COME OUT AND PLAY! EXPLORING THE LANDSCAPES OF FREE-PLAY IN PRINCE GEORGE, BRITISH COLUMBIA

By

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Abstract

Children's health issues are of growing concern for health care providers, researchers, and families. These concerns have prompted initiatives encouraging young people to become more physically active. Rather than focusing on activity for solely healthy purposes, the research underlines the importance of neighbourhood free-play for independent mobility. Free-play provides space for socialisation with peers and occasion to practice risk management.

The thesis analysed qualitative data from activity journals written by grade six/seven students at three independent schools in Prince George, BC in June, 2010. The data addressed research questions guiding the thesis: how do neighbourhoods influence play activities of children, how do children engage with neighbourhoods through play, and, what are the constraints that limit children's play?

The research found interrelated factors influencing children's neighbourhood free-play. Perceptions of danger, busyness, and distance to play spaces played a role in determining children's ability to engage in free-play.

Acknowledgements

For Owen,

May your childhood be filled with exploration and great adventure.

This thesis would not have been possible without the support of many people.
I would like to thank the children who agreed to participate in my research. They generously gave me their time and valuable insights on which my thesis is based. I hope that their voices will be heard loud and clear.

I traveled this journey with the feeling that I was a bit of a social science apprentice. My supervisor, Dr. Neil Hanlon, offered support, and his experience, but more importantly, he provided me with the guidance I needed to pursue and achieve my academic goals. Thank you for supporting me as I learned, and grew as a person, and a social researcher.

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Throughout this process, I thought about quitting on more than one occasion. It was my friends here on the UNBC campus and all over the country, which helped me put it all into perspective, pushed me with challenging new ideas, and encouraged me with kind words. Thank you. You will always be very important to me.

My husband Alan and, my little boy, have been beside me from the beginning (well, Owen has been there for most of it...). Thank you for your love and patience throughout this long process. You two are the reason I began this project. And finally, my family need to be acknowledged for their gentle pushes, and at times, more spirited shoves of support. Without them, I'd be in trouble...

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List of Acronyms

ACSP	Active Communities Strategic Plan
AHKC	Active Healthy Kids Canada
CFS	Canadian Fitness Survey
CHMS	Canadian Health Measures Survey
CIS	Catholic Independent Schools
CHCA	College Heights Community Association
CSEP	Canadian Society for Exercise Physiology
CLG	Prince George Community Leisure Guide
ESRI	Environmental Systems Research Institute
GIS	Geographic Information Systems
LAP	Leisure Access Program
LICO	Low Income Cut-Off
OCP	Official Community Plan
PHAC	Public Health Agency of Canada
POSMP	Parks and Open Space Master Plan

Chapter One: An Introduction

"People seem to have forgotten that kids need fresh air and exercise, and lots of it"
(Silken Laumann 1992 Olympic Bronze medalist; 2007, 54).

1.0 – Introduction

Research is both a deeply personal and inherently social activity. We choose to pursue topics based on our interests and experiences, but we rely on others as advisors, participants, sponsors, and end-users. The interplay of personal and social factors sets the course of research sometimes in ways not anticipated. I chose to write my thesis where the personal nature of the work is acknowledged, and discuss my thoughts about why this research is important and meaningful to me (Behar, 1996). My experiences as an athlete and coach, and my academic interests in community, and issues of social justice, influenced my decision to pursue research that explores healthy living and children's access to opportunities for physical activity.

Initially, I set out to understand how children and youth gain access to, and participate in, competitive team or individual sports in relation to their family's socioeconomic status and neighbourhood of residence. I was interested in understanding how those youth who found themselves unable to participate fully because of financial or other difficulties could take part in a meaningful way. Through discussions with my committee members, and after much reading, reflecting, and through the exploration of the experiences shared by participants, the research evolved to uncover a different story.

The research shifted from a concern about access to organised sports in the City of Prince George, to exploring the idea of neighbourhoods in relation to how children and youth utilise the local landscape for independent and physical free-play. My greatest concern from the beginning

was finding ways for children to engage in physical activity based on the growing health issues faced by children and youth today. Arguably, it does not matter if children are being active for competition or for fun. Therefore, listening to children share their perspectives about being active seems more important if encouraging children to be physical more often is the goal. This shift in research direction prompted me to reflect on my own childhood experiences growing up in the City of Victoria in one of British Columbia's (BC) first housing cooperatives. Here, autonomous mobility and free-play were greatly enabled by both the warmer climate and unique social circumstances

1.1 – Research Objectives

This thesis explores the use of their neighbourhoods and wider communities by children and youth to engage in physical free-play activities. This includes issues of independent mobility and access to public space, participants' thoughts, feelings, and fears regarding the use of public space, as well as individual and household constraints. An important feature of the research is that children and youth were recruited as research participants. By speaking with the children directly, I learned that neighbourhood is not simply a geographic place with rigid and set boundaries where participants engage in daily exercise. Participants are aware of the geographic boundaries drawn by the city and the spatial implications neighbourhoods pose for leisure and transportation. Additionally, participants view their neighbourhoods as a social network of paths, parks, and playgrounds that allow them to socialise, and assert some degree of independence from parents within the perceived safety of local and familiar territories.

The term neighbourhood is used throughout this thesis in two important ways. The first recognizes the role of city officials in constructing and demarcating neighbourhood spaces as

formally identified, for instance, in an Official Community Plan. The second use acknowledges that individuals create their own neighbourhood boundaries, often related to official demarcations, but also reflecting their own priorities and experiences. Neighbourhood boundaries and identities are therefore not rigid and are best understood as socially constructed. This is especially true for children and youth who tend to have a special relationship with their immediate environments. Christensen offers this explanation of a child's use of, and relationship with neighbourhood, which reflects how the participants in this research relate to their local neighbourhood spaces: "children engage with place as a simultaneously social and physical location, describing how they come to inhabit and belong to a place through their experiences and use of it" (Christensen; 2008, 71). The term neighbourhood used in this thesis acknowledges both senses of the word, but pays particular attention to children's constructions of neighbourhood as they relate to free-play activities.

My thesis is informed by the constructivist theoretical perspective. Individuals experience reality differently, and yet those experiences are greatly influenced by culture and society (Crotty, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). This includes our ways of thinking, what we value as important, our fears, and how these shape our individual reality and experience (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Both researcher and participant find themselves subject to preconceived ideas, values and ways of understanding the world and our experiences in it. The constructivist perspective involves its own set of measures for establishing valid research and these will be discussed in chapter four.

1.2 – Research Questions

At the beginning of any research project, researchers have broad ideas of their subject before narrowing, and focusing their ideas to form clear and concise research questions. I believe the process of thinking through study questions is an important part of social research, and should not be undertaken without serious thought and reflection. Kirby and McKenna (1989) suggest before proposing research questions, or even a topic, one should consider the need to fill knowledge gaps, evaluate what kind of data are possible to collect, and take into account the researcher's personal interests when forming research questions. While undertaking this process, I found my research questions changing. When I learned more about my participants, I realised that questions regarding differing neighbourhood socioeconomic status and equitable access to resources were not relevant to the participants themselves. Therefore, shifting my focus from questions about financial means and access to questions regarding the importance of independent mobility and physical free play helped me to frame the three research questions that guided the fieldwork and the data analysis. These three questions are:

- How do neighbourhoods influence the play activities of children in Prince George?
- How do children engage with their local neighbourhoods through play and leisure activity?
- What are the social and spatial barriers that contribute to children's outdoor play in Prince George?

My research and methodology focuses on children and their contribution to knowledge production, as well as magnifying issues important to the research participants as children. While children and youth may have a different way of conveying their ideas than adults, geographers such as Matthews, Limb and Taylor (1998), Punch (2002), and Barker and Weller (2003a, 2003b) stress that the views of children are equally as important as those of adults: "[r]ather than assuming children know less than adults we suggest that they may know something else"

(Matthews, Limb & Taylor, 1998, 313). The idea that children know differently than adults is one that has gained recognition in human geography and other social disciplines (James, Jenks, & Prout, 1998). It is this view that has been the guiding principle of my research from the methodology and research design, to the writing and representing of the results within this document (Clifford, 1986; James, 2008). Children are active members of our communities, and thus research *with*, rather than *on* (Thomas & O'Kane, 1998, my emphasis), children can bring different perspectives to social policies and encourage community involvement.

Conducting work that reflects and acknowledges who I am, but also that is meaningful to those who participate in my study, is important to me. Tuhiwai – Smith states that research "should set out to make a positive difference for the researched" (1999, 91). In my view, the most appropriate way to go about a project of this nature is to include the voices and opinions of the children themselves through direct quotations within the write-up of results and interpretations of the field data. Geographers are beginning to approach their work with children acknowledging their participants are social actors and play an important role in our society now, not only when they reach adulthood (James, Jenks, & Prout, 1998; Matthews & Limb, 1999; Valentine, 1999; Punch, 2002; Barker and Weller, 2003a, 2003b; Pain, 2004). My attitude, and the methods employed here, strive to respect the importance of critical reflexivity, acknowledging my positionality (England, 1994), as well as ensuring the voices of participants are heard and valued.

1.3 – Thesis Outline

The thesis is divided into the following five chapters. A discussion of the social, political and spatial context of the study is provided in chapter two of the thesis. Next, the thesis will discuss a

review of theory found in the relevant literature in chapter three. In chapter four, an examination of the methods used throughout the research is offered. Chapter five presents the results and provides a discussion of the findings. Finally, chapter six holds the conclusion to the thesis, and revisits the key findings, offers some final thoughts about the research process, as well as provides some ideas as to where future research is needed.

Through this research, I hope to have magnified the views of my participants in a way that they will have an influence on those who are responsible for decision making, and planning at the City of Prince George. The thesis will be shared with city officials within the recreation and cultural services division, as well as each of the three participating schools. The participants have shared valuable information regarding park and neighbourhood use, as well as thoughts about playground design and city planning. Ideally, the views of children would be considered by city councils, and local governments during the planning, design, and construction of outdoor environments that are so important to children's growth, and physical activities. When the research is shared with city officials, I hope that policy makers will have a better understanding of how children experience public spaces, and invite more children to participate in the City decision making process.

Although suggestions for future research will be discussed at the end of the thesis, there are many areas for which future researchers can delve deeper. For example, an investigation into how children might be more included would be valuable. Perhaps children could be consulted on issues of planning and land use. Throughout this thesis, I stress that children should be heard rather than simply seen (Valentine, 1999). I hope that this research allows the children to feel included in the development of knowledge, and important enough to be asked.

Chapter Two: Study Context

"Supporting and encouraging opportunities for safe, free, unstructured play, especially outdoors, may be one of the most promising, accessible and cost-effective solutions to increasing child and youth physical activity in Canada." (Active Healthy Kids Short Form Report, 2012,3).

2.0 – Introduction

Our interest in outdoor play touches on issues of public health and urban design. There is also a need to outline various levels of government roles and responsibilities, particularly as expressed in policies and programs. This chapter provides a contextual overview of initiatives influencing the physical activity of the research participants in this thesis.

There is growing concern with rising levels of child and youth obesity, and the declining rates of physical activity amongst children and youth. In this sense, the study of leisure has become a public health concern as well as a social and developmental issue. This research took place in the months following the 2010 Vancouver / Whistler Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games, and the Provincial Government used the event as an opportunity to promote policies and programs to encourage local outdoor initiatives. These will be reviewed below.

Finally, it is necessary to understand what the landscape of outdoor physical activity looks like in the study location, the City of Prince George. I will provide an overview of parks, playgrounds, and walking trails that make up the physical activity landscape within the city. Prince George has made efforts to draw upon Olympic legacy programs, grow the parks and recreation infrastructure by adding parks and playgrounds. The city has produced activity guides, as well as implemented subsides for families who feel cost is a barrier to accessing opportunities for recreation and leisure activities. These will be outlined below.

2.1 – The Declining Fitness of Canadian Children and Youth

It is widely believed that independent free-play and physical activity for children and youth has changed dramatically in recent decades (Harsha, 1995; Brown, 1998; Tandy, 1999; Bergen & Fromberg, 2009; Louv, 2008). Since the 1980s, children face ever more serious health issues because of increased time spent engaging in sedentary activities. Children and youth are struggling with obesity and illnesses such as type two diabetes and cardiovascular problems that were previously considered to be adult health conditions (Tremblay & Willms, 2003). Researchers studying physical activity among youth have discussed many theories about why this is so (Day, Strange, McKay & Naylor, 2008). Technology, perceptions of safety, and family economics all play a role in the amount of activity children have access to every day. Each of the above has influenced the participants of this study.

Reports show that the fitness of Canadian children and youth has been on a decline since at least 1981, when findings were published from the Canadian Fitness Survey (CFS) (Tremblay et al., 2010; Statistics Canada, 2010). Regardless of the age or sex of Canadian children, "[t]he [Canadian Health Measures Survey] data show that fitness levels have declined significantly and meaningfully since 1891" (AHKC, 2010). The CHMS is the most comprehensive and most representative health survey since the CFS in the early 1980s. For decades, Canada has conducted fitness testing of the population, but until the 1981 study, these tests were not representative of the population, nor were they standardised (Tremblay et al., 2010). This resulted in an inaccurate and incomplete picture of the health status of Canadians. The CHMS is the most recent national and representative study available.

