really as close to me... [so] I can go to other people [to play].” She explained that she also enjoyed playing “knockout and soccer” and that these activities typically have between ten and thirty participants.

The highly accepted students’ responses were similar to the NASI students’ responses regarding their satisfaction with the number of good friends they had. Both groups believed they had good friends and did not need more good friends. Whereas the rationale for NASI students’ satisfaction centered on the quality of contact and interaction with their “good friends,” the highly accepted students’ rationale focused on their ability and desire to play and interact with many different students if their friends were not available. The highly accepted students’ rationale was examined and explained in more detail when the topic of partner selection was discussed.

Variety in Partner Selection

The highly accepted students indicated that partnering with different students provided valuable experiences. For example, Keith discussed how different levels of skill and ability come into play when working with a partner:

If they are worse than you, you can work with them. If they are better than you, they can like help you out.... And you can help each other out completely, and both of you can tell each other what to do when like something bad happens.

Jimmy talked about self-selection as his first preference, but as he began to reflect, he added, “you might be with the same person every time and that might get a little boring. So sometimes it is better to be assigned.” Karen chose random selection as her favorite way to be placed with a partner or in a group. She said random selection was best because “groups are ... interesting that way. You are not always with people that you like, so you have to find a way to work together.” When asked if she would rather choose or be assigned a partner, she selected assigned because “it is a lot more exciting because you do not know who you are going to be with and stuff.”

Keith agreed with Karen’s idea of using opportunities to work with different partners as a learning experience by proclaiming, “I don’t mind working with most people in the class. And if you are partnered with someone bad, it teaches you to make do with what you have and try new things.” Keith really showed his interest in working with a variety of different people and to the way that a teacher partners him with others when he stated:

If you get to choose, you can work with your friends. But if you get assigned, you can work with a variety of people and ... even if they are not ... your really good friends who you usually are partners with when you can pick, they can help you in

your weak spots. And if it is someone else who you are O.K. friends with and you can help them improve and stuff, and that you kind of get gratitude if you help someone do something better.

In support of Keith's comments, Karen shared this example: "Yeah, everyone helps each other. Like I wasn't very good at hitting the ball off of a tee because I am used to pitches, but my friends and some of the people on the opposing team would help me with that."

Unlike NASI students who preferred to be with and work with their friends, highly accepted students did not seem to mind working and playing with other students in the class and in non-structured environments, such as recess. At times they indicated that they preferred it and viewed it as an enjoyable challenge. They did seem to avoid situations where they had to work with students who were uninterested in the activity or unmotivated to try their best.

Deserved Isolation

Highly socially accepted students seemed to be frustrated by peers who did not put forth effort in class. Elizabeth stated that she did not like partners "that just kind of sit there and let other people do the work and then just copy down what they say" and "don't try." Karen responded similarly, "Someone who is just like they don't want to do any work, or someone who wants to do just work and doesn't want to interact at all." When the highly socially accepted students explained what characteristics they wanted a partner in physical education to have, Elizabeth replied:

It's like I would want to be with somebody who will work hard.... I don't really care if it is like my friends or not. Just like they have to like try...when I am doing all of the work, that... bugs me.

This feeling was prevalent in the entries in the fifth grade physical education journals. They fifth graders also exhibited discontentment over students who did not appear to try hard, or in the students' eyes, were "lazy." When responding to a prompt that asked what was the best way for students to be placed into groups in physical education, one fifth grader wrote, "I think the best way to create teams is to separate the people who don't really want to play." Fifth grade students responded to a prompt requesting them to name character traits that they would not want their partner to have. One response read, "I would not want my partner to not care about the game." Another student wrote, "If they were lazy, they wouldn't try at all, and I'd be trying my best. That is unfair to me and themselves." A third student added:

The last characteristic that you don't want your partner to have is to be lazy. You do not want a partner that never runs or never hits the ball and just stands in the corner and doesn't help you at all. Then all you are doing is playing with yourself and that's not very fun.

A final student echoed the previous sentiments when he/she responded, "Another characteristic that I would not want my partner to have is not caring about the game. It is not fun to play with someone who's lazy because you don't have as much fun when your playing on your own." When the writing prompt asked for characteristics that you want your partner to have, one fifth grade student entered, "I would like my partner to be hard-working because if they don't even try to do their best it won't be fun or fair for either of us." A second student proclaimed, "Everybody should try their best even if they don't like what we are doing."

In support of the previous comments and responses, a discussion on effort came up in the interview with one of the highly accepted students that centered on Jill, a NASI student interviewed for this research. Keith was talking about his enjoyment level in physical education when he said:

Everything is pretty much fun. I would have to say badminton was kind of not fun because once I worked with Marcus and once I worked with Jill. And Marcus like did not try at all. And Jill tried sometimes, but like sometimes when the ball came she would let it drop and like swing at the air. I could kind of tell, I mean like, she tried sometimes but most of the times she didn't.

Keith seemed to dislike the fact that some students from his point of view were not giving their best effort or at least trying. He continued:

Even if you don't feel you have the skill, you should at least try. And that is the only way that you are ever going to get better. And I really don't know, because I have been in Jill's group a couple of times, and she is actually pretty good at badminton but she doesn't try that much. And I don't think that anyone is necessarily really bad at it, but even if they are not skilled at it, they [should] still try.

Karen gave her observations of students who remove themselves from activities in physical education when she stated, "Most people seem to participate, but sometimes people get really scared and they don't want to do something because they are afraid that they will mess it up for the team." Elizabeth offered another perspective on why some students tended to remove themselves from physical education tasks. She was asked why certain people seemed to be excluded from activities, Elizabeth responded:

I don't think that it is people excluding them. I just think they're like "Oh, I don't need to try, I don't need to do this, I don't like this game" or whatever.... I don't think it is people that are saying, "No, you do not play or what ever."

Elizabeth was asked if she saw a lot of people sitting out of physical education activities or not trying, she replied, "Well, sometimes if they don't like it. Then it is unfair to the rest of their team." She continued, "It's kind of like they think they don't like this and it is for other people and it doesn't really matter if they do it or not." Elizabeth further explained:

People will be like "O.K. whatever" or "they are not doing anything, we can't get them to," so they like keep going [without them]. They don't make [the isolated student] play. But it is like their fault. They're just not wanting to play. They're not trying.

When asked if classmates ever invite these people to participate more, Elizabeth responded, "Well, sometimes. But like sometimes we won't ask them because it is kind of like, if we are doing O.K., and they are just sitting there, then people don't really care."

Even students who do not mind working with many different peers do not want to be partnered or grouped with students who they perceive put forth little effort. If students do not think that a child is interested or motivated to participate, they will figure out a way to perform the activity to be as successful as possible without the help of the unmotivated student. Peers may see children, who are excluded because of their perceived lack of interest and motivation, as constraining their ability to succeed. If the child's talents and

efforts are not needed for the success of the group, the child will be excluded and social isolation will occur.

Summary

Unlike their NASI peers, the highly socially accepted students reported positive interactions with most of their classmates and expressed a desire and willingness to work with a wide variety of their peers. The highly socially accepted students expressed frustration with peers who did not seem interested in class activities or motivated to put forth adequate effort while performing tasks. The highly socially accepted students acknowledged that they would exclude unmotivated/uninterested peers while helping their group to perform tasks to the best of their group's ability.

Conclusion

I chose the NASI students to be interviewed because their teachers perceived them to be their most socially isolated students whose isolation was not caused by social aggressiveness. Conversely, I chose the highly socially accepted students to be interviewed because their teachers perceived them to be their least socially isolated students. I decided to interview one highly socially accepted child from each class, above and below the aggression threshold, to increase the diversity of the perspectives of the students being interviewed.

The teachers presented a brief portrait of each NASI student that described both the student's self-isolating behaviors and their behaviors that lead to peer exclusion. The perceptions of the NASI students, their teachers, and their highly socially accepted peers

yielded a view of the school- and physical education-based lived experiences of NASI students.

NASI students valued and enjoyed the time they spent with their accepting friends. The security these friendships provided enabled the NASI students to appear more confident in their individuality. The NASI students demonstrated a high degree of creativity, imagination, and wit that was not always accepted or understood by other peers. They did not appear to wish to expand their interests to include those of other peers. NASI students also reported negative treatment by and interactions with peers, promoting their desire to self-select partners and groups. Conversely, the highly socially accepted students reported positive interactions and experiences with most peers, enhancing their willingness to work with a wide variety of peers. Further, the NASI students' motivation to participate in small group, classroom activities decreased when they were unable to work with an accepting friend. Interestingly, the highly socially accepted students appeared to be aware of this and acknowledged that they excluded or ignored peers who did not seem to be putting forth their best effort. The teachers recognized that the NASI students were disconnected from group activities, and experiencing social isolation during school and physical education because at times they exhibited self-isolating behaviors and other times they were excluded by peers. These behaviors generated teacher concern in cooperative classroom environments in which teachers attempted to include and teach all students. The fact that NASI students, at times, worked consciously to remain excluded and chose purposefully to disengage from content they deemed uninteresting, perplexed teachers and led them to be critical of NASI students' self-excluding behaviors.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

This chapter discusses how the school- and physical education-based lived experiences of these NASI students relate to the educational practices of the elementary school. The first section discusses the research findings from this study as it relates to the prevalence of cooperative learning in the elementary school and its impact on these NASI students. The second section centers on social estrangement and how these NASI students shared some qualities with alienated students, but maintained feelings of inclusion. The final section demonstrates how the NASI students' affiliation with good friends allowed them to cope with the everyday struggle of interacting with peers who were not close friends.

The Impact of Collaborative Learning Strategies on NASI Students

Currently, elementary school teachers are embracing constructivist learning theories that emphasize the importance of students working collaboratively on learning projects to enhance learning. For example, Vygotsky's (1978) emphasis on the zone of proximal development in which students learn effectively when working closely with a knowledgeable peer has been implemented in schools in the form of cooperative learning. In cooperative learning formats students are grouped randomly or selectively with many different peers to facilitate learning. Although many children appear to enjoy and flourish in these settings, the NASI students observed in this research appeared uncomfortable in some types of cooperative arrangements. In fact, there seemed to be a struggle occurring between the collaborative learning philosophies espoused in the literature and implemented in this elementary school and the personalities and learning

preferences of these NASI students. Interestingly, although observations of these NASI students in the collaborative learning setting evoked an impression of students who appeared isolated, social estranged, and *disengaged*; observations during unstructured times in school (e.g. lunch and recess) revealed *engaged*, fun loving youth. This is one of the characteristics that seemed unique to NASI students. They were socially estranged in certain circumstances and highly socially interactive in other situations.

Collaborative Learning

In this paper, the term *collaborative learning* is used to describe situations where two or more students are required to work together to complete a task. Collaborative learning consists of any peer-mediated instruction including “collaborative seatwork” (Cohen, 1994, p. 3). Collaborative seatwork occurs when students are asked to work together on tasks that they could accomplish on their own. Collaborative learning was prevalent in the school in which this study was conducted. For example, the classrooms were arranged to facilitate collaboration by placing all students at tables consisting of five to eight children. During my observation of David’s classroom, for instance, the students were asked to complete a series of tasks using a map of the United States. They were instructed to use any educational resources in the room and to dialogue with the people at their table to complete the task.