With respect to child and youth fitness and body composition, the CHMS shows that "of children and youth aged six to seventeen, 8.6 percent are obese" (PHAC; 2011, 1). Statistics such

as these are startling and researchers continue to study the reasons why the health of Canadian children is decreasing so rapidly. Research has found many possible explanations for the increase in obesity and decline in the overall fitness of children and youth in Canada. Rising levels of obesity are associated with physical inactivity, diet, and socioeconomic status (PHAC, 2011). Sedentary behaviours, such as television watching, video gaming, and computer usage, have been identified as contributors to the problem. Health Canada recommends that children have less than two hours of screen-time daily, but the PHAC found that only nineteen percent of Canadian children and youth are meeting the above guideline.

Clearly, childhood obesity is a growing problem in Canada. It has been suggested by researchers (Tremblay & Willms, 2003) and others that over the last twenty-five years, obesity rates among children and youth in Canada have nearly tripled (PHAC, 2012). In an effort to reduce obesity rates, the PHAC, along with the Canadian Society for Exercise Physiology (CSEP), recommends children and youth aged five to seventeen years of age should take part in at least sixty minutes of moderate to vigorous intensity physical activity every day (CSEP, 2011). Children of this age should work towards achieving up to ninety minutes of activity daily. The CSEP suggests that activities such as bike riding and playground activities could account for moderate intensity activities while running and swimming could comprise more vigorous activities. As discussed in the analysis and discussion chapter, the participants in this research take part in many neighbourhood activities such as the ones listed here. Unfortunately, the majority of Canadian children, about eighty percent of youth are not meeting these guidelines (AHKC, 2010). While the participants in this research appear to be very active, the statistics discussed above are representative of children and youth in all regions of Canada

Just-for-fun neighbourhood exercises, such as playground games, bike riding, dog walking and others discussed in the thesis, are important contributors to positive overall health and development for children and youth (Pellegrini & Smith, 1998). Therefore, these free-play activities are as important for overall health promotion in childhood as developing social and interpersonal skills are to becoming successful adults. The amount of active play children and youth engage in is measured and included in the AHKC report card. Here, the researchers criticise over-involvement in organised activities, and stress the importance of free-play activities.

Unstructured active play is valuable for cognitive and social skill development, as well as learning to be independent (Bergan, 2009). Play is discussed in greater detail in the literature review chapter of the thesis. As stated above, children and youth should be accumulating at least sixty minutes of physical activity daily. AHKC (2010) reports that unstructured free-play activities should account for at least half of those sixty minutes. Because such a large proportion of children and youth are not meeting the physical activity guidelines, it is also suggested "they are not engaging in sufficient amounts of active play" (AHKC, 2010, 10). Researchers believe that unstructured play and physical activity including chase games, and creative active play need to be a part of every child's experience of healthy development.

Steps-per-day is another measure of physical activity. According to AHKC, if children are meeting the above guidelines, they should be taking roughly 13,000 steps daily (AHKC, 2010, 12). AHKC (2010) suggests that among, the provinces, British Columbia is ranked significantly higher, at approximately 12,504 steps – per – day, than the rest of the country, where average is only 11,698 steps per day. Still, it is noteworthy that even British Columbia's number of steps – per – day are below the suggested requirements for children and youth in

Canada.

2.2 – Government Initiatives to Promote Youth Physical Activity

Responsibilities for public health promotion is divided between all levels of government in Canada. The Federal Government is responsible for issues of national importance such as surveillance of communicable diseases, as well as health care provision for First Nations and Indigenous populations on reserves. Otherwise, most of the responsibility for public health programming and delivery falls to Provincial Governments, who often devolve aspects of these programs to health authorities and municipalities.

The Federal Government, through the Public Health Agency of Canada and Health Canada, offer informative websites intended to educate the public on activity guidelines, healthy eating, and ways to begin and stay physically active. However, these websites are largely geared to adults. It is the job of parents and educators to provide time and space for children to engage in active play, but it is important to reach out to children and youth themselves.

The Federal Government has been active in developing policies to increase levels of physical activity, but there has been criticism that these initiatives lack adequate funds and strategies for implementation (AHKC, 2010). A recent plan, the Children's Fitness Tax Credit aims to provide parents with a tax credit to assist in the registration fees of organised physical activities (Tremblay, 2007). This plan has been criticised because the tax credit seems to have rewarded families who are fortunate enough to earn higher incomes (AHKC, 2010) and are less likely to be helpful to those families in financial need. In addition, those families finding themselves in need may not be able to pay for the program fees initially in order to qualify for the tax credit to begin with. What needs to be emphasised is that the majority of government

programs assist with organised sport participation and do not place as much importance on promoting physical free-play activities. Studies such as the AHKC 2010 report card continue to suggest that, while provincial, federal, and community governments succeed in implementing strategies and action plans, they fail to award enough funding and support to ensure sustainable programming. For example, AHKC states that federal per capita funding in 2010, is only half that of per capita spending in 1986 (AHKC, 2010).

As mentioned earlier, most of the public health programming rests with Provincial Ministries of Health and regional health authorities. The 2010 Winter Olympics in Vancouver / Whistler has brought about a heightened awareness of the importance of leading a healthy, active lifestyle especially for young people. The province of British Columbia, through ActNow BC / Healthy Families BC (a program administrated by the British Columbia Ministry of Healthy Living and Sport), initiated programs and partnerships with many communities and provincial health organisations and have set the goal of 'twenty percent by 2010'. This initiative encourages families to "increase physical activity and healthy eating by twenty percent by the year 2010" (City of Prince George Active Communities Strategic Plan; 2007, 3). Under the umbrella of ActNow BC, a program that has been recognised as a leader world-wide by the World Health Organisation (AHKC, 2010), the provincial government administers a variety of programs targeting young people such as Action Schools! BC, and the ActNow BC Athlete Ambassador program. All of these programs seek to promote the goals of the ActNow BC program goal of increasing activity (Healthy Families BC, 2010).

Each of the three Prince George CIS schools participating in this thesis research is registered in the Province's Action Schools! BC program. The initiative was first implemented in 2002 in ten schools in the Vancouver area. This program was designed to address the growing

concerns regarding childhood obesity, and other chronic health diseases relating to physical inactivity and unhealthy eating habits. This program is a partnership between the provincial government, researchers, educators, as well as the recreation and sport communities (Action Schools! BC website, 2004).

The Action Schools! BC program is integrated into the guiding principles of each of the registered schools. The program has strived to incorporate principles of healthy eating and activity into curriculum, and has succeeded in "increasing the physical activity level of students, and contributed to improvements in their bone health, heart health, dietary requirement awareness and academic performance" (Action Schools! BC, 2012). The program has been successful in meeting target goals, and has enlisted the participation of 100 percent of the province's school districts. The Action Schools! BC program continues to play an important and active role in encouraging elementary aged children to form habits for healthy eating and participate in physical activity.

As discussed above, the Province of British Columbia, through the Ministry of Community, Sport and Cultural Development, along with the Ministry of Health, has extensive resources available to children and families on their websites. Resources include documents discussing nutrition for elementary school children, healthy eating and physical activity learning resources for grades kindergarten through twelve. These documents are intended for teachers and educators, but also families.

ActNow BC has evolved into Healthy Families BC. The webpage offers an interactive, friendly and informative lay-out. As with their Federal counterparts, the Provincial webpages, with the exception of the Action Schools! BC page, are each aimed at the adult population. Healthy Families BC was established in 2011. The website focuses on four domains of healthy

living: healthy eating, healthy start, healthy communities, and healthy lifestyles. The Healthy Families BC website serves as a portal were users can gain access to blog articles, and other provincial initiatives aiming at anti-smoking, the 8-1-1 nurses hotline, and the physical activity line. The Provincial Government has strived to consolidate, and make it easier to access, resources for families and individuals. The webpages place priority on stating the health benefits of exercise, but do not give emphasis to the importance of play for plays sake and contributions to healthy physical activities.

2.3 – Physical Activity Initiatives in Prince George, BC

Prince George is a registered member of the Active Communities Initiative which was funded through ActNow BC. While not targeted directly at school aged children and youth, this program aimed at encouraging whole communities to get out of their cars and living rooms to meet the goal of raising "physical activity levels in British Columbia by twenty percent" (BCRPA, 2010). Prince George is a member of this program and has completed an active community strategic plan. The British Columbia Recreation and Parks Association (BCRPA) have taken on the responsibility of facilitating the Active Communities Initiative, but at a lesser capacity. Participating communities have been awarded nearly $1,000,000 in grant money. These grants have gone towards promoting community programs, and infrastructure such as trails and pathways, and promoting events (BCRPA, 2010).

According to the 2006 Canadian Census, the population of Prince George was 70,981 (Active Communities Strategic plan, 2007). In order to meet the Active Communities goal, the initiative has to "engage 14,196 people to get active and eat healthier" (ACSP; 2007, 3). The City of Prince George surveyed residents and found that, "only 48.9 percent of residents meet the

World Health Organization's definition of being physically active" (ACSP; 2007, 7). Researchers have found that obesity levels vary across Canada. In their study, Belanger-Ducharme and Tremblay (2005), indicate that rural areas of the country which are characterised by unemployment and lower incomes "had prevalences of obesity and overweight significantly higher than the nationals rates" (2005, 185). While the City of Prince George did not specifically study rates of obesity in comparison to the rest of the country, parallels can be drawn to Northern British Columbia.

As a registered Active Community, Prince George was required to complete an Active Community Strategic Plan. This report was completed in the summer of 2007. The document outlines the Active Communities project, discusses and reports the healthy eating and activity survey results as well as recommends program delivery models. Throughout the document, the Active Communities Committee suggests Prince George has the potential to be an Active Communities leader within the Province of British Columbia.

The Strategic plan was commissioned to help the Active Communities Committee to find successful ways of creating and implementing "a comprehensive health promotion strategy" (ACSP; 2007, 6). The authors found that, while Prince George has much potential and many opportunities, the city is unequipped to deliver the Active Communities program on its own. Therefore the report recommends that Prince George reach out to local stakeholders and community groups to work together to encourage those 14,000 citizens to lead a healthier lifestyle. In addition to creating the Strategic Plan in August of 2007, the City of Prince George conducted the physical activity and healthy eating survey. The survey asked 304 Prince George residents about their activity levels and eating habits. The survey was part of baseline measurements collected to better understand the health and fitness of Prince George residents.

The report indicates there is an opportunity for residents to improve their overall health and fitness. In addition to the physical activity and healthy eating survey, the Active Communities committee compiled peer reviewed research, comments from survey participants and public consultation meeting attendees concerning barriers to participating in leisure and physical activity. The comments and suggestions included in the Strategic Plan indicate that city residents would like to see the city play a more active and involved role in recreation programming.

The Strategic Plan goes on to outline, in detail, strategies to implement the Active Communities initiative. The Committee discusses five strategies: plans and policies; opportunities and participation; supportive environments, collaborations, and partnerships; communication, education, community identity and involvement, and finally, accessibility. The Strategic Plan shows that, at the time it was created, the City of Prince George was committed to assisting its citizens become healthier. However, at the time of the field research in June 2010, government funding to the Active Community Initiative had been terminated, and there are no written documents available to the public indicating progress made or the current status on the goals outlined in the Strategic Plan produced in 2007.

Prince George has developed and implemented programs aimed at encouraging families to get moving any way they can. The slogan "active is what you make it" (City of Prince George, 2010) suggests that being active can mean walking the dog, gardening, playing tag at the local park, or attending regular fitness classes. This casual motto succeeds in being encouraging without being too pushy. Twice each year, the City of Prince George publishes two detailed community leisure guidebooks: the Prince George Community Leisure Guide (CLG). The CLG details active living opportunities available to residents and visitors alike. Not only does the CLG contain information regarding community and city programming, the guidebook also contains

some degree of advertising for local businesses, and city initiatives such as recycling and mosquito management programs. In addition, information on community events, organisations, and information for seniors is also included (Community Leisure Guide, 2010). Unlike larger cities such as the Municipality of Saanich or, the Municipality of Oak Bay in Greater Victoria, BC, Prince George does not operate a single multi-purpose recreation centre, or provide extensive recreation programming.

Municipalities of Greater Victoria offer a much wider variety of recreational opportunities, it must be acknowledged that the landscape of recreation and leisure in a centre like Victoria, and that of Prince George are difficult to compare for various reasons. Population base and economics both play a role. However, recreation delivery models that support and facilitate recreation directly, such as those found in Greater Victoria, can be used as an inspirational blueprint for service provision in Prince George. City residents and those on council who allocate funds, must decide if service administration, delivery and programming fits with the ideas and goals for the city found within the official community plan. Initiatives such as Participate Prince George, and the Active Communities program discussed earlier in this chapter suggest that there is interest among the population to warrant re-evaluation of recreation delivery within the city. It is not sufficient for the city to download this responsibility to local community groups. In the time being, residents, adults and children alike, will have to implement constraint negotiation strategies (White, 2008) of their own to access recreational and leisure opportunities whether those opportunities are swimming lessons at the city run pool, dance classes at the College Heights Community Association, or neighbourhood streets, parks and playgrounds.

As a newcomer arriving from Vancouver Island, it was difficult, at first, to discover where programs are offered and by whom. Other than the aquatic programs listed in the guidebook, Prince George does not directly facilitate recreation and leisure programs. The City of Prince George is responsible for running programs at the two city pools, and contracts the Family YMCA of Prince George to coordinate programming at the local arenas. In order for residents to access dance or art programs for example, they must go to local businesses or to one of the local community associations. The City of Prince George relies heavily on volunteer based, community associations to provide recreation and leisure activities for residents. The Department of Community Services within the Recreation and Cultural Services Division offers community associations liability insurance coverage and allows them first priority, and free access to facilities such as fields, and courts to implement programming (Recreation and Cultural Services Division personal correspondence, 2012). There are other communities within the province that use this model to deliver programming, however, those cities offer greater assistance by providing staff, and sometimes, direct funding opportunities (Recreation and Cultural Services Division personal correspondence, 2012).

Prince George has ten community associations. Each group offers some degree of programming, but none to the extent of the College Heights Community Association (CHCA). While the majority of community associations only require a few columns in the leisure guide, the CHCA needs four pages in the guide to list all of their programs and classes. Programs provided by community associations include everything from dog obedience classes to preschool and daycare, to dance classes for children and adults. These associations are run entirely by volunteers and receive little or no funding from the city with which to hire experienced coaches, instructors, or to implement programming (Recreation and Cultural Services Division personal

correspondence, 2012). Although this thesis is focused on summer time activities, it should be mentioned here, along with discussion of community programming, that there is long list of community run, volunteer maintained, outdoor ice rinks throughout the city. These rinks are free (with the exception of the Ice Oval) to access, however, the city does request that users bring with them shovels to contribute to snow removal. In addition, the city provides an ice making workshop in the beginning of each December (City of Prince George, 2012).

The fees associated with community run programs do tend to be less expensive than a more traditional, private dance or hockey school. For those families where cost limits access, community associations are a good option. Prince George offers three subsidy programs. First, the Leisure Access Program (LAP) offers a series of free swim passes as well as a seventy-five percent discount on city of Prince George Programs. Alternatively, each member of a qualifying family would receive a non-transferable fifty dollar voucher towards a registered program (City of Prince George, 2010). Fortunately, those programs offered by community associations have been included in the LAP. In order for a family or individual to qualify for the LAP, they must prove that they are in need by submitting income documentation, or receive a referral from the Ministry of Children and Family Development or the Ministry of Housing and Social Development, Carrier Sekani Family Services or Community Living BC (City of Prince George, 2010).

Second, the City of Prince George has partnered with KidSport Canada to "provide support to children to remove [the] barriers of playing organised sport" (Community Leisure Guide, 2010, 6). KidSport provides up to one hundred dollars towards the registration fees to a member organised sport team/organisation. There are forty community chapters in BC and there are over one hundred seventy-five chapters across the country (KidSport Canada, 2012). To

qualify for this program, applications must be submitted by an adult sponsor and then passed to an adjudicator who "acts as an objective third party who is familiar with the athlete's family and is in a professional position to assess the social and economic barriers facing the family" (KidSport Canada, 2012). Third, Prince George offers travel grants for children and youth aged eighteen and under who need to travel for "academic, art, cultural and amateur sport/recreation purposes" (CLG; 2010, 7).

While it is important to acknowledge these Municipal programs, a local contextual account is not complete without considering the creation of the physical landscape which is literally the backdrop of outdoor play. The following section offers an overview of city and neighbourhood planning to account for official efforts to create neighbourhood features such as parks, playgrounds, walking paths and trails that children and families use on a regular basis for a variety of leisure pursuits.

2.4 – A Brief Discussion of the Neighbourhood Unit and the First Official Community Plan

During the 1960s and 1970s, Prince George experienced a time of very fast growth and expansion (Llewellyn, 1999). Industry brought newcomers to live in the city, and although officials had been developing zoning bylaws and plans already, this population growth prompted council to consider drawing up the city's first official community plan in 1969 (Llewellyn, 1999). The OCP assigned land to four different categories: residential neighbourhoods, commercial areas, industrial, and public use and parks. The aspects of neighbourhood planning in the late 1960s seem to be different than the residential developments that are seen springing up around Prince George in the 2000s. The development of neighbourhood in the OCP is focused on below.

The first OCP was very neighbourhood and residentially focused. Utilising the Neighbourhood Unit concept which "was [a] standard development from across Canada after the Second World War" (Llewellyn; 1999, 74) and was used to define, and develop residential areas throughout Prince George. The neighbourhood unit conceptualised residential areas as self contained, with an elementary school situated in the centre functioning as the neighbourhood or community centres. Neighbourhoods would also encompass local small business and retail opportunities. McCann (1982) suggests that individual neighbourhoods should hold at least one elementary school, parks, playgrounds and community facilities. They should be designed in a way that allows for children to walk to school without necessitating the crossing of major roads. This design implies a focus on, and a sense of importance of, community, walkability, and family friendliness. During this period, there was a concerted and explicit effort to ensure that new neighbourhood subdivisions included ample space for parks and recreational opportunities as well as pedestrian pathways. This heritage of neighbourhood planning has contributed greatly to the amount of greenspace Prince George residents enjoy today.

Today, the concept of neighbourhood planning valued through the 1960s and 1970s is increasingly overlooked in the development of the subdivisions we see today. Far less space for parks, pathways, and greenbelts is allocated in more recent subdivisions. Comparing older neighbourhoods, such as Lower College Heights, with newer developments such as Malaspina Ridge or Westgate, it is apparent that the newer neighbourhoods contain less park space, walking trails or pathways for residents. The streets are wider, but often because sidewalks are not included, placing the ease of vehicle traffic above pedestrian mobility.

2.5 – Parks

When cities provide space for unorganised free-play or other leisure activities, considering the availability of, and access to, parks and trails is fundamental. Because the use of park and trail resources is free, in theory, every citizen should be able to have access. As was illustrated in this research, and discussed in chapter five, many children have difficulty making use of these free resources for their free-play activities. The problem of distance and the inability of many participants to travel independently throughout or across neighbourhoods sometimes limit how often they can use these potential play spaces. Distance is a limiting factor in independent outdoor play and therefore participating children, and potentially other children in Prince George, will often experience uneven access across neighbourhoods.

Despite the problem of distance for some children, the City of Prince George has an extensive park and trail system. With nearly 200 city parks, and 112 parks with playgrounds (Table 1.), residents and visitors have many opportunities for free outdoor physical activity if children are able to access them. Within the Parks and Open Space Master Plan (POSMP) (City of Prince George, 2008), nine park types are identified. The participants discussed using each of these park types with the exception of City Aesthetic and City Passive parks. The participants made use of neighbourhood parks, Tot Lot parks and elementary school grounds most often (Activity Journal data, 2010).

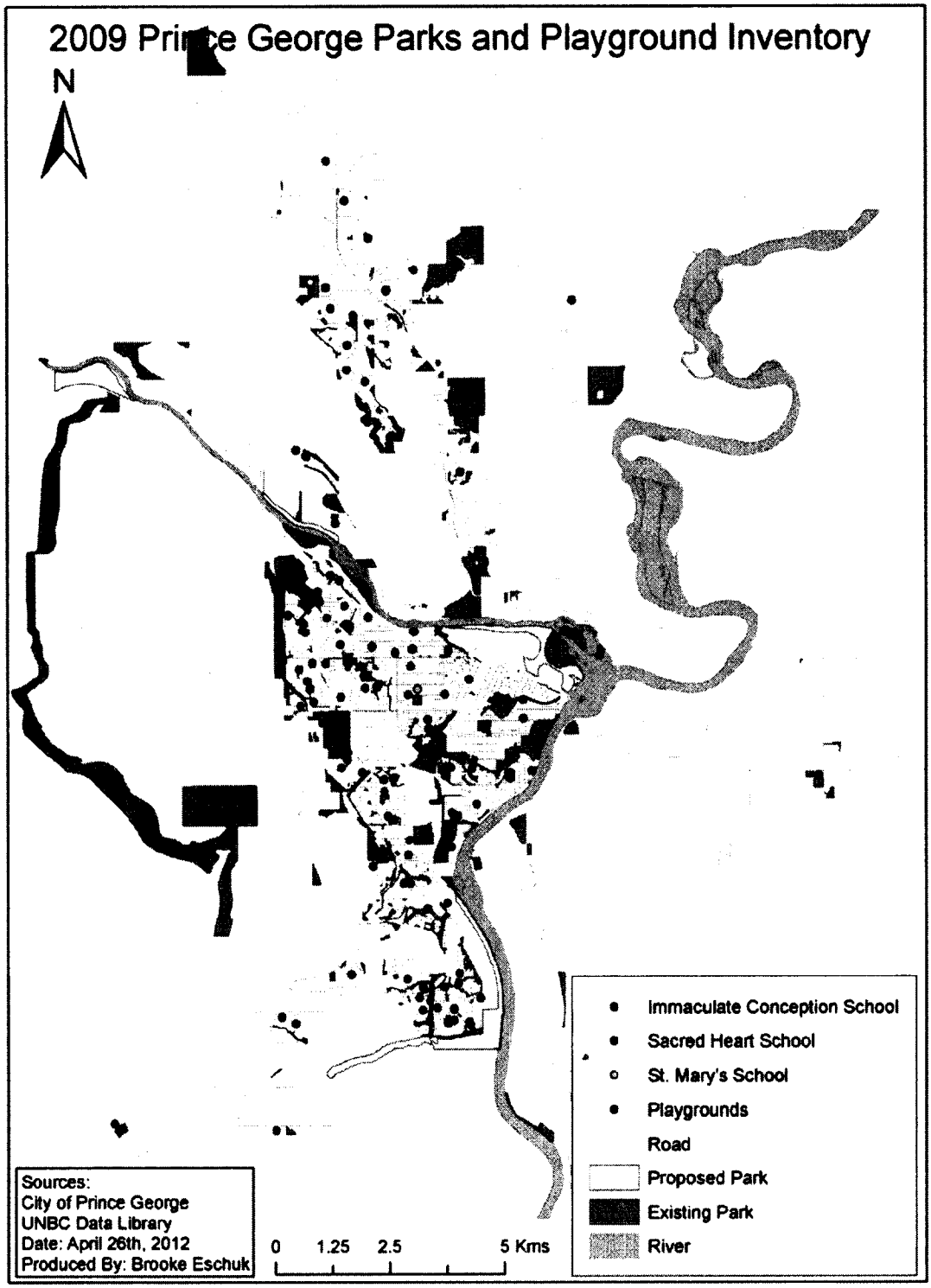
Table 1. Allotment of Space for City Parks in Prince George, BC

Park Type	Total Hectares (Ha)	Total Parks
City Aesthetic park	6.5	4
Athletic Park	78.5	5
Natural Park	908	16
Passive Park	45.7	3
District Park	29.4	6
Neighbourhood Park	110.3	54
Tot Lot Park	6.83	24
Green Space	608.8	45
Elementary Schools	111.9	34
Total	**1906**	**191**
Total Park Area with Playgrounds	**229.03**	**112**

Source: (Adapted from City of Prince George, Parks and Open Space Master Plan, 2008; UNBC GIS data Library, 2009). Note: Neighbourhood Parks, Tot Lots and Elementary grounds include playground equipment.

There are fifty-four neighbourhood parks distributed throughout The City. Parks planners have been specific in terms of parkland size, facilities, and distance from residents. See figure one below. For example, a neighbourhood park tends to serve a greater number of residents than does a Tot Lot park.

Figure 1. City of Prince George Parks and Playground Inventory.



Source: UNBC GIS Data Library, 2009

Neighbourhood parks are generally two hectares in size, and are between 400 – 800

metres (five to ten minutes walking distance) of individual residences. They have playground facilities for children ranging in age from two to ten, and are preferably located next to elementary schools (POSMP, 2008). Conversely, Tot Lot parks are smaller in size, about half of one hectare, and serve smaller residential areas. Tot Lot parks also have playground facilities for the age range mentioned above. Parks located immediately within neighbourhoods are especially important for the children in this study, as they are easily accessible and within close walking distance to participants' homes. The POSMP specifies that the city should allocate 1.2 hectares of neighbourhood parkland for every 1000 residents as parks are created in the future.

The Official Community Plan for Prince George, talks extensively about park area, and the distribution of greenspace and other city parks types according to the surrounding residential population. However, other than mentioning that neighbourhood and Tot Lot parks are equipped with play structures, the plan does not focus specifically on the importance of maintaining space for children's free-play activities. As we will see later in the thesis, participating children make use of a wide variety of non-traditional (spaces not originally intended for play) and traditional playspaces within public space such as neighbourhood streets, greenbelts and bike paths as well as the conventional playground to be active with friends.

In addition to neighbourhood parks and Tot Lots, Prince George takes advantage of its location and offers destination parks such as Forests for the World, located in a more wild, or rustic setting, and Fort George Park located along the Fraser River, and offers walking paths, play areas, lush grass and tables for picnicking. Destination parks are meant to showcase all that the city has to offer residents and visitors, and are highlighted prominently on The City's web site. The participants, as will be discussed in a later chapter, wrote of these parks frequently.

2.6 – Trails

Improving the walkability of neighbourhoods is important in order to encourage citizens of all ages to leave their cars at home more often. When thinking about children's use of their neighbourhoods, and independent mobility, walkability becomes even more important. Studies have shown that the ability to walk throughout one's neighbourhood increases physical activity levels, especially in children (Giles-Corti, Kelty, Zubrick & Villanueva, 2009). Neighbourhood walkability is closely linked to a child's degree of independent mobility, or as will be discussed later, licence (Tranter, 1994) to travel alone, or with friends, in neighbourhood public space. Prince George has a large network of connective paths between neighbourhoods. However, in newer developments such as Westgate, these paths are lacking, and residents are very car dependent. These neighbourhoods are spread-out, and do not have shops or community centres within walking distances. Giles-Corti, Kelty, Zubrick, and Villanueva (2009), suggest neighbourhoods that are highly dependent on vehicle use adds to parental fears of traffic danger, which in turn serves to further limit a child's licence to move throughout her or his neighbourhood independently.