Cooperative learning is a specific instance within the larger collaborative learning environment. Cohen (1994) defined cooperative learning as “students working together in a group small enough that everyone can participate on a collective task that has been clearly defined” (p. 3). She acknowledged that many scholars believe that the origins of small group work and their benefits emerged and flourished due to the research on the

social construction of knowledge (Vygotsky, 1978). This work presented the idea that small-group processes contribute to higher order thinking skills.

Vygotsky (1978) developed the construct of the “zone of proximal development” to highlight a central component of sociocultural learning theory --- the interdependence of social and individual processes in the construction of knowledge (Mahn, 1999). The zone of proximal development is defined as the distance between the actual developmental level of an individual problem-solver and the potential level of that problem-solver under the guidance of a more capable person (Vygotsky, 1978). Students participating in group work with peers are likely to be working within one another’s zones of proximal development, thus advancing one another’s understanding. Similarly, Piaget (1926) argued that social-arbitrary knowledge (e.g. language, values, rules) could only be learned through group interactions. According to Slavin, “Students will learn from one another because, in their discussions of the content, cognitive conflicts will arise, inadequate reasoning will be exposed, disequilibrium will occur, and higher quality understandings will emerge” (Slavin, 1996, p. 49).

The NASI students in this study seemed to be unwilling to work with a majority of their classmates during collaborative learning situations. Linda acknowledged that there were times when “I like to work alone because sometimes the people get into my face when I am trying to do something.” In support of this statement, she described collaborative learning situations in physical education as stressful when she did not understand an activity because “Other people are like, ‘You should know this.’ Or like sometimes if I am supposed to be somewhere and I am not there, they are like, ‘Linda, get over here!’ I don’t like it at all.” When she was asked how classmates responded to

her pleas for help in understanding the activity, Linda replied, “Some [try to help me], but then sometimes I just get on their nerves... and then they just stop helping me.” Mike concurred with Linda when he said, “Sometimes when there is somebody ... that I don’t really know... they just kind of don’t talk to you. They like do things on their own.” Mike gave a reason for not wanting to work with other peers when he proclaimed, “Well, from my perspective, there are kind of more people [in my class] that are mean than nice.” Mike explained that people should be able to choose their partners because “if you are assigned, and you don’t really like that person, [and] that person is your bully, then it is not very fun.” Mike further cautioned, “You have to be really wise with picking partners [because] you [can] get stuck with someone that is a bully or that just doesn’t really like you.” Jill demonstrated her discontent with being assigned to a partner by proclaiming, “If it is an assigned partner, I would rather work alone.” Jill continued, “Sometimes when I am with someone I do not know, I hardly do anything at all. I just sit and watch and once in a while do something.” Keith, a highly socially accepted student, was in one of Jill’s collaborative learning groups and commented:

...Jill tried sometimes, but like sometimes when the ball came she would let it drop and like swing at the air. I could kind of tell, I mean like, she tried sometimes but most of the times she didn’t.... And I really don’t know [why], because I have been in Jill’s group a couple of times, and she is actually pretty good at badminton, but she doesn’t try that much.

Elizabeth, another highly socially accepted student, seemed to be in accordance with Keith when she stated, “I don’t think that it is people excluding them. I just think they’re

like ‘Oh, I don’t need to try, I don’t need to do this, I don’t like this game’ or whatever.”

She continued:

People will be like... “[the NASI students] are not doing anything, we can’t get them to,” so they like keep going [without them]. They don’t make [the NASI students] play. But it is like their fault. They’re just not wanting to play. They’re not trying.

Although, the NASI students were unwilling to work with most individuals in the class, they were willing to socially construct knowledge and participate collaboratively with friends. Linda stated, “I like to work with my friends *all* of the time when I am given the chance.” Linda explained why she liked to work with her friends when she stated, “because we do a little bit of girl chat, and we work, and we know what each other are having difficulties at.... They are able to help me better than people I don’t know as well.” Jill concurred when she explained the importance of working with friends to complete a collaborative task. She stated, “[Friends are] really, really important.... with friends I just do more.” Thus it appears that the NASI students were arguing that if they were able or allowed to be with one or more of their friends during collaborative learning activities, they would feel more motivation to participate while eliminating some of the feelings of social estrangement. With schools placing an emphasis on collaborative learning strategies, NASI students may experience an increase in negative feelings and passivity in the classroom when their needs were not addressed.

The Prevalence of Collaborative Learning Classroom Practices

Group learning in the classroom environment has become a fixture in current educational practices. Webb, Troper, and Fall (1995) explained that “One of the most

pervasive changes in education in the last 20 years has been the use of peer-directed small groups” (p. 406). Slavin (1996) supported this claim by declaring that cooperative learning is more than a subject of research and theory because it is used at some level by millions of teachers. Additionally, Antil, Jenkins, Wayne, and Vadasy (1998) proclaimed,

Cooperative learning is arguably the best example of a contemporary teaching practice.... It is the product of theoretical and applied research, having evolved from three decades of scientific work in the fields of social relationships, group dynamics, learning, and instruction. (p. 420)

To examine this in more detail, Antil et al. (1998) conducted a study of six diverse elementary schools in the Pacific Northwest to examine the prevalence, conceptualization, and form of cooperative learning used in the elementary classroom. Of the 81 teachers surveyed in these schools, 93% indicated that they used cooperative learning and 26% of the 81 teachers acknowledged using daily cooperative lessons. Additionally, a national survey found that 79% of elementary school teachers and 62% of middle school teachers reported using some form cooperative learning in the classroom (Puma, Jones, Rock, & Fernandez, 1993). It is important to understand the pervasiveness of this teaching strategy and to recognize that NASI students in many schools may be experiencing the same discomfort and social estrangement as the students in this study.

The Impact of Collaborative Learning and Table Groups for NASI Students

Isolated learning in which students work independently in classrooms is no longer a common occurrence in schools because collaborative activities have become a significant part of lessons (Brint, Contreras, & Matthews, 2001). As the physical education teacher

in this study I found in examining my lessons that I also used cooperative learning strategies extensively in my teaching. For example, I *assigned* groups of students to work together, participating in modified games or practice sessions during *every* class. By controlling group assignments, I eliminated the students' ability to choose partners for the activities, thus not taking into consideration the needs of my NASI students. This was made apparent when Linda was asked how her peers in physical education treated her, she responded, "When we are broken up into team[s]... I usually get left out." Teachers assign students to teams in physical education to try and eliminate students being "left out" or the "last person chosen", but in her case it seemed to foster a feeling of social estrangement because she was not placed with one of her good friends.

Brint et al. (2001) stated that 20 percent of instruction time in classrooms was dedicated to this collaborative strategy (only whole class instruction accounted for more time: 25-30%). They noted that it was common to find classroom table groups of four to six students discussing a variety of school related topics. I also noticed similar seating arrangements during each of the observations in David and Jennifer's fifth grade classrooms in the current study. In her interview, Jennifer spoke of cooperative learning groups when she acknowledged:

I try to take it out of their hands so that their cooperative groups are not totally free... When we pick cooperative groups, I tend not to let students choose. I tend to do that... if they choose it has to be somebody...within their table. I never let the students wander around the room.... what I usually do is say, "your partner has to be at your table, everybody has to have a partner"... if I say there is only

twos if there is an odd number at the table then I will tell that person that they have to move.

Thus, students' seating assignments played a direct role in who their collaborative learning partners would be. Jennifer did allow for some student choice in table arrangement and emphasized this when explaining her seating policies:

I do let them have some free choices about where they are going to sit every month, but... I call myself the "Benevolent Dictator" and it's my final choice. I also try to tell them that they can't be at the same table every month. They can't be with the same people.... they will have been at a table with everybody and hopefully by the end of the year, sat next to a lot of different people. So it moves everybody around and lets some people that don't know each other very well in the beginning [work together].

Although students had the opportunity to choose the tables at which they would sit, Jennifer emphasized that her goal was to have all students work together and not have the same group of friends together all of the time.

These same principles governed seating arrangements in David's classroom as well. During my observation of David's classroom, the students were instructed to dialogue with the people *at their table* to complete a task. David admitted to switching the students' seating arrangements or tables three to four times a year. He created table groups he felt would be most effective in his classroom and did not allow students to decide seating placements, thus eliminating students' choice. The inability of the NASI students to choose who they sat next to in their homeroom class or participate with in

physical education may be in conflict with their preferences both in friendship and collaborative learning groups.

The NASI students demonstrated convincingly that self-selection of partners and groups was critical to their learning and emotional security. Linda, for example, preferred to choose people who met certain criteria:

I want to be with people who, number one; they understand if I really stink.

Number two; some of them might be in the same position as I am. So I want to be with some people in the same position as me and some people who are understanding.

Mike explained that people should be able to choose their partners because “if they are with somebody that they like, then it is pretty much fun; [but] if you are assigned, and you don’t really like that person, [and] that person is your bully, then it is not very fun.” Mike further cautioned, “You have to be really wise with picking partners [because] you [can] get stuck with someone that is a bully or that just doesn’t really like you.” Finally, Jill demonstrated her discontent with being assigned to a partner by proclaiming, “If it is an assigned partner, I would rather work alone. But if you were able to pick, I would like to.” The conscience decisions of the teachers regarding collaborative learning assignments and seating arrangements, although well meaning, seemed to trap the NASI students in socially isolated situations, without close friends, that may detract from their learning and successes.

Teachers may need to consider NASI students’ preferences when assigning working groups and observe NASI students during collaborative learning activities to minimize NASI student disengagement. Disengagement can occur either when NASI students

remove themselves from collaborative interactions or are forced out of the group by peers. In these instances knowledge construction decreases or comes to a halt.

Conversely, even though NASI students desired to work exclusively with their friends, their withdrawal from socially uncomfortable situations or social interactions with others is likely to limit opportunities for personal or professional success in the future.

Constructivist learning theorists argue that social interactions with a number of different peers contribute significantly to student learning. Thus, NASI students need to learn to work effectively with students who are not their good friends. These interactions are critical and enhance NASI students' opportunities to consider and evaluate a variety of perspectives as they construct their understanding. Schools should expect NASI students to learn to work better with others, and teachers should be focused on both teaching the NASI students how and why this is important while making sure that the classroom is still a socially and emotionally safe place for them to be. One possible strategy to accommodate both the *needs and wants* of the NASI students might be to permit them to work with friends on particularly difficult assignments, while encouraging and requiring them to work with others on less difficult tasks.

Summary

Collaborative learning is rooted in Vygotsky's (1978) theory of social constructivism. Piaget (1926) acknowledged that some knowledge is best acquired and retained by means of cognitive dissonance created by group interaction, such as that found in cooperative learning. To be categorized as collaborative learning, classroom teachers develop group tasks and collaborative seatwork that focus on academic content. Collaborative learning strategies are used quite frequently in schools and acknowledged as a commonly

occurring educational practice. Observations and interviews revealed that it was a frequently used strategy with the students participating in this study.

NASI students appeared to struggle between the collaborative learning philosophies of the elementary school and their own desire to be in contact with good friends to learn effectively. Most collaborative learning activities in classrooms took place at the tables where teachers assigned students to sit. Teachers may not have taken into consideration the need of some students to work with good friends, which was ultimately controlled by their seating assignments. Likewise, in physical education, teachers frequently assigned students to partners and or groups, again limiting students' opportunities to select the partner with whom they worked most effectively.