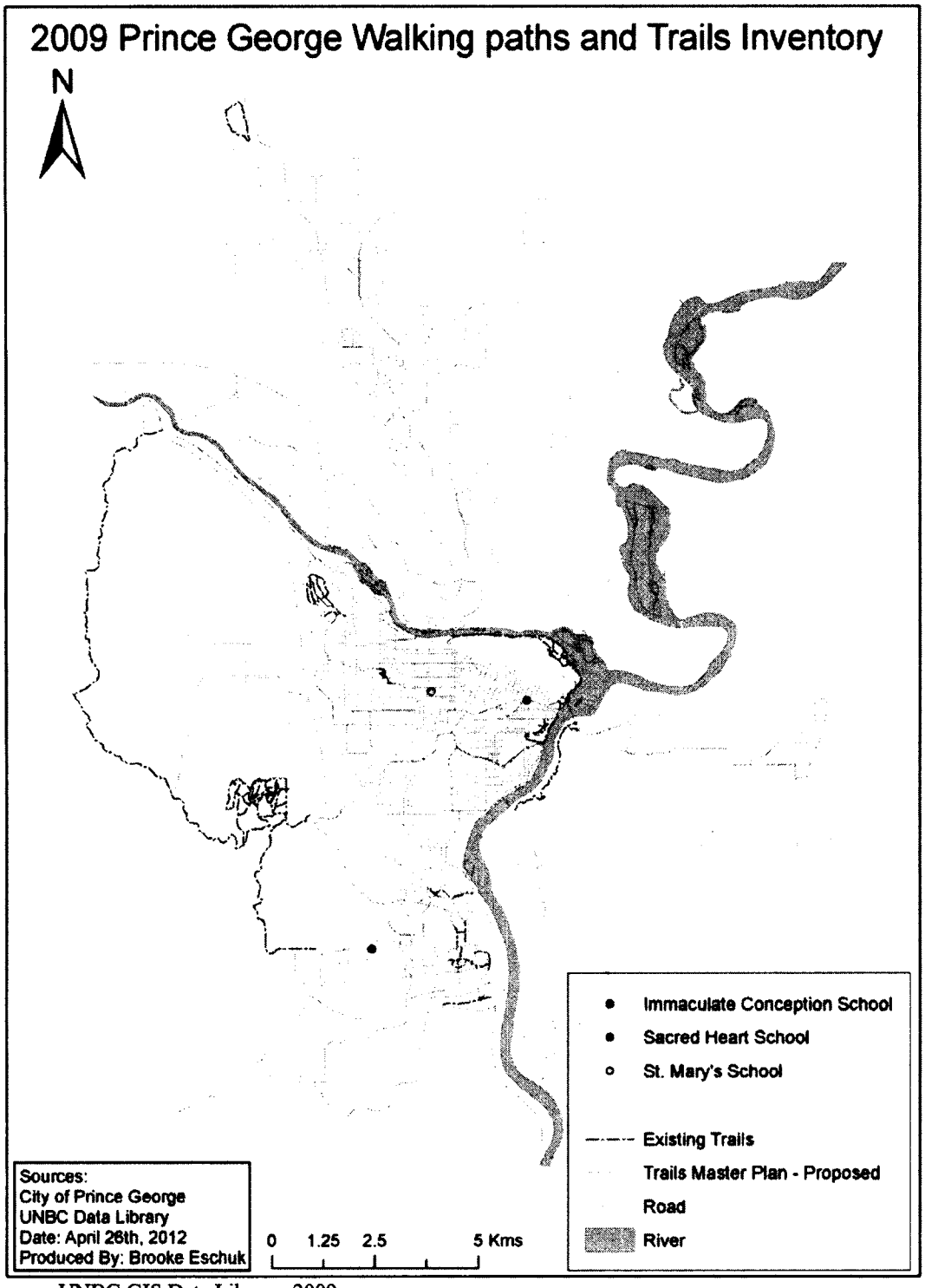
These authors discuss, in detail, the relationship between urban density and higher levels of walking among children and youth. The neighbourhoods in which research participants live tend to be away from the downtown core. Instead of a grid street layout pattern, where residents have close access to grocery stores, and facilities such as the art gallery and the library, participants' neighbourhoods tend to have lower density housing, and larger distances between amenities. Newer neighbourhoods in Prince George tend to be comprised of larger houses, wider streets, and do not have many spaces allocated to public greenspace or connective walkways.

In 1998, Prince George implemented the Trail System Master Plan. The plan was created after the city conducted a survey asking residents about trail use. Surveyors found that 67 percent

of households made use of the trail system and made nearly 700,000 visits each year (City of Prince George, 2012). With the interest in the city's trail network, trails and pathways are included in the Official Community Plan, where plans are made for trail expansion. Currently, Prince George has a growing trail network. As of 2009, there are 74 kilometres of trails existing within city boundaries, and a further 170 kilometres of planned upgrades or new trails are proposed in the coming years (Figure 2.).

As part of the Active Communities initiative, the parks and recreation department, along with Participate Prince George, has worked to develop and publish the City of Prince George, Walking Trail Guide (2010). This guide includes park and trail maps for 18 of the City's most popular trails. There is a wide variety of trails available to residents ranging from leisurely, paved, garden-side walking paths to opportunities for more strenuous hiking.

Figure 2. 2009 City of Prince George Walking Trails and Pathways.



Source: UNBC GIS Data Library, 2009.

City trails not only provide access to local parks and greenspaces, but they also provide access to the local wilderness. For example, many participants made use of the kilometres of trails located on the Cranbrook Hill Greenway and Forests For the World. These trails offer exposure to wildlife, an opportunity to experience local forest types, and exercise, as the terrain undulates with the elevation gain being 245 metres (Walking Trail Guide, 2010). The trails, paths, and greenspaces throughout the city are used for a variety of purposes by all citizens. The children in this study used these networks for dog walking, and biking, and are important for recreation and travel between neighbourhoods. While older children have greater opportunities to utilise these resources on their own, younger children using the trails with their family are introduced to nature, and encouraged to take part in physical activity.

2.7 – Conclusion

The City of Prince George recognises the health problems that are associated with declining physical fitness and poor eating habits among Canadian children, youth, and adults. As discussed earlier in this chapter, obesity levels are rising significantly among all age groups as a result of physical inactivity, poor eating habits, and the cost to the health care system is ever increasing.

As a legacy to the Vancouver / Whistler winter Olympics in February 2010, federal, provincial and local governments have tried to promote the benefits of physical activity and healthy eating among children, youth and adults. By taking advantage of government funding programs, Prince George has attempted to create a culture of participation among city residents. Because the city is growing its recreation infrastructure by expanding parkland and building more, and improving existing walking and hiking trails, citizens have greater opportunities that

are free and accessible to participants at all skill levels. Although this research is primarily focused on a portion of the City's younger residents, the resources that are now available within Prince George benefit everyone.

Chapter Three: Literature Review

> *"We approached the children we were to study as social actors with their own distinctive abilities to understand and explain their world" (Thomas and O'Kane, 1998, 338).*

3.0 – Introduction

This chapter reviews some of the literature relevant to the thesis research. The research domains explored here include the new sociology of childhood, an overview of play theory, and ideas as to what makes behaviours or activities playful. Next, I review some perspectives of constraints and barriers to leisure and recreation. This domain serves as a lens with which to view children's independent mobility, the problem of distance, and parental fears of safety.

While writing this chapter, I realised that, especially with respect to leisure constraints, these literature domains are highly interconnected. The way we view children (i.e., whether we believe they are capable social actors or innocents incapable of making responsible decisions), influences how we view their play activities, how much independent mobility they are granted, as well as our own feelings of fear in relation to children occupying public space. This chapter, then, provides an overview to the major themes discussed in chapter five of the thesis.

3.1 – The 'New' Social Studies of Childhood and The Geographies of Children

Geographers and researchers in other social sciences are in a unique position to hear children share important ideas about their social surroundings. Understanding the agency of children is a central viewpoint emerging in what I will refer to as the new social studies of childhood, which has served as a guide throughout the thesis (Matthews, Limb, & Taylor, 1998; Valentine, 1999; Aitken, 2001; James, 2008; Barker, Kraftl, Horton & Tucker, 2009). This domain of research lends itself to many different disciplines, beginning with the fields of

psychology and sociology. Matthews, a sociologist, compares the old and new perspectives held by researchers in her field, suggesting that the change in thought came when scholars began to challenge the accepted view of children which did not "take seriously the study of children and childhood" (Matthews; 2007, 322). The old and the new social studies of childhood see children, childhood, and indeed research, from vastly different perspectives.

Socialisation theory, part of the old way of thinking in sociology, holds the view that childhood is merely a stage of life prior to reaching adulthood (Jenks, 1996; Matthews, 2007; Handel, Cahill & Elkin, 2007). Research falling under this category tended to be more quantitative in nature, rather than utilising more child centred, qualitative methodologies. During this stage of life, children are considered incompetent (Evans, 2008), and as "potential outcomes rather than social actors who are not only affected but also affect social structures and relationships" (Matthews; 2007, 323). Rather than being passive observers, children are now seen "as social actors who are capable of making sense of and affecting their societies" (2007, 324). This shift in thinking has prompted some scholars to comment on, and compare sociologists to anthropologists. Jenks (1996) suggests that sociologists used to speak of children in the way anthropologists used to speak of 'the savage' (Matthews, 2007).

Holloway and Valentine (2000a) offer a timeline, *per se*, of the progression of research in sociology and geography. They discuss some of the same aspects of socialisation theory as do the scholars mentioned above. Within the older social studies of childhood, the socialisation of children entails moulding children and, in effect, training them to become competent adults (Holloway & Valentine, 2000a). This underlines their marginalisation in the adult constructed world. It seems rather harsh, but children were not viewed as human beings with all the rights and respect given to adults, but instead as "human becomings... who through the process of

socialisation, were shaped into fully human adult beings" (Holloway and Valentine; 2000a, 5).

We must acknowledge that, as adults and researchers, researchers may hold a set of preconceived socially constructed assumptions of what it means to be a child, as well as the age at which children cease to be children and transition into adulthood. The progression in thinking within the geographies of children and the new social studies of childhood has sought to de-construct these assumptions (Matthews & Limb, 1999; Holloway & Valentine, 2000b) and attempt to better understand this social group from their perspective.

Scholars are recognising that romanticized understandings of childhood and children are not necessarily effective or adequate. These labels only serve to categorise children in relation to adults. The process of labeling becomes a process of othering, rather than bringing young people to a more central and prominent place in research. In the context of the geographies of children, researchers need to remember that being a child is more than simply falling within certain, often debatable age brackets. Rather, the notion of being a child is much more complex and is mixed up with issues of space and place, control, power and resistance (James, 1990; Matthews and Limb, 1999; Holloway and Valentine, 2000b; Barker, Kraftl, Horton & Tucker, 2009). Researchers working within children's geographies have strived "to question negative stereotypes of children and young people, to empower children and young people, and to challenge barriers to children and young people's participation in policy decisions" (Evans; 2008, 660).

The study of children from the new social studies of childhood (James, Jenks, & Prout, 1998) framework, addresses the differences in power between the researcher and the researched, as well as acknowledges children as social actors (Morrow & Richards, 1996; O'Brien, Jones & Sloan, & Rustin, 2000). This is echoed by James, who posits that "making children visible [in

geography] is simply not enough, they must be viewed as a meaningful part of the whole population rather than a distinct subgroup" (James, 1990, 282). James and Prout suggest that a perspective which acknowledges children as a "structural feature in society" as well as one that recognises children's "experiences in daily life" (James & Prout, 1995, 81) addresses the notion of children's agency and competence as well as the importance of acknowledging children in their 'state of being' (Matthews & Limb, 1999). These statements illustrate that researchers have begun to change their perspective regarding children's ability, and responsibility (Valentine, 1997, 67).

Matthews continues her comparison of the old and new ways of thinking in sociology by questioning the belief that children are the same regardless of location or context. In this way, scholars have applied a level of "homogeneity" (2007, 325). Because these scholars did not believe children held any degree of agency, there was no need to pay attention to context, and the many realities children experience. Therefore, within the new way of thinking, researchers chose to acknowledge the importance of context. In opposition to the homogeneity assumption, Jenks (1996) suggests that we add an 's' to the word childhood to remind researchers of the varied lived experiences children encounter (Matthews, 2007). Generalising childhood as one constant and consistent period of life is misguided and ignores the individuality of children.

Those critical of the power relationships between adults and children often discuss how children are defined within research. In most countries, children are not adults until they reach the age of eighteen years (United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989). It is critical for researchers to recognise that children are distinct from adults and should be treated as such when doing research (Matthews, 2007).

Views of the child have indeed changed in the last two decades. The scholars discussed above believe children play an integral, but often ignored role in society (Morrow and Richards, 1996; Holloway and Valentine, 2000; James, 2008; Evans, 2008). This perspective is echoed by James (1990), when she insists that if we ignore and neglect the "attitudes, experiences, and perceptions of environments" of children, then we are not capitalising on factors that can help us understand the world of adult geographies (1990, 279). James goes on to say that "it is important that the voices of children should not be confined to childish issues... listening to what children say about their everyday lives and experiences can allow us to both theorise and act on their understandings in relation to issues of social and political change" (James; 2008, 267). Understanding issues of healthy living and the local environment from a child's perspective can help us understand those same issues as they pertain to the wider society.

Matthews and Limb (1999) caution that the geographies of children should not simply be a process of documenting the differences between adults and children for documentation's sake; instead, researchers should be documenting the reasons *why* adults and children encounter differences in how they live in the world around them (Holloway & Valentine, 2000b). Acknowledging children as social actors within the new social studies of childhood perspective forces social researchers to think about relevant research topics, adjust their methodology and approach to ethics (Morrow & Richards, 1996; Thomas & O'Kane, 1998).

3.2 – What is Play?

Research on play is primarily focused on children. Although it is acknowledged that adults do in fact engage in play behaviour, it is different from the kinds of play that children take part in. Research on children's play should be approached like other topics concerning children.

The principles of respect, the utilisation of child-friendly methodologies, and attention to ethics as discussed above, should be applied to play research.

Each of us has an idealistic picture of what it is to play based on our experiences and memories of being a child. We remember active games of chase, and quiet, solitary instances of play. What we do not often think about is what was happening behind the scenes during these episodes of play, how we felt when we played, and why and where we chose to participate in play. It is sometimes difficult to separate our memories from what we see in children now, while representing research results. However, acknowledging differences in our play, or indeed similarities, can be helpful to adult researchers as they interpret research data.

Research on play has occurred since the 1930s (Vygotski, 1978). Much of the research was conducted by psychologists interested in human behaviour and was highly quantitative. Play is a field of research that overlaps many different scholarly disciplines. As such, researchers from human development, anthropology, sociology and psychology have come to different, and sometimes controversial theories as to what play is, how it should be defined (Henricks, 2008; Pellegrini, 2009; Brown, 2009). Although there are similarities in the use and meanings of the term, there does not exist any one definitive theory of play.

Play is inherently creative. Play allows for the player to step away from their lived reality, and "express themselves" in a world of their own design (Henrick; 2008, 159). Although perspectives on play vary, the above statement is thought to be associated, to some degree, with most ways of thinking about play. Where scholars tend to disagree are defining the purpose, the meaning, and understanding specific details of what constitutes play behaviours or activities.

Piaget, a French psychologist, was among the first to study the psychology and cognitive development of children and is still referenced today as an important contributor to the

scholarship of play (Valentine, 1997; Singer, Singer, D'Agostino & DeLong, 2009). In his book *Play, Dreams and Imitation in Childhood*, Piaget suggests that play is "not a behaviour" (1962, 147), neither should it be defined by the types of individual activities that players are engaged in. Rather play encompasses "active involvement, intrinsic motivation, attention to the process rather than the product, non-literality, freedom from external rules and self-reliance..." (Fein & Wiltz, 1998, 46). If Piaget did not consider play as behaviour, perhaps we can think of play as a way of being, or a state of mind where true play is said to occur for play's sake (Piaget, 1962). That is, play is engaged for no other reason than because it is fun (Bergen, 2009) and allows children to "express and explore feelings... to overcome anxiety and fear" (Frost& Woods, 1998, 236). As discussed in chapter five, research participants write about their play in ways that convey feelings of enjoyment and positive socialisation with peers.

Another key figure in the literature on play is Lev Vygotsky, whose major contributions span the early decades of the twentieth century. A psychologist like Piaget, Vygotsky discusses play and its role in the cognitive development of children. Vygotsky believed that scholars of play cannot ignore the fact that play fulfills children's needs, and that in order to understand play as behaviour, we must first understand what needs the behaviour is satisfying. Vygotsky goes on to say that "play differs substantially from work and other forms of activity" and therefore "in establishing criteria for distinguishing a child's play from other activity, we conclude that in play a child creates an imaginary situation" (1978, 93). As ideas and definitions of play continue to change and progress, what is constant is the notion that the use of one's imagination is of vital importance (Piaget, 1962; Vygotsky, 1978; Fein & Wiltz, 1998; Singer, Singer, D'Agostino & DeLong, 2009; L'Abate, 2009).

Pellegrini (2009) describes play behaviours in two ways. First he suggests that play should be understood in terms of its function, and second, behaviour analysis or definition should take into account causal factors (Pellegrini, 2009). In his book *The Role of Play in Human Development,* Pellegrini describes some functional aspects of play behaviour and suggests that behaviour could be described as play if "it resembled a functional behaviour but did not serve that purpose" (2009, 13). In other words, children play fighting appears similar to real, aggressive fighting, while the players do not intend any harm or violence towards one another. Causal factors, or the context in which play behaviour occurs, is also important. Pellegrini suggests that real play occurs when our most basic needs are met: when we are safe from danger, and free from hunger (2009).

Krasnor and Pepler (1980), proposed four indicators of play which are echoed by many other play researchers (Pellegrini, 2009; L'Abate, 2009; Brown, 2009; Smith, 2010). These indicators include intrinsic motivation, nonliterality, positive effect, and flexibility. Rather than describing behaviour as play or non-play, these scholars felt that it was more appropriate to visualise and define play on a "continuum from more clearly to less clearly playful behaviours" (Smith; 2010, 6). A fifth criteria was added by Smith and Vollstedt in 1985. This last rule sates that "the child is more interested in the performance of the behaviour than in its outcome" (Smith; 2010, 7). Other provisions of playfulness suggested by play researchers include "cognitive spontaneity, physical spontaneity, manifest joy, and a sense of humor" (Bergen; 2009, 414).

Because play is an important part of childhood (Brown, 1994, Brown, 2009), included in the play debate are thoughts about its benefits to developing children. Barns (1998) suggests that play "can be seen as the 'natural right' of childhood" where children "learn to test their strength,

their agility, their determination, their capacities to cooperate and compete, their speed, their cunning, their skills, their gracefulness, their memories, and their imaginative abilities" (Barns; 1998, 5; Burdette & Whitaker, 2005). These skills and abilities can be considered an essential part of growing up, and helps to develop the social skills needed to negotiate the adult world later in life. In her paper, Bergen, writes of the benefits of play in childhood to adult scientists and engineers. Bergen argues that play is an important process for learning. She goes on to state:

> all human beings are active seekers of knowledge, and play is an integral facet of this ongoing quest. The pedagogical value of play does not lie in its use as a way to teach children a specific set of skills through structured activities called 'play'. Rather, play is valuable for children primarily because it is a medium for development and learning (2009, 416).

Not only should play be valued for its benefit to academic learning, but also to building social and interpersonal skills. Pellegrini (2005) suggests the type of play observed on the playground teaches children social interaction skills, such as the ability to interact positively, and effectively resolve problems and conflicts with their peers (Burdette & Whitaker, 2005). These skills are necessary throughout childhood and the entirety of one's life.

Children who engage in unstructured free-play are benefiting in a number of ways. Not only are they learning life skills and having fun, in an age where health issues are at the forefront of research, children are likely to be taking part in some form of physical activity. Research by Burdette and Whitaker (2005) show that active free play promotes happiness, "emotional well being... minimis[es] anxiety, depression, aggression and sleep problems" (2005, 48).

In addition to analysing and understanding the social and developmental aspects of play, psychologists, educators and geographers alike recognise that play is both a social and spatial phenomenon (James, 1990; Brown, 1994; Frost & Woods, 1998; Rivkin, 1998; Tandy, 1999;

Holloway & Valentine, 2000a; Matthews, Limb & Taylor, 2000; McKendrick, 2000; Thomson & Philo, 2004; Veitch, Bagley, Ball, & Salmon, 2006). How and why children choose specific spaces for play is important. Because adults observe play from an outsider's perspective, researchers often misunderstand the mechanics of children's play. Brown mentions that understanding children's "consideration of place" can help us appreciate why we see children "wandering aimlessly" (Brown; 1994, 53) when in reality they are searching for a particular space that matches a particular activity. Tranter and Pawson suggest "children's local environments help shape their level of cognitive development, their social and motor skills, and their personal identity. Children see their whole world as a play opportunity" (2001, 27) not solely in the traditional spaces that adults envision such as parks and playgrounds. By having an understanding of children's use of space, and their local neighbourhoods, we can see that they are not wandering aimlessly at all. It is in these instances that groups of children run the risk of being labelled unfairly and rules governing use of space are imposed by those adults with the power to do so. In addition to imposed spatial rules, environmental development and parental concerns about safety have proved to be barriers to children in their use of space for active free-play (Thomson & Philo, 2004; Tandy, 1999).

3.3 – Constraints on Leisure and Free-play

Some discussion of leisure constraints is necessary within the realm of this research. Geographers are in a unique position to investigate the constraints on leisure that individuals and families face regarding their physical activity. Geographers are interested in understanding how participants face barriers in neighbourhoods spread across their city, and the ways in which the constraints listed below combine to influence some groups with greater severity than others

(Jackson, 1994). This thesis mainly focuses on the influence of structural constraints, time and money, but recognises that personal and interpersonal constraints are important, underlying factors which must be considered when thinking about leisure participation and access to resources.

Leisure constraints research "aims to investigate and understand the factors that are assumed by researchers and perceived by individuals to detract from or prohibit participation and enjoyment in leisure" (Jackson; 1994, 111). Since the 1980s, there has been much discussion among researchers as to how to measure these constraints, how to define the various kinds of leisure constraints, and finally, how to apply the research findings. The constraints individuals must negotiate to access leisure resources are complex and varied and thus this area of research has become an important aspect of leisure studies (Jackson, 1994).

Crawford, Jackson and Godbey's (1991) work suggest a hierarchy of constraints. Someone who is unable to participate as much as they would like, is not having as much fun as they could, or is unable to take part at all in a chosen activity, is constrained in their recreational activity. Jackson and Burton (1999) discuss Crawford and Godbey's hierarchical model of leisure constraints. They argue that individuals progress through a linear model of constraints that shape one's participation in leisure activities. Crawford and Godbey propose that individuals first face intrapersonal constraints (i.e. factors which influence the formation of a personal preference as to which activity to engage in), then interpersonal constraints (i.e. factors which address activities that require more than one person to participate), and finally structural constraints. Structural constraints are considered to be issues of cost, lack of facility, time, lack of transportation, or distance (Jackson & Burton, 1999; Rehman et al., 2003). Jackson and Burton (1999) indicate that individuals are faced with multiple sets of constraints at any given

time, and it is these combinations that affect the ability to participate in leisure or free-play activities.

Physical activity is essential to the healthy development. Understanding leisure constraints in relation to children's free-play and physical activities is important given growing health problems among children and youth. (Harsha, 1995; Pellegrini & Smith, 1998; Veitch, Bagley, Ball, & Salmon, 2006; Potwarka & Kaczynski, 2008; Timperio et al. 2008). Children may be impacted to a different or even greater effect than adults by barriers to recreation because of their financial and transportation limitations (i.e. they are too young to drive, and may be unable to travel independently across neighbourhoods, or they may have insufficient funds) (Rehman et al., 2003; AHKC, 2010). Negotiating these constraints is often more difficult for children than for adults (McMeeking & Purkayastha, 1995). Using Crawford and Godbey's description of intra, interpersonal and structural barriers, Rehman et al. (2003) illustrate how children fit into these three kinds of barriers. For example they elaborate on the structural constraints faced by children and include issues of time and cost. Interpersonal barriers include the influence of family members, and intrapersonal constraints might include a participant's feelings of self confidence (Thompson & Humbert; 2003).

While understanding how children and adults are constrained in their leisure is important, it is also important to understand how individuals take advantage of negotiation strategies to overcome barriers and factors limiting leisure and recreation. Scholars such as White (2008) and Shogan (2002) suggest that, while leisure constraints may initially serve to limit and restrict one's activity, individuals, are capable of, and prone to finding ways of circumventing constraints and participate in other, equally enjoyable ways. Being open to the idea that constraining factors are not always negative, potential leisure participants will be creative and

find ways of engaging in physical activities. Rather than conceptualising constraining factors as entirely negative, Shogan encourages us to perceive of constraints as incentives to enablement. Doing so makes it possible to "plan and intervene... to improve the opportunities for participation" (Shogan; 2002, 27).

As will be discussed in chapter five, the participants of this study utilised negotiation strategies while engaging with their neighbourhoods and their friends. While movement outside of their home territories may have been restricted, the participants used bikes, scooters, and other non-motorized vehicles to use as much as their allotted territory as possible. White (2008) suggests the greater the motivation to participate in a particular activity, the more likely it is that individuals will find ways of participating in the desired activity in some way. The motivation to participate, and the subsequent negotiation strategy, serves to limit the negative impact of the initial constraining factor and promote alternate opportunities for participation.

3.4 – Independent Mobility and the Problem of Distance

Being independently mobile is central to a child's ability to take part in neighbourhood recreational activities. Where as adults are able to transport themselves across neighbourhoods and cities by car, children under the age of sixteen years do not have that opportunity. Therefore, the ability to move throughout neighbourhoods, or across town by bus or by bicycle, is important. The degree to which children are independently mobile has decreased since previous generations (Veitch, Salmon & Ball, 2008; Barker, Kraftl, Horton, & Tucker, 2009). Research has shown that those young people who have greater independence are more active in play (Veitch, Salmon & Ball, 2008) and other forms of physical activity.

Children's mobility is valuable not only for the purposes of transportation, but for

inspiring instances of play and healthy habits. For instance, Kytta suggests that the degree to which children are independently mobile "influence[s] their physical, social, cognitive and emotional development". She goes on to say that the ability to play out of doors autonomously is of great benefit to children's "physical health" (2004, 180). This mobile play leads to an exploration of public space. Understanding the importance of children exploring their neighbourhood is described here, in this quotation by Engwicht:

> This freedom to explore the local neighbourhood is probably the key ingredient in children developing a feeling that they belong to a neighbourhood, a place. It not only gives them an opportunity to develop relationships with people of all ages who live in their neighbourhood, it gives them an opportunity to develop a relationship with the placeness of their physical environment. Robbing children of a sense of place robs them of the very essence of life (1993, 39).