NASI students should be permitted to work with their good friends during some collaborative activities, and encouraged and taught directly to work productively with non-friends in other collaborative learning situations. This balanced, two-pronged approach to teaching NASI students may facilitate learning because they will have opportunities both to work with their friends, reducing the time spent feeling socially estranged, and to learn how to work with non-friends. Elementary age NASI students need to be taught directly to engage productively and effectively with others and to be held accountable for progress in positive social interactions. Effective social interactions are central to constructivist classrooms and essential for NASI students to benefit from opportunities to consider diverse perspectives necessary for effective learning.

Were NASI Students Socially Estranged?

The use of collaborative learning strategies employed in this elementary school was tarnished by the fact that the NASI students in this study seemed to be socially estranged while participating in group work. The NASI students' isolation during collaborative activities prompted the idea that these students may feel socially estranged from peers perhaps leading to feelings of alienation from school.

As part of Mau's (1992) larger examination of alienation, she explained that one component of alienation, social estrangement, referred to a person's lack of participation or involvement in a friendship network and/or participation in school, especially in the social context. This was the primary focus of the current research because of the perceived lack of social interaction demonstrated by the NASI students while participating in collaborative learning activities. Carlson (1995) expanded this perception by pointing out that alienated, socially estranged students withdraw emotionally, mentally, and physically from situations where they experience persistent negative feelings.

Trusty and Dooley-Dickey (1993) reviewed the alienation literature to identify possible predictor variables associated with fourth through eighth grade students' feelings of alienation from school. Although they found no alienation studies of students in elementary schools, they postulated:

Alienation from school involves perceptions of students, and these perceptions may or may not be reflective of reality. Students may not manifest the negative effects of low achievement, failure, or incongruence of their culture and the school's culture until their early high school years. Alienation may be a

phenomenon that results from experiences in the early elementary and middle school years, but these experiences may not come to bear on students' feelings of belonging with school or valuing of school until adolescence. (p. 239)

Therefore, it is important to understand that factors, such as social estrangement, may not cause the NASI students to feel alienated at this point in their lives, but may be a cause of alienation in the future.

Personality Characteristics Leading to Social Estrangement

Newman and Newman (2001) noted that alienation, and I would argue social estrangement, might result from five personality characteristics: introversion, shyness, social anxiety, over cautiousness in interpersonal connections, and/or over preoccupation with self. Data from Newman and Newman's research are used in the subsequent paragraphs of this section to support the suggestion that a combination of these characteristics as well as the NASI students' unique interests and values led to their social estrangement from a majority of their peers.

It can be difficult to distinguish between Newman and Newman's (2001) five personality characteristics (i.e., introversion, shyness, social anxiety, over cautiousness, and self-preoccupation) because they are not mutually exclusive and may be exhibited in different combinations within certain individuals or situations. In my research, the fifth grade teachers used the term, "introverted," to describe NASI students. Jennifer described Sally as "a very quiet, introverted person.... very intellectual and a lot of times would rather be by herself." She continued in her discussion of NASI students by stating:

Yes, it's not that no one likes them, but they are just so introverted, people do not think about them.... Or it's somebody that [*sic*] is so quiet they can pass between the cracks because nobody notices that they are there.

Likewise, David portrayed Jill as a student who "is a kid that does not feel any need to get engaged in what is happening.... she has very little interest in social interaction."

An analysis of the data from this research suggested that teachers believed introverted students exhibited shy characteristics. The NASI students who were seen and described as introverted were considered to be extremely shy. Jennifer addressed shyness in terms of being noticeable. She described a NASI student as "the person that [*sic*] goes to the other extreme who is the real introvert. Just keeps to themselves because they are that quiet." Jennifer depicted Sally as "Very nice, extremely quiet. So a lot of the time she is just lost because she is so quiet".

Jill seemed to express her social anxiety in terms of being uncomfortable with peers. When responding to a question that asked her how important it was to have friends working with her, Jill responded, "Really, really important. I think I sometimes do better with friends. With people I am not really comfortable with, sometimes I do not do as well." Jennifer described a social characteristic of her NASI students when she stated:

They don't want to be combative. They don't even want to be around somebody that [*sic*] is really aggressive because they don't want to draw attention to themselves. So they back away because they don't know how to deal with it and they are not secure in their own self-esteem [or] educational values that they can challenge that person.

In this research, David discussed Jill's lack of motivation to make interpersonal connections. He stated, "She does not seek out interaction with others.... And she does not initiate interaction with peers." Jill confirmed David's statement when she discussed partner selection. She demonstrated her self-isolating personality and discontent with being assigned to a partner by proclaiming, "If it is an assigned partner, I would rather work alone. But if you were able to pick, I would like to." Conversely, Mike stated his reasons for being overly cautious in interpersonal connections when he cautioned, "You have to be really wise with picking partners [because] you [can] get stuck with someone that is a bully or that just doesn't really like you."

The final personality characteristic that Newman and Newman (2001) noted that may result in alienation is over preoccupation with self. Jennifer was talking about Mike when she said, "He daydreams. He is off task a lot, but not necessarily interfering with other students.... He just is in his own world doing his own thing. He doesn't know where he is". While observing Mike, the independent observer noted that he would "mumble to no one" and pump his arm and cheer for himself when he thought he did something good. In addition, Linda explained her favorite way to practice skills in physical education when she said, "I think [I like to work] in partners because then the partners are just focusing on each other." This comment seemed to reveal that Linda felt more needed attention was given to *her* in those situations. Jennifer pointed out that Sally "seems to be just as happy to read a book as she would to go play with somebody." David found that NASI students "have one interest and they have no interest in participating in what you find interesting." Jennifer concluded, "...they don't socialize,

they don't speak out, they're just always by themselves. They would rather be alone than with other people."

These four NASI students seemed to demonstrate one or more of the personality characteristics that may lead to social estrangement from their classmates. These characteristics were overlapping and progressive. For example, a student who experienced social anxiety could become introverted to reduce the prospects of peer interaction. Bowker, Bukowski, Zargarpour, and Hoza (1998) viewed social isolation from two dimensions: active isolation and passive withdraw. Active isolation occurs when children are either forced out of a group or have been unsuccessful in their attempts to enter a group. Passive withdrawal occurs when the isolation is due to a child's social shyness, anxiety, or extreme social sensitivity. It was not clear from the data collected in this research whether the personality characteristics demonstrated by these NASI students contributed directly to their isolation, were a result of being isolated by others, or were a combination of the two. However, it seems likely that these characteristics could easily lead to social estrangement, which Mau (1992) proposed could result in future alienation within the school context.

NASI Students, Social Estrangement, and Friends

NASI students who demonstrate personality characteristics outside the mainstream would seem to be at high risk for alienation due to social estrangement in certain classroom and school contexts. For example, when Linda was asked how she was treated by her peers in physical education, she commented, "When we are broken up into team[s]... I usually get left out." Jill acknowledged that she also experienced being left out of activities in physical education class. When asked for more detail, Jill replied that

the exclusion made her feel “like if it [is] a group of all everyone else’s friends and I am just in there.”

Although evident in many situations, the NASI students did not appear to experience social estrangement during the entire school day. These NASI students did have friends, and it seemed strong bonds between group members held these friendships together. For instance, when Linda was asked if she would like to have more friends, she responded, “I do not think so. I think that I have a lot of friends.” David stated, “[Jill] has friends, and she interacts with them well. I mean she has good interaction skills with her friends, and [acts] appropriately.” Linda declared, “...I like to work with my friends *all* of the time when I am given the chance.” Linda took time to emphasize why she would want to work with her friends exclusively, “because we do a little bit of girl chat, and we work, and we know what each other are having difficulties at.... They are able to help me better than people I don’t know as well.” Mike described the importance of having and maintaining friendships when he said:

... [Friends are] very important to me because without teachers or your friends, you’re not really part of the school because nobody would help you with your homework. You wouldn’t have any friends. If you didn’t have any friends, well you would just be left out.

A lack of an affiliation with a friendship group was apparent when Mike and Sally were observed during a one-hour art class during which they did not verbally or physically interact with others. This lack of social interaction seemed to occur because each of these students was assigned to a table that did not include their good friends. In addition to the lack of interaction in art class, Mike discussed being ignored during a collaborative

learning task in physical education class, “Sometimes when there is somebody ... that I don’t really know... they just kind of don’t talk to you. They like do things on their own.” In contrast, when asked what the best part of his day was, Mike stated, “Just hanging out with my friends at recess, hanging out with them at lunch, just talking.” Jill also responded to a question about how important it was to have friends working with her, she stated, “Really, really important. I think I sometimes do better with friends.”

A lack of friends could place any child at risk for increased loneliness, low self-esteem, and inability to develop the social skills necessary to effectively navigate social situations (Bullock, 1992). Conceptually, it is possible for a child to have friendships and still be lonely, and, conversely, a child that is physically alone may not necessarily be lonely (Page & Scanlan, 1994). Mike was the only NASI student in this study who proclaimed that he would like to have more friends and perceived that his peers constantly berated him. Although Mike had friends in other classes, he was the *only* NASI student not to have a close “friend” in his classroom, which could have led to greater feelings of social estrangement than those experienced by other NASI students in this study. I would recommend to principals and teachers when assigning students to new classrooms each summer, that the NASI students be placed in classrooms with at least one other person whom they consider to be a friend.

Summary

Within Mau’s (1992) four dimensions of alienation, social estrangement appeared most likely to affect NASI students and lead to alienation in the future. Social estrangement was defined as the lack of participation or involvement in a friendship network and/or participation in school especially in the social context. Although these

NASI students appeared to exhibit personality characteristics that promoted their isolation from a majority of their peers, they did have friends and were able to interact with them effectively.

Good Friends: The NASI Students' Defense against Social Estrangement

When discussing the connection between self and group identities, Newman and Newman (2001) noted, "There is a reciprocal relationship between group identifications and individual identity" (p. 516). They emphasized that the self emerges through the internalization of the norms, rules, and standards of the group, while continuing to develop as the person gains a deeper understanding of the group's outlook and goals.

In the present study, the NASI students did not feel socially estranged in all situations because they were able to maintain a group of like-friends. This was demonstrated when Jill spoke about friends as people who have "the same interests as you." When asked why she interacted with certain people, Jill replied, "[friends] don't really care if you like something kind of different from everyone else because we all have something in common." She conceded that she and her friends "all like drawing, and we like daydreaming." During Linda and Jill's interviews it became evident that they and their friends were very interested in and loved animals. When each was asked to describe ways to make physical education class better, they both stated that animals should be incorporated. Although some NASI students appeared to have interests and engaged in activities that were different from a majority of their peers, these aspects of their individual identity seemed to bring the NASI students together. Using friends as a support and shelter from offending peers and situations, the NASI students may have

been able to gain identity and maintain self-esteem through establishing a unique social identity and using various social and personal coping mechanisms.

Group Identity as a Means to Minimize Stressors

Newman and Newman (1999) identified a psychosocial conflict called *group identity versus alienation*. This conflict places the individual's desires to ally with and function comfortably within a group in opposition to tendencies to feel overburdened by social pressures, isolated, and lonely. They continued by saying that neither blind devotion to a group nor alienation is desirable, but, at times, both may be experienced during this psychosocial developmental stage. The resolution to this problem is to encourage or assist the student in finding a positive balance that allows the person to feel confidently connected to a group, while being able to tolerate periods of separateness.

The NASI students in this study seemed to have developed a coping strategy that minimized conflict and interactions when their close group of friends was not readily available. Specifically, the NASI students in this study removed themselves from distasteful situations and situations that caused them stress. I noted on several occasions that the socially isolated children "would remain close enough to people to remain connected with the activity, but far enough away so that any interaction would be difficult." In other situations, they "would be positioned close to other students, but no interaction occurs and his/her peers might not even realize their presence." When Jill was asked how her classmates reacted to her quietness and lack of motivation to participate in groups that did not contain her friends, she responded, "Sometimes the other person doesn't really notice." When I observed Sally and Mike in an art class, I recorded, "Sally and Mike did not say one word to any other classmate during the entire

hour of art.” These self-isolating solutions do not seem to be useful solutions for future school experiences or life, but a temporary, possibly immature, coping strategy for dealing with distasteful and stressful social situations in school. It does not appear to represent the “tolerance and balance” that Newman and Newman indicated were necessary for learning in constructivist classrooms and positive group assimilation.

Newman and Newman (2001) stated, “Perceiving oneself as a competent member of a group or groups is fundamental to one’s self-concept as well as to one’s willingness to participate and contribute to society” (p. 521). The ultimate positive resolution to the conflict of group identity versus alienation occurs when one or more groups provide a person with a sense of belonging, meet his or her social needs, and allow him or her to express their social self. It appears initially to be the responsibility of the NASI student to engage with more people and broaden their interests to work productively with non-friends to achieve these three criteria. Schools and teachers, however, are not without responsibility. They should attempt to teach students the social skills necessary to interact positively while creating, maintaining, and monitoring a socially and emotionally safe learning environment in which all children are accepted.

The NASI students in this study seemed to have discovered a positive resolution because they did have a group of friends who enabled all three of Newman and Newman’s (2001) criteria to be met, at least in a limited setting. Unfortunately, their solutions leading to this resolution were not always appropriate and did not require personal and social growth on their part.

Nevertheless, the NASI students did create islands of comfort for themselves by interacting effectively with one group of close friends. They may have been drawn to

these people because they provided a sense of belonging and shared interests. Linda explained why she liked to work with her friends when she stated, “because we do a little bit of girl chat, and we work, and we know what each other are having difficulties at.... They are able to help me better than people I don’t know as well.” Jill supported the idea of having a bond with her friends when she stated, “[my friends] don’t really care if you like something kind of different from everyone else because we all have something in common.”

Although the NASI students did not declare that they had many friends, they seemed very satisfied with the ones that they had. These friends may have been meeting at least some of their perceived social needs. This claim was apparent during my observations of the NASI students during lunch and recess. For example, Linda, Anne, and Chloe played exclusively with each other for the thirty-minute period, skipping, galloping, and running while holding hands. They spent a majority of their time playing on the otherwise unoccupied baseball diamond with no other students within fifty yards. Likewise, Mike spent the thirty-minutes at recess with two friends, neither of who were in his homeroom class. They engaged exclusively with one another, sitting on a bench, standing on the playground equipment talking, or chasing each other around the blacktop area, yet Mike wished for more friends. Thus, all of his social needs were not met with this small group. Jill spent recess in the library with two classmates, Chloe and Lucy, who were the media assistants for the day. Jill spent the period talking, laughing, and interacting with the other two girls. They seemed to have a lot of fun and did not appear to be isolated from others. The NASI students’ sought additional opportunities to be with their friends at lunch in the All Purpose Room (APR). Mike sat with his same two friends and continued

to smile, talk, and laugh with them. Linda and Jill sat at the same lunch table and interacted with the same girls Ann and Chloe (with Linda) and Chloe and Lucy (with Jill). All five students were talking, laughing, or engaged in whole group or partner discussions for most of the thirty-minute time period.

Observations of the NASI students interacting within these two conditions, with friends and in the presence of random peers, differed significantly. While with their group of friends, the NASI students appeared better able and more willing to express their social selves. They were more talkative, engaging, and animated while demonstrating characteristics of joy, excitement, and content. This was most evident when I observed Jill during her recess. She was with two of her friends in the media center. Jill was leading most of the discussion. She was “talking about dreams and telling stories.” About half way through their recess time, the three girls ducked down under the main media center desk so they were “hidden and isolated from the other 20-30 people in the media center.” They kept poking their heads up and laughing. The activity seemed to be almost “peek-a-boo” in nature. They drew caricatures of their faces and propped them on the counter of the media center desk with signs saying, “Ask us for help” thus, removing themselves from peers, yet staying within the physical boundaries of the library.

NASI Students' Use of Coping Mechanisms

Dietz-Uhler and Murrell (1998) explain that social identity is part of a person's identity as an individual. When people identify strongly with groups, they gain a sense of who they are and derive positive self-esteem from their memberships in these groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Group identification can be so important that any threat to the

group may be unsettling (Dietz-Uhler & Murrell, 1998). Dietz-Uhler and Murrell (1998) continued by declaring that people tend to link more positive characteristics to their own group and overvalue its products to make their group superior to other groups.

When a group member's positive identification has been threatened, the self-esteem of the individual is at risk (Dietz-Uhler & Murrell, 1998). Coping mechanisms are used to restore or maintain their self-esteem. Dietz-Uhler and Murrell (1998) named *social creativity* as an effective coping mechanism. Social creativity includes such strategies as comparing groups on different dimensions or one's group with a lower status group, and attributing their group's successes to internal factors while blaming the group's shortcomings on external factors. Bat-Chava (1994) suggested that minority group members used several psychological mechanisms to enhance self-esteem. First, group members might compare their performance with that of another in-group member rather than that of a member of a more advantaged group. Second, group members can attribute negative feedback or actions from outside sources as prejudice against them. Third, group members can emphasize dimensions on which their group excels. Finally, group members may devalue dimensions on which their group performs poorly.

The NASI students in this study used a variety of coping strategies and mechanisms to shield themselves from situations that could lead to a loss of self-esteem. The most utilized strategy was to not fully participate socially in activities with classmates who were not part of their in-group. A highly socially accepted peer described this strategy in use in physical education when he said:

...Jill tried sometimes, but like sometimes when the ball came she would let it drop and like swing at the air. I could kind of tell, I mean like, she tried

sometimes but most of the times she didn't.... And I really don't know [why], because I have been in Jill's group a couple of times, and she is actually pretty good at badminton, but she doesn't try that much.

The NASI students appeared to detach themselves physically and/or verbally from working in collaborative experiences when they were assigned to work with others. The independent observer remarked that Jill "sat herself at the back of the row separated by a person length in distance in the AP room." She continued, "As the game began, other children were chatting and interacting. Jill said nothing." During the activity, "She maybe said 2 words, but participated [only] when she had to."

The NASI students' groups of friends may have acted as a sanctuary from negative feelings and experiences. When discussing who she would like to work with in class, Linda explained, "I like to work with my friends *all* of the time when I am given the chance." Conversely, if her friends were not available to work with or help her, she declared, "I [would] like to work alone because sometimes the [other] people get into my face when I am trying to do something." Typical of the group behavior described by Bat-Chava (1994), the NASI students seemed to attribute the negative peer feedback as prejudice against them or a lack of understanding towards them. Linda described situations in physical education as stressful when she did not understand an activity because "Other people are like, 'You should know this.' Or like sometimes if I am supposed to be somewhere and I am not there, they are like, 'Linda, get over here!' I don't like it at all." When she was asked how classmates responded to her pleas for help in understanding the activity, Linda replied, "Some [try to help me], but then sometimes I

just get on their nerves... and then they just stop helping me.” Linda gave a specific example of a time when she experienced exclusion and felt isolated:

... like in volleyball and badminton, I was in a group with some other people, and me and another girl were getting left out because we were not as good as the other people. But some people try to get it, but they just can’t because someone else already got it.

Conversely, Elizabeth, a highly socially accepted student, provided a different explanation for these responses:

People will be like... “[the NASI students] are not doing anything, we can’t get them to,” so they like keep going [without them]. They don’t make [the NASI students] play. But it is like their fault. They’re just not wanting to play. They’re not trying.

Another coping strategy used by the NASI students was overemphasizing the dimensions on which they excelled and were interested in pursuing while simultaneously devaluing other classmates’ interests. David discussed this phenomenon within his classroom and how it affected student interaction and isolation. “With the socially isolated student, they have one interest and they have no interest in participating in what you find interesting.” David was able to give an example of this type of behavior from his classroom when he recalled:

Just the other day I have kids playing at recess.... There was a situation where a couple of kids were playing a card game. And they tried to get a couple of other kids to join the card game. And I saw some of my kids, who I would describe as more socially isolated, say, “I do not know how to play the game” and walk off.

Whereas my kids that are more socially accepted will walk up and say, “Well, teach me”. And they would sit down and learn.

The NASI students were not observed to go out of their way to understand and experience the interests of others not in their group or to learn new activities that others found enjoyable. Elizabeth concurred that some students appear to exclude themselves from activities:

I don’t think that it is people excluding them. I just think they’re like “Oh, I don’t need to try, I don’t need to do this, I don’t like this game” or whatever.... I don’t think it is people that are saying, “No, you do not play or what ever.”

Elizabeth continued, “It’s kind of like they think they don’t like this and it is for other people and it doesn’t really matter if they do it or not.” The NASI students liked to work and play in their friendship groups and demonstrated a dislike for interactions or activities that removed them from their sanctuaries.

Summary

Although NASI students appeared to share some thoughts and feelings with students who feel alienated from school due to social estrangement, they demonstrated the ability and chose to connect with a select few who helped them feel included. These interactions seemed to prevent them from experiencing social estrangement, which could lead to future alienation, at least during some aspects of their school experience. These NASI students’ group identities along with their friendships may help them cope with the everyday social experiences that most students enjoy. They developed a variety of coping strategies and seemed to use these strategies to shield themselves from any real or perceived injustices encountered throughout the day. Although the NASI students

seemed to seek friends during lunch and recess, school policies and current collaborative learning teaching practices often required that they work with students who were not in their friendship group.

Chapter Summary

Collaborative learning is rooted in Vygotsky's (1978) theory of social constructivism. Piaget (1926) acknowledged that some knowledge is best acquired and retained through cognitive dissonance created by group interaction, such as that found in cooperative learning. Classroom research on cooperative learning suggests that most teachers use more loosely organized strategies more consistent with collaborative rather than cooperative learning (Antil et al., 1998). Collaborative learning strategies are used quite frequently in schools and acknowledged as a commonly occurring educational practice. Observations and interviews revealed that it was a frequently used strategy with the students participating in this study.

NASI students appear to struggle with the collaborative learning philosophies of the elementary school and their own desire to be in contact with good friends. Although these students found friends during lunch and recess, school policies and current cooperative learning teaching practices often required that they work with students who were not in their friendship group. Often collaborative learning activities in the classroom and physical education class take place in teacher assigned groups that may not take into consideration the need of some students to work with their good friends. Careful contemplation when organizing collaborative learning activities and observation of the NASI students during these activities is crucial because once the NASI students

personally disengage or are actively forced out of the group by peers, the construction of knowledge decreases or comes to a halt. Conversely, even though NASI students desired to work exclusively with their friends, withdrawing from social interactions with others was not likely to position them for personal or professional success in the future.

Within Mau's (1992) dimensions of alienation, social estrangement seemed most appropriate to define the social life of NASI students at school. Social estrangement was defined as the lack of participation or involvement in a friendship network and/or participation in school, especially in the social context. Social estrangement appeared most likely to affect the NASI students because of the struggle between their desires and the elementary school's collaborative learning focus. NASI students seemed to experience elements of social estrangement while participating in collaborative learning tasks, which could lead to future feelings of alienation. These NASI students exhibited personality characteristics that promoted their isolation from a majority of their peers, but results from this study indicated that these students did have friends and were able to interact with them effectively.