The view of the importance of neighbourhood exploration is one that conveys the fundamental need to experience public space, and the social and environmental relationships that are formed when children are afforded the opportunity. The opportunity to explore, or as Tranter and Pawson put it, the "licence" (2001, 28) to explore independently is awarded by parents, and reflects the degree to which children are allowed to move about freely. The authors above suggest that this licence can be thought of as the ability to:

> come home from school alone, or to visit places other than school alone, or to play on the street... The age at which children are given licences, or the proportion of children in any group who have them, is an indicator of the level of independent access to their local environments (an indicator of their freedom) (2001, 28).

The idea of licence, or the permission to access neighbourhood public space granted by parents and caregivers, is shared by many scholars such as those listed below. O'Brien, Jones, Sloan and Rustin (2000) argue that the autonomous participation of children in public space may not be a reality for many young people.

The lack of independent mobility of children is clearly a complex problem. Many researchers suggest that mobility and licence is very closely related to age. The younger the child, the smaller the territorial range the child is permitted to travel (O'Brien, Jones, Sloan and Rustin, 2000; Tanter & Pawson, 2001; Barker, Kraftl, Horton & Tucker, 2009). While this is reasonable, the failure to increase the spatial range as children grow becomes a barrier to neighbourhood play and exploration.

Accessing play spaces that are outside the permitted distance of travel is often limited to supervised visits. The problem of distance is exacerbated when children live in lower density, sprawling suburban neighbourhoods where neighbourhood walkability is decreased. Spread out neighbourhoods encourage vehicle use, which in turns adds to parental fears of traffic, and therefore increases dependence on parents for rides to playspaces. Salmon and Timperio (2007) warn that suburban neighbourhood design, and poorly connected roads and pedestrian pathways, only adds to difficulties with distance for children. Easy access to playspaces is influenced by neighbourhood design, with distance being a limiting factor in free-play activities. In order to access distant play spaces, children must either wait for a convenient time when parents can escort them, or find their own way perhaps acting against the rules, in order to access the playspace.

3.5 – Fear

The restriction of movement is a central problem, and one that is often a result of perceived fear. Scholars such as Tranter (1994), Tranter and Pawson (2001), and Tandy (1999), discuss the idea that children's independent mobility is limited, usually as a result of parental fears of traffic and strangers in public space (Valentine, 1997; Valentine & McKendrick, 1997;

Tranter & Pawson, 2001; Backett-Millburn & Harden, 2004; Pain, 2006; Malone, 2007). In her article called *The Bubble-Wrap Generation* (Malone, 2007), describes how parents feel they are protecting their children from the dangers of the outside world by only permitting them to play close to home, usually within sight of their parents. Malone is critical of the parenting view that children are innocent, fragile, incapable, and need to be shielded. Mikkelsen and Christensen (2009) propose that independent mobility can be further restricted because of the perceived danger faced by children (Salmon and Timperio, 2007). These restrictions serve as leisure constraints because children may be required to wait until the schedules of their family allow for an accompanied walk to the park, or supervised bike ride to a friend's home.

In terms of parental fears of safety and stranger danger, the role of the media cannot be ignored (Valentine, 1997; Nayak, 2003). This social construction of fear and danger has a role in the over concern about all things potentially unsafe and insecure (Harden, 2000). Much research has been done investigating the fears of parents, and the belief that their children are not capable of managing risk or assessing potential danger (Backett-Millburn & Harden, 2004). Valentine (1997) argues that, despite fears, children are in fact capable of assessing potential dangers and acting appropriately while occupying public space. Rachel Pain voices the concern that fear of strangers, in spite of evidence that violence against children is most common in their own homes, serves to restrict the movement of children and "activities in public space at great cost to their autonomy, social interaction and health" (2006, 221). In a sense, this culture of fear and anxiety has affected children to the point that some are now as unnecessarily fearful as their parents (Nayak, 2003; Pain, 2006).

3.6 – Conclusion

Research that looks at issues concerning children relates to a great many other fields of study. Children's geographies is a field which focuses on research important to children. Seeking out children's views and perspectives, and using methodologies designed specifically for young participants, are exciting new developments in social science research. As is evident from the literature reviewed here, there are complex and personal influences on the free-play activities of each of children participating in the research. Children negotiate constraints and utilise neighbourhood resources in their own way.

The geographies of children encourages researchers to approach their work with respect for the abilities of their participants, and highlights their place in geographic study. Researching with children asks scholars to think critically of the theories they adhere to, and how those perspectives may affect the questions they ask, and the analysis of the data they collect.
The literature discussed here is by no means the extent of what has been written. However, these authors provide us with improved theory to understand the free-play activities of children in Prince George. The following chapter will provide a detailed account of the methods and overall research design used to address the thesis objectives and research questions.

Chapter Four: Methods and Research Design

"Methodologies that promote mutual respect and identification of commonalities and differences between researcher and researched in non authoritative ways are deemed preferable in that they allow for 'others' to be heard and empowered" (Nast,1994, 58).

4.0 – Introduction

My thesis research is exploratory in nature and uses a mixed methods study design. I chose to take on this research approach for many reasons. The qualitative methods used include daily participant journaling, as well as group discussions amongst the participants and myself as researcher in two classroom visits. Qualitative methods were used because the data produced are rich and meaningful and are therefore valued for their "exploratory and explanatory power" (Attride-Stirling, 2001, 403). Winchester argues that "[i]ndividuals experience the same events and places differently and giving voice to young people allows viewpoints to be heard that otherwise might be silenced or excluded" (2000, 6). Participant journaling as well as group discussions allowed me to gather insightful, meaningful and personal statements from each of the participating students and were therefore valuable research tools. Choosing qualitative methods allowed me to learn of participant's experiences told in their own words (Winchester, 2000), and helped to illuminate aspects of physical activity specifically related to children in Prince George.

Quantitative methods included the use of GIS mapping and analysis software to produce city maps given to participants, as well as to analyse and understand the social and spatial context of the research derived from the 2006 Statistics Canada Census data. The use of census data allowed me to identify neighbourhoods of social disadvantage and fewer opportunities for physical activity as well as other social services across the city. These data were not used as part of analysis, instead the data were used strictly to help contextualise the information provided by participants in their activity journals. To protect anonymity, I used confidential participant

identifiers, and I did not disclose information regarding the socioeconomic conditions of individual neighbourhoods gathered through GIS.

The use of mixed qualitative and quantitative methods helped provide a greater understanding of research issues reflected in my research questions and added depth to the analysis of results. Patton suggests qualitative and quantitative methodologies can be used in harmony with one another as "they have differing strength and weaknesses" (2002, 14). Where the qualitative methodologies gather rich data from smaller numbers of participants, quantitative methods "allow for broad generalizable set of findings" (2002, 14). Throughout the research, close attention was paid to ensuring that rigor would be upheld through various practices such as participant validation, and critical self-reflection (Baxter & Eyles, 1997; Bradshaw & Stratford, 2005).

4.1 – Researching with Children

Research that involves collecting primary data from children comes with a particular set of concerns that must be accommodated. Throughout my research, I tried to uphold the principles of "equity, empowerment, social change" (Henderson, Shaw, Bialeschki, & Freysinger, 1996, 13), and a commitment to social justice. The adherence to these ideals allowed for the use of methodologies that attempted to give voice to the marginalised (Kirby & McKenna, 1989; Jones, 2001; James, 2008; Evans, 2008; Hemming, 2008), and produce work that I hope will bring positive outcomes to participants and our community. While designing my thesis, it was important to research from a viewpoint that questioned the accepted position of children and the validity of their knowledge in relation to adults and the academy (Nast, 1994; England, 1994; Valentine, 1999; Moss, 2002; Meth, 2003). Too often youth are told rather than asked, and I

hope that participants in my research felt respected and included rather than discounted and excluded. I aimed to be mindful of how the research methodology I selected might magnify or conversely minimize the voices of participants by being critical of accepted ways of generating knowledge, power relationships in social research, and participant representation. In doing so, understanding the importance of critical self-reflection throughout the entire work became integral (England, 1994; Katz, 1994; Madge, Raghuram, Skelton, Wills, & Williams, 1997; Moss, 2002).

Research with children is moving away from positivistic methodologies (Hood, Kelly & Mayall, 1996; Aitken, 2001) and towards child-centred methods (Barker & Weller, 2003b, Hemming, 2008). Aitken states that the quantitative "paper and pencil exercises and graphic tests" (2001, 502) used by psychologists, such as Piaget (1962) are methods that are "far removed from children's lived experiences, and they problematically position the researcher as an objective, impartial assessor of how well children performed on standardized tests" (Aitken; 2001, 498). Aitken goes on to say that "structured methods may help us learn a great deal about children, but they don't help us know them" (2001, 502). These kinds of tests are not part of a child's every day experience and therefore were not as viable in my research. It was my goal to use methods designed specifically for my research participants, which were intended to be fun and engaging. It was important for me to remember that children are different from adults in their perception of social issues and navigation of social norms (Morrow & Richards, 1996; Punch, 2002). I believe that researchers often forget that children occupy a different (not lesser) position in our community and have different abilities than do adults. Research methods therefore need reflect this difference (Jones, 2001).

Punch argues that "the researcher's own assumptions about the position of children in society affect the methods chosen as well as the interpretation of the data generated" (Punch, 2002, 324). I want to underline my belief that the views and perspectives of children are equally as important as are the views of adults, and I believe the methods I chose reflect that belief. In this way, individual researchers need to utilise methods appropriate (Christensen & Prout, 2002) to the child's age and abilities. Methods which use an inclusive research framework will go further to acknowledging that children are "competent social actors [who have the ability to] make sense of and actively contribute to their environment" (Barker & Weller, 2003a, 207).

It is important to recognize that there is still a great degree of power that comes with the writing or representation of the realities of those who participate in our research (James, 2008). I acknowledge that social scientists cannot hope to tell the entire story. As Clifford (1986) suggests in his discussion of 'partial truths', we will only know a small part of the story and will therefore only be able to relay an incomplete representation of it. In collecting field data, we are merely gathering a few pieces of the puzzle. There will always be another perspective, or another individual with a different story to tell. As researchers, can only write about what is shared with us by those who choose to participate and, therefore, we are only receiving a snapshot of a particular social reality (England, 1994; Nast, 1994; Gilbert, 1994; Mullings, 1999; Jones, 2001).

Power dynamics were dealt with carefully throughout the research process. While thinking about the obvious discrepancy of power between myself and the students, I thought about the context in which my research took place (Walsh, 1998; David, Edwards & Alldred, 2001). As Barker and Weller (2003b) point out, the place in which research occurs carries with it issues of power distribution in itself. In considering the built-in and concrete power inequalities experienced by children within the classroom, I realized I was in a position of authority over my

participants even before I introduced myself. For this reason, I chose to be aware of the relationship and conduct my study in a way that sought to avoid "exploitive relationship[s]" (Madge et al., 1997, 92), and instead used methods that encouraged "conversation rather than interrogation" (Madge et al., 1997, 92).

While it was impossible to completely remove the power imbalance, it was possible to emphasize that the participants were the individuals with the knowledge and it was up to them to choose whether or not to share their experiences with me through discussion and activity journals. It is by means of this open discussion between researcher and participant that I hope to give my work validity (Cahill, 2004). Participants had the opportunity to be listened to, clarify incorrect interpretations, and articulate what was meaningful to them. My approach to field research strived to readjust power dynamics but also acknowledges that my relationship with participants could never reach equal ground (Mullings, 1999), given the classroom context (Barker & Weller, 2003a) of my research and the age gap between myself and my participants. I tried to minimise this power gap by inviting participants to contribute as much or as little as they chose. (Gilbert, 1994; England, 1994; Madge et al., 1997).

Working with children involved designing a study using methods that were applicable and meaningful to the participants, but were also age appropriate (Morrow & Richards, 1996; Hemming, 2008). Given the classroom context of the research, I felt that activity journaling was appropriate, as the children were used to writing in journals as part of their regular classroom activities. Researching with children is both complicated and worthwhile. They can contribute to knowledge building and influence decision making in meaningful ways, while at the same time requiring adjustments to the research methods employed when working with adults (Kantor & Fernie, 1998; Valentine, 1999; Aitken, 2001).

As social researchers, we must acknowledge our positionality, identity, and our own influence on "[w]hat we find out, what we perceive as important ... what knowledge we decide is valid" (Nast, 1994, 101; Kwan, 2002). In research with children, we must also recognise that the research is inherently personal and therefore subjective (Kantor & Fernie, 1998). Because "we have all experienced childhood before... we see the children in our work through prisms of our memory, romantic images of the ideal child, and hopeful emotions for the future" (Kantor & Fernie; 1998, 74; Philo, 2003). These emotional and personal feelings shape interpretations, approaches to research design, and the questions we ask. The reasons I chose this particular topic are influenced by personal factors such as the memories I hold of my own childhood. Therefore, my experiences, views and beliefs will always play a role in my ways of knowing, asking, and interpreting data and results, whether intended or not (Madge et al., 1997; Kwan, 2002).