Although NASI students appear to share some thoughts and feelings with students who feel alienated from school due to social estrangement, they demonstrated the ability and choose to connect with a select few who helped them to feel included. These interactions seemed to prevent them from experiencing social estrangement, at least during some aspects of their school experience. These NASI students maintained group identities and friendships that helped them cope with the everyday social experiences that most students enjoy. They developed a variety of coping strategies and seemed to use

these strategies to shield themselves from the real or perceived injustices encountered throughout the day.

Conclusion

NASI students present a dilemma for principals and teachers who espouse cooperative learning practices and use them effectively for most students in their classrooms. These strategies encourage all children to work together to facilitate and enhance learning. Although most students seem to function effectively within these environments, NASI students appear to be uncomfortable in these situations and resist these arrangements by isolating themselves, causing frustration to well-meaning teachers and peers. Clearly, the desires and preferences of the NASI learners should be considered in the selection of teaching strategies and student groupings. Yet, to what extent should they be permitted to exclude themselves from others, focus exclusively on learning with a few self-selected friends, and potentially avoid experiences in which they might gain effective cooperative strategies useful in a variety of educational and professional settings in the future?

NASI students exhibit personality characteristics that should be seriously considered by principals and teachers as they assign students to classrooms and working groups. Educators should strive to create and maintain a delicate balance between the desires of the NASI students to interact solely with friends and the educational needs of the NASI students to learn to interact effectively with non-friends. Careful contemplation of appropriate protocols to structure collaborative learning activities with NASI students is critical because, once the NASI students personally disengage or are actively forced out of the group by peers, the construction of knowledge decreases and feelings of social

estrangement commence. Future perceptions of alienation may prove to be a serious problem for these NASI students if the balance between their *wants* and educational *needs* is not attended to during the formative elementary school years. If this issue can be effectively addressed in elementary schools, it might substantially help the NASI students as they move through middle and high school and into a profession.

Solutions to this conundrum involve strategic use of cooperative learning strategies to both accommodate and challenge NASI students as they engage within a comfortable environment. For example, NASI students might be permitted to work with their good friends during collaborative activities that they perceive to be difficult, while encouraged and taught directly to work productively with non-friends in other, less challenging collaborative learning situations. Thus, students could be nurtured in a friendship dyad during the most stressful and potentially frustrating tasks such as term papers and projects, which require persistence and perseverance, while, required to interact with non-friends in routine academic tasks such as daily task sheets. This two-part approach to teaching NASI students may facilitate learning because they will have opportunities to work with their friends in challenging situations when friends and supportive structures are most needed. Conversely, they will be made, taught and encouraged to work with non-friends in less academically stressful situations, consequently benefiting from the practice of engaging others while receiving the diverse perspectives necessary for effective learning in constructivist classrooms. This two-pronged strategy accommodates NASI students' preferences when they are most insecure, yet requires that they learn to function more productively as they develop socially.

The challenge to educators is in structuring the settings and instruction to teach NASI students *how* to engage with non-friends and *why* it is important, while educating and motivating the majority of their peers to be openly receptive and accepting to facilitate engagement. NASI students, their classmates, and teachers should focus on developing positive relationships as a means to foster more positive interactions.

One avenue that teachers and schools could explore to tackle this difficult task is based on a theoretical framework developed by Nel Noddings (1988, 1992) called the Ethic of Care. The Ethic of Care is based on a relational dyad that includes the One-caring and the Cared-for. The One-caring responds to the needs of the Cared-for in a dynamic role that is characterized by engrossment for and motivational displacement to the Cared-for. The Cared-for also has defining characteristics or responsibilities to acknowledge the efforts of the One-caring, including reception, recognition, and response. In the context of the relationships needed to nurture and enhance NASI students' relationships with others, students need to be taught directly and purposefully about these roles and how they can evolve and change in different situations. Interestingly, because NASI students already assume both the One-caring and the Cared-for roles with their friends, it is likely that they can learn to demonstrate these roles with others. Strategies and tasks to facilitate this process would contribute substantially to success.

Noddings (1992) proposed four strategies or aspects essential for implementing caring relationships in the educational setting: modeling, dialogue, practice, and confirmation. Modeling involves demonstrating how to care and how to be cared for. Peers or teachers can exhibit both of these behaviors in the classroom. Teachers model caring by creating

genuine caring relationships with their students. The caring relationships should maintain a reciprocity where teachers not only care for their students, but also allow for their students to care for them. Being cared-for involves demonstrating the appropriate ways to respond to caring and helpful behaviors. Collaborative learning tasks are inherently caring relationships. Modeling reveals to all students what acceptable and appropriate interaction during collaborative learning activities should look like. At the beginning of the year, strategies such as role-playing can be used to model appropriate behavior in collaborative groups.

Dialogue, Noddings' (1992) second strategy, involves open-ended discourse between individuals in which the outcome of the discourse is not predetermined. It also can be used to introduce and compel the students to define and defend what they feel encompasses caring in collaborative learning situations. It is a strategy that allows people to search for and gain understanding, empathy, and/or appreciation of another's perspective, which can help demarginalize the NASI students' perspectives. Dialogue also facilitates a connection between individuals and helps to maintain and strengthen caring relationships. A weekly dialogue session facilitated by the teacher with mandatory participation from the students focusing on care or other meaningful classroom issues may generate compassion and understanding of diverse perspectives.

Noddings' third strategy, practice, could provide NASI individuals with the opportunity to gain skills involved in both care giving and being cared-for. It encourages students to develop the characteristics and attitudes necessary to participate in a mature caring relationship. Collaborative learning activities provide the perfect opportunities for all students to practice caring and develop a deeper understanding of what the roles are

for the One-caring and the Cared-for. Noddings asserted that the practice of caring in education has the potential to not only transform classroom dynamics, but also positively enhance the climate in the school and community. The collaborative learning strategies currently implemented in many elementary schools are examples of the practice strategy when the Ethic of Care is emphasized throughout the lesson.

The final strategy or aspect essential in the implementation of the Ethic of Care for NASI students and their peers is confirmation. It occurs when teachers and students affirm and encourage the best in others. Confirmation goes beyond the acknowledgement of a caring action. Confirmation supports and encourages future caring actions and lifts people to their vision of a better self. It is not hard for most people to say “thank you” or “well done”, but that interaction is the first step involved in confirmation. Confirmation can also act as a reflective tool which allows students to understand what caring is, why it should be given to others, and how it makes people feel when giving or receiving care. If a NASI student would take this step with non-friends, it could position them for more caring gestures from other peers because the non-friends may be encouraged by the confirmation of their action.

The strategies and techniques involved in the effective implementation of an Ethic of Care will take time to develop and would be most successful if addressed as a school wide initiative to help *all* students feel included and cared for. By implementing the Ethic of Care, positive interactions between all classmates are expected and may be the key to reducing NASI students’ perceptions of isolation by emphasizing that every person plays an important role in the classroom and school. The power of utilizing this strategy in schools is that it does not focus on a small group of marginalized students, but it has

the potential to enhance the learning and ethical development of all students involved in a caring environment.

CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Non-aggressive socially isolated (NASI) students are students whom teachers perceive to be socially estranged from a majority of their peers. Their isolation is not caused by socially aggressive tendencies (e.g., being rude, obnoxious, overbearing, etc.). Research identifying the educational needs and preferences of NASI students is important because these students tend to be overlooked in their classrooms due to their passive and unobtrusive demeanor. This research is significant because it demonstrated a contradiction between the preferences of the NASI students and social constructivist practices (e.g., collaborative learning) that is prevalent in many elementary school classrooms.

This chapter contains a brief summary of the essential design and findings of this research examining the school- and physical education-based lived experiences of NASI students, including background research, methodology, results, and discussion. The second section includes the conclusions resulting from the data analysis, while the final section is comprised of two types of recommendations derived from this study. The first recommendations are for schools and teachers regarding the instruction of their NASI students. The second recommendations provide suggestions to other researchers wishing to conduct studies involving NASI students.

Summary

School is a social institution where knowledge construction and social interaction become intertwined. Although schools and scholars acknowledge the benefits of peer

collaboration to create knowledge, some students may not fully engage in the social dynamics of the class. Unfortunately, these students are actively or passively removed from the social aspects of school because they demonstrate self-isolating behaviors or face the exclusionary behaviors of peers. These socially isolated students may develop feelings of social estrangement that can lead to peer and school alienation. Even though scholars have studied social isolation, few have examined socially isolated students' school experiences. These students' experiences need to be understood if educators are to develop and utilize strategies to alleviate their feelings of social estrangement while effectively engaging these students in the social construction of knowledge.

The physical education classroom could be used as an anchor or focal point for studying the lived experiences of the socially isolated. A physical education setting is primarily a platform that blends the teaching and learning of the cognitive and physical domains. A secondary feature of physical education is that it takes place in an inherently social environment where student interaction plays a vital role in every task and learning opportunity. Physical education provides opportunities for students to engage not only physically, but also cognitively and affectively in constructing their understanding of the learning experience.

The purpose of this investigation was to discover the physical education-based lived experiences of non-aggressive socially isolated students. The research question was "What are the physical education-based lived experiences of non-aggressive socially isolated students?" Specifically,

- (a) How did the non-aggressive socially isolated students describe their social interactions with their peers?

- (b) What were the perceptions of the children who were not socially isolated towards their non-aggressive socially isolated peers?
- (c) How did teachers view their non-aggressive socially isolated students?

Background Research

This section is presented to give a partial and focused summary of the literature that explains the educational setting and characteristics of NASI students. It provides a theoretical base for the research while developing a foundation for the findings and conclusions. The background research section is divided into three sections: constructivism and collaborative learning practices, isolation, and alienation.

Constructivism and collaborative learning practices. It is important to understand constructivism because social constructivism is the theory which gave rise to the collaborative learning practices used in the classroom today. It is in these collaborative learning situations that NASI students seem to be most socially estranged.

Constructivism is a learning or meaning-making theory based on the interaction of what is already known by an individual with new ideas and phenomena that are currently experienced in an educational setting. There are two major views of constructivism: psychological and social. Psychological constructivism is based on the Piagetian view that meaning-making and learning are *individualistic*. Psychological constructivists focus on the individual as the primary agent in the learning process (Richardson, 1994). Conversely, social constructivism is defined as intellectual development directed by the social consensual interpretation of reality (Cottone, 2001). Vygotsky (1978) developed the construct of the “zone of proximal development” to highlight a central component of sociocultural learning theory --- the interdependence of social and individual processes in

the construction of knowledge (Mahn, 1999). The zone of proximal development is defined as the distance between the actual developmental level of an individual problem-solver and the potential level of that problem-solver under the guidance of a more capable person (Vygotsky, 1978).

Cooperative learning is rooted in Vygotsky's (1978) theory of social constructivism. Piaget (1926) acknowledged that some knowledge is best acquired and retained through cognitive dissonance created by group interaction, such as that found in cooperative learning. Slavin (1996) declared that cooperative learning is more than a subject of research and theory because it is used at some level by millions of teachers. The term *collaborative learning* is used for situations where two or more students are required to work together to complete a task. Collaborative learning consists of any peer-mediated instruction including cooperative learning and "collaborative seatwork" (Cohen, 1994, p. 3). Collaborative seatwork occurs when students are asked to work together on tasks that they could accomplish on their own.