For these reasons, returning to participants for validation of my interpretations was important to ensure trustworthiness and therefore rigour (Baxter & Eyles, 1997). Acknowledging this subjectivity, rather than designing a study which attempted to be objective, allowed me to focus on the research process itself more closely and strived to respect the voices of my participants in an empowering way while they learned about the research process in the classroom. I wanted each child to feel that, by participating in my research, they would be able to share their unique views, ideas and insights in a forum such as city council meetings (i.e. knowledge sharing and potential to contribute to decision making) where children's voices are not often heard or valued. I also wanted participants to feel that they were able to express themselves in any way they wished. By providing journals, the children were able to simply write entries, draw pictures or maps, as well as communicate with me via email if they chose.

4.2 – Ethical Responsibilities

While accepting that children are inherently different than adults (Punch 2002), paying close attention to research ethics is important if researchers are to gain access to study participants. Issues of gaining the support of gatekeepers and the informed consent of participants and their guardians need to be addressed (David, Edwards, & Alldred, 2001). These, and other issues of confidentiality become tangled when one seeks to study children and understand the world form their perspective (David, Edwards, & Alldred, 2001; Aitken, 2001). In addition, informed consent is a particularly thorny issue when working with children in an education-based environment (David, Edwards, & Alldred, 2001).

In the educational context, codes of conduct or conformity often ensure that participant consent, informed or not, is taken for granted or even "coerced" (Valentine; 1999, 145). Because of the power imbalance between teacher and student: "it is difficult if not impossible, for individual children to withdraw from classroom-based research except by physically walking out of the room" (Valentine; 1999, 145). Allowing participants the opportunity to opt-in to the research as we do for adults acknowledges that children are capable to make these decisions and understand the implications of participating in research. Ensuring that one is conducting research with children ethically requires much critical reflection from the inception of the research (Christensen & Prout, 2002; Punch, 2002).

Problems occur when adult researchers fail to address the differing power relationships between the researcher and the researched, and carry on working with child participants as if they were working with adult research participants (James, 2008). James discusses the importance of involving young people in the research process, especially when it comes time to present results, analyses, and findings. I believe that, by holding the perspective that children are

competent and valuable social actors, they become more empowered, less other, and respected for their differences.

Before engaging in research with human subjects, researchers and research projects are required to meet the standards of the University of Northern British Columbia's Research Ethics Board (REB). As my research involved children, certain steps were required to satisfy the university, Catholic Independent School officials, the participants and their parents. I underwent a criminal records check with the Prince George detachment of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) and a subsequent letter of introduction was mailed to the Superintendent of the Prince George Diocese Catholic Independent Schools.

Immaculate Conception School, Sacred Heart School, and St. Mary's School are located in the City of Prince George. The three CIS schools were chosen as field sites for two practical reasons. First, my thesis advisor has a relationship with the administration at Immaculate Conception School. Second, gaining access to the much larger public School District 57 promised to be a more lengthy and complex process. In the interest of time, I therefore chose to approach the CIS of Prince George.

An introductory letter was mailed to the Superintendant of CIS in the Diocese of Prince George who then forwarded it to each of the principals informing them of the research and inquiring as to whether they would be willing to participate in the study. Meetings were established with individual teachers of grades six and seven to further introduce the project and begin planning classroom presentations. Given that each of the three schools draws children from diverse neighbourhoods across Prince George, I felt that the community of students would comprise a group of individuals with interesting and varying perspectives on opportunities for physical activity within the city. I was then granted permission to contact each of the three

participating school principals. The principals replied with letters stating their interest and willingness to participate in the research, and allowed me to contact each of the teachers of grades six and seven. A copy of the letters to the superintendent can be found in the appendix.

As per the requirements of UNBC's Research Ethics Board, and because participants had not yet reached the age of majority, a very detailed information package was distributed to the parents of potential participants during a research introduction session. This package included a research project information sheet outlining the purpose, potential benefits and risks of the project, how participants were selected and what participants would be required to do throughout the research process, and how I proposed to maintain the confidentiality of any resulting research data and the identities of participating students. Initially, I experienced some degree of hesitation from teachers regarding the information packages to be sent home with students because of the length and the level of detail. Teachers were also concerned with the time of year the research took place, as the end of the academic year is a very busy time for everyone. In light of teacher's concerns, I assured them that I would disrupt their classes as little as possible, limiting my visits with students to thirty minutes or less. I also acknowledged that the students would already have homework assigned during the day, which would take priority over their activity journals.

Additionally, a letter of informed consent was addressed to parents and a letter of assent (David, Edwards & Alldred, 2001) was addressed to students. These letters can also be found in the appendix. In addition to the information package, I began a discussion with the students outlining the research project, the expected benefits of the work, and clearly emphasised that there was no obligation to participate (Edwards & Alldred, 1999; Bell et al., 2008). I wanted to be clear that students could withdraw at any time and by no means would there be any consequences if they chose not to participate. I chose to view the children as competent and able

to make informed and clear decisions (David, Edwards & Alldred, 2001). This viewpoint served as a guide while I approached the topic of informed versus educated consent Barton and Douglas state:

> A competent child is one who has sufficient understanding and intelligence to enable him or her to fully understand what is proposed and also sufficient discretion to enable him or her to make a wise choice in his or her own interests (1995, 125-126).

Although I gave ample opportunity to the children to first opt-in and then to opt-out of the research, the formal decision to participate rested with the individual parents of the students. However, those students who agreed and had their parent's consent to participate, but failed to turn in the activity journal at the end of the research, were considered to have withdrawn their consent. In this way, students were empowered to have the final decision as to their participation in my research.

4.3 – Sample and Participants

I chose to use non-probability purposeful sampling (Babbie, 2007) in terms of the goals and objectives set at the beginning of this research. The thesis research is largely based in the field and is not intended to be statistically representative. Non-probability sampling is appropriate for small-scale studies such as this one (Ritchie, Lewis & Elam, 2003; Guest, Bunce & Johnson, 2006). Therefore, because the research involves a small number of children in Prince George, and sampling was not random, it is important to note it that findings cannot be generalized to all children in the city. We can expect that aspects of the findings can "fit into contexts outside the study" area (Koch, 1994, 92). Transferability, a measure of trustworthiness, implies that findings of research can be attributed to groups in other settings (Graneheim &

Lundman, 2004). Arguably, children in communities across the Province and Canada, share similar neighbourhood experiences as those children represented in the research.

Participants were selected because they are knowledgeable and experienced (Bradshaw & Stratford, 2005) in the area of study, they are capable of fulfilling research requirements (i.e. completing journal entries and participating in discussions regarding mapping and the spatiality of their neighbourhoods), and have some degree of freedom of movement within their neighbourhoods.

I estimated that 119 students would participate in the study if each student in the grade six and seven classrooms participated. However, only forty-seven students and parents agreed to participate. Of the forty-seven participating students, roughly twice as many girls as boys chose to take part in the research (see Table 2.). Four students did not disclose their gender in their activity journals. Immaculate Conception School had the greatest number of participants with twenty-seven students, followed by St. Mary's with twelve and Sacred Heart with eight participants. The three schools are located in economically diverse neighbourhoods across the city. In addition, each of the schools draws students from all over Prince George. For example students may live in The Hart and attend Immaculate Conception School in Westgate, along Highway Sixteen West. Sacred Heart School is located in the Millar Addition neighbourhood near Fort George Park and Downtown Prince George. St. Mary's School is located more centrally in the bowl on Gillett Street. A city map showing the school's locations can be found in the context chapter (Figure 1.).

Table 2. Number of Participants, School, and Gender.

School	Total Students	Boys	Girls	Gender not disclosed	Total Participants	% of Total Participants
Immaculate Conception	49	7	17	3	27	**41.2**
St. Mary's	47	2	9	1	12	**39.5**
Sacred Heart	23	4	4	0	8	**19.3**
Total Participants	**119**	**13**	**30**	**4**	**47**	**100**

4.4 – Qualitative Procedure

At the outset of the primary data collection, I visited each of the classrooms to give a formal introduction of the project to the students and begin an on-going discussion regarding the importance of physical activity, favourite play spaces, and participants' ideas of the constraints they may face in accessing physical activity. A large wall map of Prince George, including parks, city facilities, trails, schools, and other features, was shown and students were invited to make additions, edits, and corrections to the map. Students were also asked to share the ideas they arrived at within the group discussion portion of the introduction session. Finally, students were encouraged to ask any questions they might have of me, the project, the research requirements, and the instructions for completing their journals.

Each student was given an activity journal to record daily physical activity, as well as to document their thoughts, feelings and perceptions regarding the places they play, constraints and barriers they might face (either spatial or economic), and offer suggestions as to how they might improve the city's parks and recreation facilities (Meth, 2003; Barker & Weller, 2003b; Punch, 2002). A copy of journal instructions is included in the appendix. Participating students were asked to write in their activity journal for a two week period in June of 2010. Although this research focused mainly on summer-time physical activity, I understand that the seasonal

(Tucker & Gilliland, 2007) aspect of activity in Northern British Columbia requires some attention and some students indicated what types of physical activities are typical for them during the winter months. The seasonality of physical activity in the north was beyond the scope of this thesis but warrants in-depth research in the future nonetheless.

Through the privacy and security of journaling, I hoped that participants felt empowered (Meth, 2003) to discuss aspects of their activity more freely and comfortably. Punch proposes that "children are not used to expressing their views freely or being taken seriously by adults because of their position in adult-dominated society.... the challenge is how best to enable children to express their views to an adult researcher" (Punch, 2002, 325). It was important to me that the participating students understood that their views and thoughts about physical activity were valued and important. I believe the participants were excited and encouraged to know that my thesis will be shared with the adults responsible for deciding and creating policy about recreation and physical activity within in the city. After students completed journal entries over a two week time period, the journals were collected and digitally scanned, enabling me to return the original journals to the study participants. Scanning preserved the data and allowed for thematic coding and analysis. I then prepared a summary of the initial results and I returned to the classrooms and discuss the findings with the students. I visited St. Mary's School on June 16th, 2010, Sacred Heart School on June 22nd, 2010, and Immaculate Conception School on June 23rd, 2010. This participant or member checking exercise gave the children an opportunity to confirm, elaborate, or disagree with the findings I had arrived at. Additionally, the students were again separated into discussion groups, where they answered brief questions that clarified some of the research findings I was unsure of, or that I wanted to learn more about.

4.5 – Geographic Information Systems and 2006 Canadian Census

In addition to the qualitative methods discussed above, mapping and analysis of 2006 Canadian Long Form Census data using GIS was conducted to corroborate and add to the data generated from the activity journals. Family economics has been shown to influence participation in physical activity and access to resources (Thompson, Rehman, & Hubert, 2005; Gilliland, Holms, Irwin & Tucker, 2006; Ziviani et al, 2008). I used Environmental Systems Research Institute's ArcGIS to plot locations where opportunities exist for physical activity throughout the city, as well as the locations of other health resources such as doctor's offices, and other social services. Together, the analysis of these data within a GIS framework helped me to locate areas of potential disadvantage based on 2006 Statistics Canada Dissemination Areas (DAs). The Canadian Census is a valuable research tool for social scientists to better understand the socio-demographic characteristics of small populations. As my interests lie in the influence of place and the social determinants of health (SDOH) (Raphael, 2004), and because the children who participated in this research resided in neighbourhoods all across the city, it was important to gain an overview of differing socioeconomic status across neighbourhoods.

This research used 2006 Census data to summarize neighbourhood socioeconomic characteristics based on the SDOH (Raphael, 2004). For example, by aggregating *Average After-Tax Family Income*, and the *Proportion of Lone Parent Families*, and the proportion of individuals who have obtained a *high school education*, and finally comparing with the total number of *Census Families* within a census dissemination area, I was able to attain a more detailed image of the composition of each neighbourhood in Prince George. A Census Family is defined by Statistics Canada as:

> [A] married couple and the children, if any, of either or both spouses; a couple living common law and the children, if any, of either or both partners; or, a lone parent of any marital status with at least one child living in the same dwelling and that child or those children. All members of a particular census family live in the same dwelling. A couple may be of opposite or same sex. Children may be children by birth, marriage or adoption regardless of their age or marital status as long as they live in the dwelling and do not have their own spouse or child living in the dwelling. Grandchildren living with their grandparent(s) but with no parents present also constitute a census family (Statistics Canada Definitions, 2011).

It was decided at the outset of this research that using dissemination areas as proxies for neighbourhoods would be the most appropriate (Bell, Schuurman, Oliver & Hayes; 2007, 449) because DAs generally represent an area that is walk-able and because the research is specifically concerned with how children use their neighbourhood to be active. In addition, data generated based on DAs are the highest resolution for data obtained from the long form census. It is also important to note that GIS allows researchers to attach social attributes to spatial features. For example, attributes of neighbourhoods could be related to parks, schools, healthcare providers, as well as socioeconomic data such as family income, employment rates and family status. These attributes add context to the study and draws a more detailed image of the lived experiences of research participants.

Having detailed neighbourhood information brought an extra level of depth to the analysis of the primary data collected from the children. I created city maps which displayed parks and other resources noted by the children during the info sessions, throughout journals, and the validation sessions. These maps helped me to visualise the findings in relation to the impressions and experiences of the participants. Reading the qualitative journal entries alongside the quantitative census information, I was able to better understand the context of the children's experiences.

Students were given the opportunity to edit and mark-up the maps in order to correct, and confirm what I gathered from their journals and what I knew of existing resources. Through this exercise, it was clear that the participants had a very good idea about the geography of their city, and of their own personal territoriality (Valentine, 1997). It was also clear that I had underestimated the abilities of my participants to read and navigate their way around a map. In doing so, I left off several features incorrectly believing that creating a simple and uncluttered map would be simpler for the students to understand. The initial city map, as well as a map of the neighbourhood that each of the schools belonged to, was included for reference in the activity journals I distributed to the participants.