Isolation. Collaboration between individuals is a vital element in the social construction of knowledge including the practices of cooperative and collaborative learning. In schools using collaborative practices, NASI students appeared to be removed from group interactions and uninvolved in collaborative processes.

In 1934, Jacob Moreno conceptualized a discipline called sociometry. Sociometry is the study of individuals' choices to affiliate with others (Kindermann, 1998). The examination of individuals' preferences to affiliate with others tends to gravitate toward two fundamental constructs of acceptance and rejection. The constructs of acceptance, rejection, and indifference were used by Peery (1979) to create a framework of

sociometric classification based on two dimensions – social preference and social impact. Social preference is an index of *relative likableness* and is defined as the difference between one's acceptance and rejection by the peer group. Social impact is an index of *visibility* or *notice* and is defined as the sum of one's acceptance and rejection by the peer group. The two dimensions of social preference and social impact allowed scholars to distinguish and list individuals in five status or social groups: popular, rejected, controversial, neglected, and average (Cillessen & Bukowski, 2000).

Children who are classified sociometrically as rejected or neglected could also be considered social isolates because they receive either low preference or low impact nominations by their peers. When some children are not able to develop peer relationships or be accepted by peers, they will experience social isolation. Bowker, Bukowski, Zargarpour, and Hoza (1998) viewed social isolation from two dimensions: active isolation and passive withdrawal. Active isolation occurs when children are either forced out of a group or have been unsuccessful in their attempts to enter a group. Passive withdrawal occurs when the isolation is due to a child's social shyness, anxiety, or extreme social sensitivity. People who are actively isolated typically correspond to the rejected status group, while passively withdrawn people generally represent the neglected group. NASI students in this study demonstrated passive withdrawal characteristics and received active isolation by peers.

Alienation. NASI students who experience social isolation may also struggle with alienation. Alienated students withdraw emotionally, mentally, or physically from the situations that gives rise to persistent negative feelings (Carlson, 1995). Social estrangement is one aspect of alienation theory proposed by Mau (1992). She explained

that social estrangement referred to the lack of participation or involvement in a friendship network and/or participation in school especially in the social context.

Summary. Many teachers use collaborative learning as a teaching strategy. The ability and willingness of the students to participate in group discussions and tasks lie at the center of this social constructivist strategy. When students do not want to actively participate in or are excluded from the collaborative learning practice, they may experience social isolation and/or receive a decreased amount of constructed knowledge. Alienation may occur if the isolated student begins to feel socially estranged from his or her peers or detached from the school in which the isolation takes place.

Methodology

This study took place in a public elementary school in an upper-middle class suburb on the East coast. The participants were the researcher/teacher, the students in two fifth grade classes, their homeroom teachers (David and Jennifer), and an outside observer. The fifth grade teachers were given a qualitative social dynamics task during their interviews that provided data for the researcher/teacher to identify NASI (Linda, Jill, Sally, and Mike) and highly accepted students (Karen, Keith, Jimmy, and Elizabeth) from each class. Data were collected during this eleven-week study through two individual interviews with each of the fifth grade teachers and NASI students, and one individual interview with each of the highly accepted students. Additionally data in the form of fifth grade student journals, field notes from independent and researcher observations, and researcher/teacher journaling were also used to identify themes and draw conclusions. The data were collected from the seven sources previously stated and triangulated to

ensure the validity of the phenomena being examined and explained. The data were analyzed using open, axial, and selective coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Results

NASI students valued and enjoyed the time they spent with their friends. The security these friendships provided enabled the NASI students to appear more confident in their individuality. The NASI students demonstrated a high degree of creativity, imagination, and wit that was not always accepted or understood by other peers. Most students did not appear to wish to expand their interests to include those of other peers. NASI students also perceived negative treatment by and interactions with peers, promoting their desire to self-select partners and groups. Conversely, the highly socially accepted students reported positive interactions and experiences with most peers, enhancing their willingness to work with a wide variety of peers. The NASI students' motivation to participate in small group classroom activities seemed to decrease when they were unable to work with a friend. Interestingly, the highly socially accepted students appeared to be aware of this and acknowledged that they excluded or ignored peers who did not seem to be putting forth their best effort.

The teachers recognized that the NASI students were disconnected from group activities, and experiencing social isolation during school and physical education because, at times, they exhibited self-isolating behaviors, while at other times, they were excluded by peers. These behaviors generated teacher concern in cooperative classroom environments in which teachers attempted to include and teach all students. The fact that NASI students, at times, worked consciously to remain excluded and chose purposefully

to disengage from content they deemed uninteresting, perplexed teachers and led them to be critical of NASI students' self-excluding behaviors.

Discussion

NASI students appeared to struggle with the collaborative learning philosophies of the elementary school and their own desire to be in contact with good friends. Although these students found friends during lunch and recess, school policies and current cooperative learning teaching practices often required that they work with students who were not in their friendship group. Often collaborative learning activities in the classroom and physical education class take place in teacher assigned groups that may not take into consideration the need of some students to work with their good friends. Careful contemplation when organizing collaborative learning activities and observation of the NASI students during these activities is crucial because once the NASI students personally disengage or are actively forced out of the group by peers, their knowledge construction decreases or comes to a halt. While NASI students desired to work exclusively with their friends, they tended to withdraw from other types of social interaction. This practice limited their opportunities for learning and working effectively with others essential for personal and professional success in the future.

Social estrangement appeared most likely to affect the NASI students because of their lack of interest and desire to work, play, or engage with non-friends during school activities. NASI students seemed to experience elements of social estrangement while participating in collaborative learning tasks, which could lead to future feelings of alienation. These NASI students exhibited personality characteristics that promoted their

isolation from a majority of their peers, but results from this study indicated that these NASI students did have friends and were able to interact with them effectively.

Although NASI students appeared to share some thoughts and feelings with students who feel alienated from school due to social estrangement, they demonstrated the ability and chose to connect with a select few who helped them to feel included. These interactions seemed to minimize their perceptions of social estrangement, at least during some aspects of their school experience. These NASI students maintained group identities and friendships that helped them cope with the everyday social experiences. They developed a variety of coping strategies and seemed to use these strategies to shield themselves from the real or perceived injustices encountered throughout the day.

Conclusions

Three conclusions can be drawn from this research that investigated the school- and physical education-based lived experiences of NASI students. It appeared that NASI students experienced discomfort with collaborative learning, they experienced social isolation due to self-isolating and peer exclusionary behaviors, and they were socially estranged in some but not all school situations.

NASI Students Experienced Discomfort with Collaborative Learning

Collaborative learning is a term used for situations where two or more students are required to work together to complete a task. Collaborative learning consists of any peer-mediated instruction including cooperative learning and collaborative seatwork. Cohen (1994) defined collaborative seatwork as a situation in which students are asked to work together on tasks that they could accomplish on their own. Data analysis shows that

when NASI students were asked to participate in collaborative learning practices, they often experienced isolation when not in the company of their friends.

NASI students could and would socially construct knowledge and participate collaboratively with friends, but rarely with non-friends. Linda stated, “*Sometimes* I want to work with my peers.... I like to work with my friends *all* of the time when I am given the chance.” Mike cautioned about working with peers, “You have to be really wise with picking partners [because] you [can] get stuck with someone that is a bully or that just doesn’t really like you.” Linda desired to choose people who met certain criteria:

I want to be with people who, number one; they understand if I really stink.

Number two; some of them might be in the same position as I am. So I want to be with some people in the same position as me and some people who are understanding.

NASI students reported that, if they were allowed to be with one or more of their friends during collaborative learning activities, they would be more motivated to participate. Jill demonstrated her discontent with being assigned to a partner by proclaiming, “If it is an assigned partner, I would rather work alone. But if you were able to pick, I would like to.” Jill continued, “[Friends are] really, really important.... Sometimes when I am with someone I do not know, I hardly do anything at all. I just sit and watch and once in a while do something. With friends I just do more.” NASI students appeared to struggle between the collaborative learning philosophies of the elementary school and their own desire to be in contact with good friends to learn effectively.

NASI Students' Isolation was Due to Self-Isolating and Peer Exclusionary Behaviors

Two separate behaviors contributed to the NASI students' social isolation. Data analysis shows that NASI students experienced isolation due to self-isolating behaviors and/or the exclusionary behaviors of peers. NASI students appeared to exhibit self-isolating behaviors as part of their personality traits (e.g. shyness or quietness) or as a passive refusal to participate with peers who were not their friends. Exclusion seemed to occur when peers perceived different or unusual behaviors. Typical of students this age, peers were reluctant to accept behaviors that deviated from the norm and were unwilling to accept the NASI students into social situations.

The teachers witnessed and discussed both of these behaviors in their interviews. Teachers described Jill and Sally as students whose isolation was due to self-isolating behaviors. David described Jill as someone who:

...has very little interest in social interaction.... she does not seek out interaction with others.... she does not initiate interaction with peers. She is very happy just not talking to you.... I think she probably could be more socially aggressive. She is just not very interested in it. She is a kid that does not feel any need to get engaged in what is happening.

Jennifer described Sally as:

...very intellectual and a lot of times would rather be by herself.... [She] is not excluded to the point of "we don't want you." It is just that no one thinks to ask her.... [She is] a very quiet, introverted person.... Quietness tends to be around her all of the time. She tends to be a loner; she tends to be by herself.... And she seems to be just as happy to read a book as she would to go play with somebody.

Conversely, teachers described Linda and Mike as students whose isolation appeared to be fostered by her classmates' perceptions of them and were manifested in the exclusionary behaviors of their peers. David described Linda as:

... [A student who has] some maturity issues. I think... the way she interacts can feel a little forced to the kids.... And I think that she has some habits.... Things like skipping to and from the closet area. Almost like a gallop. That takes place pretty often and the other kids see that and even though they wouldn't respond to it, they wouldn't react to it, it affects social interaction.

Jennifer described Mike as a student who:

...tends to not be aware of what is going on around him at times. He daydreams. He is off task a lot, but not necessarily interfering with other students.... He just is in his own world doing his own thing. He doesn't know where he is. So if you are asking a question, the other students are aware that he doesn't know what is going on. So they don't necessarily want to be grouped with him or work with him because he is not on task a lot.

The highly socially accepted students acknowledged that they noticed the non-participatory, self-isolating behaviors. During his interview, Keith discussed Jill's behaviors:

... [she] tried sometimes, but like sometimes when the ball came she would let it drop and like swing at the air. I could kind of tell, I mean like, she tried sometimes but most of the times she didn't.... And I really don't know [why], because I have been in Jill's group a couple of times, and she is actually pretty good at badminton but she doesn't try that much.

Elizabeth spoke about this phenomenon and how it led to the exclusion or isolation of the NASI students when she stated:

I don't think that it is people excluding them. I just think they're like "Oh, I don't need to try, I don't need to do this, I don't like this game" or whatever.... I don't think it is people that are saying, "No, you do not play or what ever."

She continued, "It's kind of like they think they don't like this and it is for other people and it doesn't really matter if they do it or not." Elizabeth further explained:

People will be like "O.K. whatever" or "they are not doing anything, we can't get them to," so they like keep going [without them]. They don't make [the isolated student] play. But it is like their fault. They're just not wanting to play. They're not trying.

The NASI students, their peers, and possibly their teachers seem to be collectively responsible for the isolation of the NASI students. Therefore, all three might need to work cooperatively to remedy the situation.

NASI Students were Socially Estranged in Some but Not All Situations

Within Mau's (1992) theory of alienation, the social estrangement construct appears particularly applicable to these NASI students. Mau explained that social estrangement referred to the lack of participation or involvement in a friendship network and/or participation in school especially in the social context. The data from this research do not support the fact that these NASI students felt alienated due to social estrangement.

NASI students do experience isolation when placed in group activities. For example, when Linda was asked how she was treated by her peers in physical education, she commented, "When we are broken up into team[s]... I usually get left out." Jill

acknowledged that the isolation she experienced made her feel “like if it [is] a group of all everyone else’s friends and I am just in there.” A lack of friendship interactions was also apparent when Mike and Sally were observed during a one-hour art class and did not verbally or physically interact with a peer.

Although evident in many situations, the NASI students probably did not experience social estrangement throughout the entire school day. These NASI students did have friends, and it seemed that strong bonds between group members held these friendships together. For instance, when Linda was asked if she would like to have more friends, she responded, “I do not think so. I think that I have a lot of friends.” David stated, “[Jill] has friends, and she interacts with them well. I mean she has good interaction skills with her friends, and [acts] appropriately.” Linda declared, “...I like to work with my friends *all* of the time when I am given the chance.” Linda took time to emphasize why she would want to work with her friends exclusively, “because we do a little bit of girl chat, and we work, and we know what each other are having difficulties at.... They are able to help me better than people I don’t know as well.” When Mike was asked what the best part of his day, he stated, “Just hanging out with my friends at recess, hanging out with them at lunch, just talking.” Jill also responded to a question that asked her how important it was to have friends working with her, she stated, “Really, really important. I think I sometimes do better with friends.” While NASI students appeared to share some thoughts and feelings with students who feel alienated from school due to social estrangement, they demonstrated the ability and chose to connect with a select few who helped them feel included.

Summary

Three conclusions were drawn from this research. First, collaborative learning activities in which the NASI students did not have the opportunity to work with a friend were stressful and uncomfortable experiences for them. The NASI students tended not to participate actively and experienced periods of social isolation during these times. Second, two separate behaviors, self-isolating behaviors and/or the exclusionary behaviors by peers, contributed to the NASI students' social isolation. Finally, NASI students were socially estranged in some but not all situations. The NASI students used the times that they were not involved in structured classroom activities to interact and engage in conversations with their good friends.

Recommendations

Two sets of recommendations are presented in the final section of this paper. The first set is provided for principals and to teachers who have NASI students in their classrooms. The second set is offered to researchers who are considering conducting research on NASI students in school settings.

Recommendations for Principals and Teachers

Get to know your NASI students. Principals and teachers should understand that NASI students present unique characteristics based on their personality. Teachers should take the time to get to know these students and identify individuals in their class who they claim as friends. Teachers should be able to identify their NASI students by observing their students engaged in collaborative activities and by contacting the students' teachers from the previous year. By purposely engaging the NASI students in their preferred

learning and social environments, teachers and NASI students can create a bond that may encourage the NASI student to seek and confide in the teacher in times of discomfort or stress. By building a trusting relationship with the NASI students, the teacher could receive valuable insight into how and why NASI students interact with peers, consequently allowing the teacher to create learning experiences that better fit the students' needs.

Likewise, as trust bonds are formed, teachers can then encourage and teach NASI students to work more cooperatively with peers who are not close friends. Trust bonds might foster an atmosphere in which the teacher can explain the rationale for non-friend relationships and assist NASI students to consider the need and develop the social skills to interact more positively with others in the future.

Articulate NASI students with friends. Teachers and administrators involved in articulating students (i.e., placing students in new classes for the upcoming year) should take into account the needs of the NASI students. They should try to place these students in classes which contain at least one, if not more, of their friends. In this research, Mike was the only NASI student who did not have a good friend in his class. He also was the student who was having the most negative experiences with his peers and the only NASI student to say that he wished he had more friends.

Create collaborative activities that meet the NASI students' preferences and educational needs. NASI students should be permitted to work with their good friends during some collaborative activities and encouraged and taught directly to work productively with non-friends in other collaborative learning situations. For example, NASI students might be permitted to work with their good friends during collaborative activities that they perceive to be difficult, while encouraged and taught directly to work

productively with non-friends in other, less challenging collaborative learning situations. Thus, students could be nurtured in a friendship dyad during the most stressful and potentially frustrating tasks such as term papers and projects, which require persistence and perseverance, while, required to interact with non-friends in routine academic tasks such as daily task sheets. This two-part approach to teaching NASI students may facilitate learning because they will have opportunities to work with their friends, thus reducing the time they spend feeling socially estranged. Conversely, they will be made, taught and encouraged to work with non-friends, consequently benefiting from the practice of engaging others while benefiting from the diverse perspectives necessary for effective learning in constructivist classrooms.

Monitor NASI students involved in collaborative learning without friends. Teachers should monitor NASI students when they are working in collaborative learning exercises without the comfort and security of having a good friend in their group. Although NASI students need to experience working in groups of people who are not their friends, they are more susceptible to isolation because of self-isolating or peer exclusionary behaviors. Strategies should be taught to both the NASI students and their peers to assist them in effectively engaging their peers.

Recommendations for Other Researchers

Researchers may need to establish a relationship with the NASI student. Researchers need to be mindful that one characteristic of NASI students is that they ego-centered, interested in what they want to do and not very interested in what others are doing. Consequently, future researchers need to be cognizant that the NASI students may not exhibit great motivation to participate in the research. When confronted with this

dilemma, the researcher may need to take the time to personally approach and bond with the NASI student to establish trust and demonstrate caring before initiating the research design.

Observations should center on one student at a time. In this research design, a problem arose during both the independent and researcher/teacher observations. The research design called for both observers to take anecdotal notes on two students, simultaneously during each observation. This proved to be difficult because, in the physical education setting and classroom environment, the two students being observed may be on opposite sides of the classroom, gym, APR, or field, making detailed note taking very difficult. When using this data collection strategy in the future, I will have four independent observer observations, instead of two and increase the number of classroom visits from two to four, one for each NASI student. Likewise, the observations at lunch and recess were also difficult if not impossible to conduct in the manner that they were planned. Fifth grade students have various responsibilities and ideas about what they want to do during these times. If rewriting the methodology, I would conduct eight observations, one for each NASI student during recess and one for each during lunch.

Examine possible gender difference among NASI students. There may be differences in personality, behavior, and preferences between male and female NASI students. In a study conducted by Waas and Graczyk (1999), for example, the researchers discovered that generally, girls acted more negatively toward externalizing behaviors (e.g., disruptiveness, aggression), while boys acted more negatively toward internalizing behaviors (e.g., anxiety, shyness). Therefore, a boy demonstrating NASI characteristics may find it more difficult to be accepted by male classmates. In this study, Mike was the

only male NASI student identified and the only one to say that he wished he had more friends. Research should be conducted to discover if one gender more easily adapts to being NASI, and if peers are more accepting of one gender of NASI student over the other. If differences were found, the strategies that teachers use to engage these students with others may need to be reexamined.

Another gender related topic could focus on the ratio of female to male NASI students. I raised this question when choosing the NASI students to be interviewed. Out of five choices for potential interview candidates, there were four females and one male. If there were differences, an examination of the nature and reason for these differences would contribute significantly to this research area.

Longitudinal studies. Longitudinal studies focusing on NASI students need to be conducted to examine trends and track for future alienation. One question could focus on whether elementary school NASI students remain socially isolated as adolescents. Longitudinal studies can provide incite into how NASI students, who have a limited pool of friends, adapt to being separated from their friends year by year, or when their friends leave school for some reason. Finally and maybe most importantly, a longitudinal study can show if elementary NASI students eventually become alienated during their late middle school or early high school years. Even though the NASI students in this study currently did not appear to exhibit alienation due to social estrangement, Trusty and Dooley-Dickey (1993) postulated:

Alienation from school involves perceptions of students, and these perceptions may or may not be reflective of reality. Students may not manifest the negative effects of low achievement, failure, or incongruence of their culture and the

school's culture until their early high school years. Alienation may be a phenomenon that results from experiences in the early elementary and middle school years, but these experiences may not come to bear on students' feelings of belonging with school or valuing of school until adolescence. (p. 239)

Therefore, social estrangement may not lead to student alienation at this point in their lives, but may be a cause of it in their future.

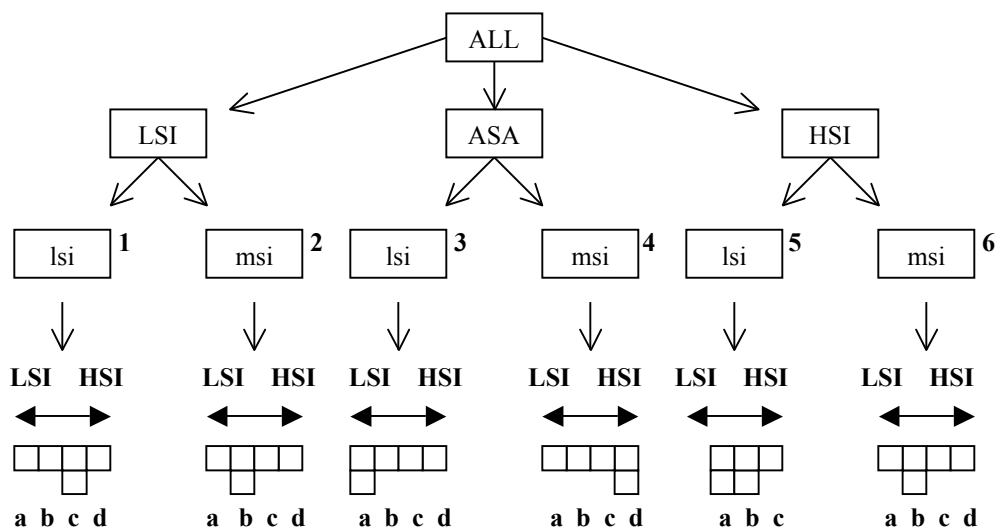
Summary

Teachers should understand that NASI students present unique characteristics based on their personality and take the time to get to know them. Teachers and administrators involved in articulating students should take into account the needs of the NASI students. Separating NASI students from their friends on most occasions could be detrimental to their learning. Teachers should permit NASI students to work with their good friends during some collaborative activities, and encouraged and taught directly to work productively with non-friends in other collaborative learning situations. Teachers should also monitor NASI students when they are working in collaborative learning exercises without a good friend in their group because they are more susceptible to being isolated from the activity because of self-isolating or peer exclusionary behaviors.

Future researchers should focus on two distinct issues dealing with NASI students. The first suggestion is to look for possible gender differences between male and female NASI students. The second is to conduct longitudinal studies focusing on NASI students. This line of research could yield data tracking elementary NASI students' alienation during their late middle school or early high school years.

Appendix A – Qualitative Social Dynamics Tasks

Qualitative Social Dynamics Task For Social Isolation

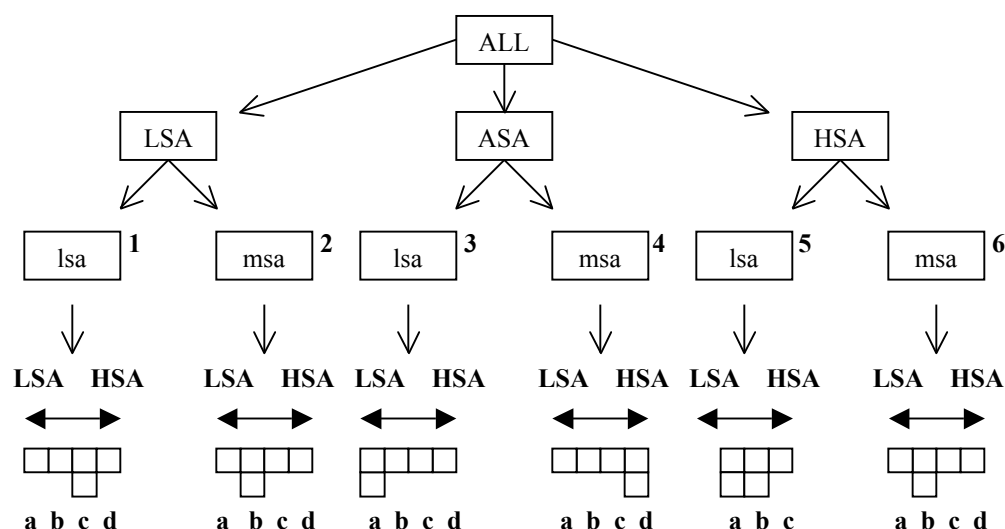


ALL = All Students
 ASA = Average Social Acceptance
 HSI = High Social Isolation
 LSI = Low Social Isolation
 msi = More Socially Isolated
 lsi = Less Socially Isolated

Directions for Implementation:

1. The teacher sorts the students in his/her class into three initial piles that will be labeled: low social isolation (left pile), average social acceptance (middle pile), and high social isolation (right pile).
2. The teacher takes each of the initial three piles and sorts the student's names into two piles that will be labeled: less socially isolated (left pile) and more socially isolated (right pile).
3. The teacher continues this procedure with the piles until all piles have four to six cards or the teacher feels that he/she cannot separate the piles any more.
4. At this point, the piles are numbered starting with the pile on the far left and ending with the far right pile. The pile number should be listed on the back of each student's name card for future researcher identification.
5. The teacher then places the cards in each of the completed piles on continua with one margin labeled low social isolation (left margin) and the other labeled high social isolation (right margin). There should be as many continua as there are final piles. The teachers can place their students' names on the same position on the continuum if no distinction can be made between students.
6. Once the teacher is satisfied with each continuum, the students' cards are labeled left to right using the alphabet starting with "a" for each continuum. If two or more students maintain the same position on the continuum, they will receive the same letter to distinguish their position. At the end of the sorting task, each student's card will have a number representing a pile and letter representing a position on the continuum placed on the card's back.

***Qualitative Social Dynamics Task
For Social Aggression***



ALL = All Students
ASA = Average Social Aggression
HSA = High Social Aggression
LSA = Low Social Aggression
msa = More Socially Aggressive
lsa = Less Socially Aggressive

Directions for Implementation:

1. The teacher sorts the students in his/her class into three initial piles that will be labeled: low social aggression (left pile), average social aggression (middle pile), and high social aggression (right pile).
2. The teacher takes each of the initial three piles and sorts the student's names into two piles that will be labeled: less socially aggressive (left pile) and more socially aggressive (right pile).
3. The teacher continues this procedure with the piles until all piles have four to six cards or the teacher feels that he/she cannot separate the piles any more.
4. At this point, the piles are numbered starting with the pile on the far left and ending with the far right pile. The pile number should be listed on the back of each student's name card for future researcher identification.
5. The teacher then places the cards in each of the completed piles on continua with one margin labeled low social aggression (left margin) and the other labeled high social aggression (right margin). There should be as many continua as there are final piles. The teachers can place their students' names on the same position on the continuum if no distinction can be made between students.
6. Once the teacher is satisfied with each continuum, the students' cards are labeled left to right using the alphabet starting with "a" for each continuum. If two or more students maintain the same position on the continuum, they will receive the same letter to distinguish their position. At the end of the sorting task, each student's card will have a number representing a pile and letter representing a position on the continuum placed on the card's back.

Appendix B – Completed Qualitative Social Dynamics Tasks

David's Completed and Overlapping QSDT for Social Isolation and Aggression

6-c	5-c	4-e	3-e	2-d	1-f
3-c	3-b	1-a	4-a	2-e	5-e
6-b	5-b	4-e	3-d	2-c	1-e
2-a	1-a	1-c	5-a	6-b	5-c
6-a	5-a	4-d	3-c	2-b	1-d
1-b	4-b	1-c	4-c	5-d	6-a
		4-c	3-b	2-a	1-c
		1-c	2-b	6-c	2-c
		4-b	3-a		1-b
		3-a	2-b		1-e
		4-a	3-a		1-a
		1-d	2-d		5-e
			3-a		
			5-b		

- Each box represents a student in the class.
- The top coding in each box represents the student's degree of social isolation as perceived by his/her classroom teacher. A box with a 6-c code represents a more socially isolated student than a box with the coding of 6-b or 1-c.
- The bottom coding in each box represents the student's degree of social aggression as perceived by his/her classroom teacher. A box with a 6-c code represents a more socially aggressive student than a box with the coding of 6-b or 1-c.
- The boxes are organized in this diagram so that social isolation decreases as you move across the columns from left to right.
- The boxes are organized in this diagram so that social isolation decreases as you move down in each column except when the top codings are the same.
- This diagram is not arranged in a certain way for social aggression.
- The bold coding represents the card of a student that was chosen from the class to participate in an individual interview as either a NASI or highly accepted student.

Jennifer's Completed and Overlapping QSDT for Social Isolation and Aggression

7-c	6-b	5-a	4-e	3-b	2-a	1-a
6-a	4-c	7-a	4-b	1-c	5-c	6-c
7-c	6-a		4-d	3-a	2-a	1-a
3-d	6-d		3-a	6-c	5-a	6-b
7-b			4-c	3-a		1-a
3-c			1-a	1-c		5-b
7-a			4-c			1-a
1-b			1-a			4-a
			4-b			1-a
			1-a			1-b
			4-b			
			1-b			
			4-a			
			3-b			
			4-a			
			2-a			

- Each box represents a student in the class.
- The top coding in each box represents the student's degree of social isolation as perceived by his/her classroom teacher. A box with a 6-c code represents a more socially isolated student than a box with the coding of 6-b or 1-c.
- The bottom coding in each box represents the student's degree of social aggression as perceived by his/her classroom teacher. A box with a 6-c code represents a more socially aggressive student than a box with the coding of 6-b or 1-c.
- The boxes are organized in this diagram so that social isolation decreases as you move across the columns from left to right.
- The boxes are organized in this diagram so that social isolation decreases as you move down in each column except when the top codings are the same.
- This diagram is not arranged in a certain way for social aggression.
- The bold coding represents the card of a student that was chosen from the class to participate in an individual interview as either a NASI or highly accepted student.

Appendix C – Sample Interview Questions and Journal Prompts

Fifth Grade Teachers' Social Isolation Interview

How would you describe a socially isolated fifth grade student?

What characteristics or behaviors do they exhibit?

Can you give real examples of these behaviors or characteristics from your class?

How would you describe a highly socially accepted fifth grade student?

What characteristics or behaviors do they exhibit?

Can you give real examples of these behaviors or characteristics from your class?

Why do you feel that some students are socially isolated while others are very accepted by their peers?

When social isolation occurs, is it usually the same students or different students experiencing it?

Why do you think this is?

What classroom situations typically lead to the social isolation of some students?

Can you give examples of these of these situations from your class?

How do you try to ease or eliminate the social isolation that can occur in classroom settings?

What strategies that you use are usually the best at easing or eliminating social isolation in your classroom?

Can you please give specific examples and reasons for each student of why you placed him or her in the first pile of the QSDT?

Can you please give specific examples and reasons for each student of why you placed him or her in the last pile of the QSDT?

Fifth Grade Teachers' Social Aggression Interview

How would you describe a socially aggressive fifth grade student?

What characteristics or behaviors do they exhibit?

Can you give real examples of these behaviors or characteristics from your class?

How would you describe a socially non-aggressive fifth grade student?

What characteristics or behaviors do they exhibit?

Can you give real examples of these behaviors or characteristics from your class?

Why do you feel that some students are socially aggressive while others are non-aggressive in their social behaviors?

Can you please give specific examples and reasons for each student of why you placed him or her in the first pile of the QSDT?

Can you please give specific examples and reasons for each student of why you placed him or her in the last pile of the QSDT?

NASI and Highly Socially Accepted Students' First Interview Questions

What are some of your most fun things to do during the school day?

Why do you like to do these activities so much?

What do you like best about the school day?

What are some of your least favorite things to do during the school day?

Why do you not like to do these activities?

What do you like least about the school day?

When doing any activity at school, how important is it to have friends and peers working with you?

Why do you feel this way?

When performing school tasks, would you rather work alone or with other classmates to complete the task?

Why do you feel that this is a better situation for you?

When you are in school, do you feel that you would like to have more good friends?

What makes you feel this way?

What is your favorite thing to do in physical education class?

Why do you like to do this so much?

What is your least favorite thing to do in physical education class?

Why do you not like to do this?

If it were up to you, how would you change physical education class to make it better?

Why do you feel that this change would make physical education class better?

Do you prefer to practice a skill in physical education class individually, with a partner, or in a group?

Why do you prefer to practice a skill this way?

When a physical education task requires you to work with a partner in your class, would you rather choose or be assigned to a partner?

Why do you feel this is a better way to get a partner?

What is your favorite way that a teacher has ever used to partner you with a classmate?

When a physical education task requires you to work with a group of students in your class, would you rather choose the people to be with or be assigned to a group?

Why do you feel this is a better way to get grouped in physical education?

NASI Students' Second Interview Questions

Imagine that an English-speaking, 10 year old child is visiting your school from a foreign country. Please describe in detail to your new friend a typical Tuesday at your school from the time you enter the building at 9:10 until you leave at 3:20.

What would you be doing during that time?

Who would you be working or involved with during that time?

Your new friend wants to know all about physical education. Please tell your friend what to expect when he or she participates in your physical education class.

What parts of physical education class do you think your new friend would enjoy the most?

Why would this be so enjoyable for your new friend?

What parts of physical education class do you think your new friend would like the least?

Why would this not be so much fun for your new friend?

The foreign student is worried about making new friends at your school. What can you tell him or her about how to make friends at your school?

What would you tell your new friend about your classmates that could make building friendships easier?

Fifth Grade Students' Journal Prompts and Questions

Name at least three important behaviors or characteristics that you **would want** a classmate to have if you were to be partnered with him/her during physical education class.

Explain why **each** of these behaviors or characteristics is so important to you.

Name at least three important behaviors or characteristics that you would **not** want a classmate to have if you were to be partnered with him/her during physical education class.

Explain why **each** of these behaviors or characteristics is so unpleasant to you.

Do you ever worry that you will not be able to find a partner or group of students to work with during physical education class?

What makes you feel this way?

What do you think are some reasons why other students **would want** to be your partner in physical education class?

What do you think are some reasons why other students **would not want** to be your partner in physical education class?

What is the best way for your physical education teacher to create teams for the semi-competitive modified games that you have been playing in physical education class?

Why would this be beneficial to the **above average** physical education student?

Why would this be beneficial to the **average** physical education student?

Why would this be beneficial to the **below average** physical education student?

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