At the conclusion of the study and the final visit with the students, neighbourhood maps were re-presented to participants where students were asked to verify the interpretation and mapping of data gathered on the first visit to each of the classrooms and through the initial interpretation of participant journals. Also at this time, a discussion took place regarding what the students felt is missing in their neighbourhoods. In this way, students became active participants in the production of knowledge. To further protect the confidentiality of study participants, the raw data containing names and other identifying information will not be released to the general public.

The safety of participants is of the utmost concern and therefore no data will be published which allows for the identification of participants. Copies of the thesis will be delivered as promised to each of the principals of the CIS schools. In the interest of safety and confidentiality of participants, every effort has been made to conceal the identities of participants. Within their statements, many participants state the name of playmates. In these cases, I have changed the names of participants within the journal quotations. While this research addresses the spatiality

of neighbourhoods and the locations of playspaces within those neighbourhoods, I feel it is more important to focus on what makes those playspaces significant and meaningful for participants rather than placing too much emphasis on specific location.

4.6 – Thematic Coding and Journal Analysis

Writing notes in the margins of the data transcripts (Kirby & McKenna, 1989, Patton, 2002), thinking closely and carefully about the statements made in participant journals, and establishing descriptive themes allowed me to condense and organise the data into meaningful themes and sub-themes (Cope, 2005). Thematic content analysis and coding are two of many methods with which to analyse qualitative data (Attride-Stirling, 2001). Before developing themes, I spent time reflecting upon and getting to know the data I had collected. Reflecting on the data meant spending time with the student's journals. I assigned a lot of time to read, re-read, and think about the journal statements. For me, this stage in the research process was important to take slowly so that I could produce work that I felt accurately reflected and represented the realities of my participants. I felt that this more contemplative pace was necessary in order to see patterns and meanings emerging from the journal's text (Patton, 2002).

Thematic analysis seeks to "capture the qualitative richness of the phenomenon [of study]" (Boyatzis, 1998, 1) and allow for the organisation of participant statements into categories. Themes within qualitative texts bring together ideas and statements offered by participants (Ryan & Bernard, 2003, 87). The identification and interpretation of participant statements and ideas underline the personal and subjective nature of analysing qualitative datasets. Thematic analysis requires one to reflect upon (Kirby & McKenna, 1989) and become familiar with the data. In doing so, themes emerge that mirror the research questions (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006).

Participant statements were transcribed verbatim, given a code reflecting the general meaning or idea within the statement, and organised into a large number of loose categories. For example, the codes helped to summarise the statements and resulted in codes describing activities or places or feelings of safety. Codes such as 'just for fun', 'risk', or 'constraint', were assigned to each of the statements.

Reading and interpreting the journal entries of my participants was challenging, but by moving the coded statements of my participants into categories, I was be able to gain a better understanding of the children's lived experiences "...using more than intuition" (Attride-Stirling; 2001, 402). The process of identifying the themes was on-going and fluid until I reached a set of themes and sub-themes I felt best described the experiences of participants and which represented the research questions. With the first round of analysis, I identified a large number of possible themes. The ideas and categories were refined, sorted, and combined as I worked through multiple rounds of reading and analysis (Attride-Stirling, 2001). Through discussion with my thesis advisor, I settled on three major themes that form the basis of the thesis research findings.

In addition to activity journals, responses to the group discussion questions gathered during the introduction and participant checking sessions were included in the coding process. Coding these responses occurred in much the same process as did the coding of the activity journals: responses were read multiple times, thought about critically in relation to the research questions, and close attention was paid to the meanings of the words used.

Attride-Stirling argues that this process helps the researcher to grasp the depth of experiences within the "context" of the study (2001, 403). The context in which the research took place is important. While preparing for analysis, thinking about the social context of the

research (e.g., the neighbourhood, the classroom, the household) is important if we are to begin to understand the social reality of participants (Kirby & McKenna, 1989).

The analysis of participant journals began with the photocopying and scanning of the original documents to create both a digital and hardcopy of the data and to allow for the return of journals to participants at the end of the study. Journals were then carefully read multiple times. Each participant and subsequent journal entry was assigned a unique identifier such as this one:

ICS-47-06-06-10 or *SHS-RI-Q1-47.*

Regardless of whether the statement came from the activity journals or the group discussions, the first three initials indicate the participant's school. If the statement originated from the activity journals, the first two numbers indicate the participants identifying number and the last three sets of digits indicate the date of individual entries in a participant's activity journal. If the statement came from the group discussions, the second two initials indicate if the statement came from the research introduction or data validation sessions, the next set of digits indicate which question the statement refers to. Finally, the last set of numbers indicate the statement numeric identifier. By allocating unique identifiers to each journal statement, I am able to refer back and utilise quotations from the journals to illustrate and support key findings of the research. Participant identifiers will continue to be kept secure so as to ensure that participants cannot be identified within final reports, or my written thesis.

Each time I read the activity journals, I considered my research questions and how each participant statement relates to those questions. I also paid close attention to understanding the meanings of the words chosen to better interpret the participants' overall perspective of their own physical activity (Cope, 2000; Patton, 2002). Both manifest and latent content analysis was utilised as the journal and discussion text were analysed (Babbie, 2007). First understanding

what participants were saying on the surface helped to illuminate the deeper meanings of the children's statements, and in turn helped me gain a richer knowledge of the children's experiences in their neighbourhoods.

4.7 – Upholding Rigor

Researcher subjectivity and bias is acknowledged at the beginning of the research process, and this thesis has therefore strived to ensure that interpretations of the data "are determined by the respondents and conditions of the inquiry..." (Lincoln & Guba, 1985 quoted in Baxter & Eyles, 1997, 517) but cannot claim to have had no influence on the interpretation and representation of the lived experiences of participants.

Upholding rigor was a consideration at all stages of this research (Bradshaw & Stratford, 2005). The design of my research incorporated the use of triangulation in the use of multiple sources of data such as quantitative Canadian Census data, as well as GIS and participant journaling to support and uphold findings (Baxter & Eyles, 1997, 514). The use of multiple methods, such as participant journaling, group discussions, GIS analysis, and statements from multiple informants account for two kinds of triangulation. First, authentication of results comes from the agreement between two or more methods (or sources) of gathering research data (Baxter & Eyles, 1997). Second, the use of more than one [individual] report from a dataset is used to support findings or results (Baxter & Eyles; 1997). Participant checking was only feasible at the conclusion of the field portion of the research because students were leaving for summer holidays. For some, the end of the academic year marked the end of their time in elementary school. For that reason, initial findings and interpretations were presented to the students to clarify whether these interpretations accurately reflected and represented the the

views of participating students. The participant checking exercise adds strength and validity to the research (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Finally, in addition to spending time with the research data on my own, I shared my ideas, and the initial generation of themes with my thesis advisor and colleagues to ask questions, discuss ideas and share early findings. This kind of investigator triangulation helps to uphold rigor as data is checked throughout the analysis process (Bradshaw & Stratford, 2005).

While analysing participant journals, similar ideas, perspectives and comments recurred throughout. Discovering that multiple participants shared similar experiences, I was able to apply those statements to support a particular finding. Triangulation increases researcher confidence and a sense of validity in findings (Moran-Ellis et al., 2006). The mixing of methods, called "triangulation", strengthens the credibility of research findings (Baxter & Eyles, 1997).

In addition to triangulation, maintaining rigorous research requires the practice of critical reflection. Critical reflection, or self-evaluation, was exercised throughout this research (England, 1994; Madge et al., 1997; Meth, 2003). I kept a research journal in which I maintained field notes, observations, and thoughts. I also used the journal to document steps in the research design, and record research decisions made. Finally, I also used my field journal to think closely on the happenings at each of the sessions with the participants, including the questions asked, my responses to these questions, and other aspects of my conduct with the students. The act of keeping a research journal helped me to evaluate my position in relation to participants, acknowledge bias and subjectivity, as well as evaluate aspects of rigor and ethics. England encourages social researchers to engage in critical reflexivity throughout the project. Reflexivity "is self-critical sympathetic introspection and the self-conscious analytical scrutiny of the self as researcher" (England, 1994, 82). Being constantly aware of project design and the progression

from fieldwork to write-up is an on-going process "that allows the researcher to be more open to any challenges" (England, 1994, 82) that may emerge during the research process. This reflexive management, as discussed by Bailey, White and Pain (1999) is a practice that should occur throughout the research from project design to interpretation and the writing up of results. Reflexivity also entails an awareness of how the researcher and the methods chosen ultimately influence not only the interpretation of results, but also the raw data that are generated throughout the study (Mays & Pope, 2000).

I chose to check my results with participants through a brief presentation in the classroom and through group discussions as discussed earlier. This was completed with the aid of a large wall map of Prince George, and a question and answer period. Group discussion of questions was designed to elaborate on the original three research questions, and to clarify initial findings. These discussion questions are included in the appendix of the thesis. Furthermore, a written copy of the thesis will be provided to each of the three CIS schools where students, parents, teachers, and principals will have access to the report.

Maintaining rigorous research, participant checking and data validation, fall under the category of credibility. Credible research reflects the researcher's ability to "represent adequately the realities of groups in such a way that not only does the scientific community but also the people who constructed the reality in the first place understand the reconstruction of that reality" (Baxter & Eyles; 1997, 513). Madge et al. echo this idea when they state "that people know as much (probably more) about their lives, and the meanings they live with as do those who attempt to study them" (1997, 106). Therefore we are only strengthening our interpretations by allowing our participants to clarify, correct and verify results.

Finally, transferability or relevance (Mays & Pope, 2000) refers to "the degree to which findings fit within contexts outside the study" (Baxter & Eyles, 1997, 515). Although my thesis did not seek to actively apply results to children in other communities, it acknowledges that the social structures and processes of socio-economic status, neighbourhood and community spatiality, and place effects are not specific or limited to Prince George. Instead, we must understand that individuals are affected by similar social structures and social processes regardless of where they live (Katz, 1994). That is to say, although the research addressed the landscapes of free-play of participating children in Prince George, it is possible that children in other communities face similar spatial and social barriers and circumstances affecting their level of activity.

4.8 – Conclusion

Working with young people has proven to be an exciting and valuable experience for me as a researcher. The participants who chose to take part in the study helped me to learn about and design a research project that addressed the challenges and ethics of working with children. By choosing to work with children of this age, I was able to gain a better understating of how the young participants in the study utilise their neighbourhoods and city resources to be physically active.

The child-centred methodologies used here are necessarily different from those traditionally used when working with adult research subjects. These methods served to magnify the voices of participants, and empower them to participate in the generation of knowledge and potentially influence decision makers. By choosing such methods, I sought to equalise as much as possible the power relationship between myself as researcher and the children in the

classroom. By being open to discussion and questions, I allowed for the contribution and sharing of information and experiences in a way that was non-threatening, and respectful. Rigor was upheld throughout this thesis by taking measures to acknowledge my subjectivity, positionality, and efforts to obtain validity from participants by way of participant checking (Mays & Pope, 2000). Mixing qualitative methods with quantitative, helped to ensure rigor, and also helped to paint a more detailed picture of what the landscape of physical activity and free-play looks like from the children's own viewpoints, and the social and spatial conditions where they play.

Chapter Five: Results and Discussion

> *"If it is our serious purpose to understand the thoughts of a people, the whole analysis of experience must be based on their concepts, not ours" Boas (1943) in Patton (2002, 455).*

5.0 – Introduction

While the journals were not read by teachers, students knew the journals would be collected by their teachers. Being conscious of this, it is possible the students may have refrained from recording of instances where territorial rules were broken, or shared their own true thoughts and feelings about certain aspects of neighbourhood free-play and physical activity. There may also have been other reasons why information was withheld.

As the quote above states, researchers must be careful to allow the voices of participants to inform in the analysis and representation of their experiences. But researchers also must question the information shared. That is, the researcher must ask whether the participants responded to questions in ways that accurately reflect their everyday experiences, or in ways they think the researcher is hoping to hear. Patton suggests "...the possibility always exists that people will behave differently under conditions where an observation or evaluation is taking place than they would if the observer were not present" (2002, 291). Patton's warning reminds researchers to be mindful while conducting analysis and discussing research findings, and prompts researchers to question: what is really going on, and what might have influenced the way participants responded. It is possible the students wrote in their journals feeling they needed to please me in some way. Or perhaps students thought they would be evaluated and responded in ways they felt would earn high marks.

In acknowledging this, I understand that the statements shared with me can only be read as incomplete glances (Clifford, 1986) into the lived experiences of the participants. The findings

discussed here seek to answer the research questions raised at the beginning of the thesis. Included in the chapter are journal statements transcribed verbatim. Excerpts from participant journals and group discussion sessions help to provide context and insight to the issues surrounding the active free-play and independent mobility of study participants in Prince George, BC.

Coding the data for key words and phrases comprised the first stage of the analysis. The most frequently mentioned words and phrases are reported in Table 3. It was clear that being active is very important to participants for many reasons. References to parks, bicycling, organised sports, and walking with friends were among the most common words and phrases. The next group of key words mentioned neighbourhood and friends as features of play, as well as certain impediments (e.g., safety, busyness, distance). Specific safety concerns (e.g., fear, drugs, and alcohol) were only mentioned a few times. These codes helped to further organise and analyse the field data. The second stage of the analysis assigned participant statements a code, which were the basic building blocks of the themes and sub-themes that will be discussed in greater detail below. As part of this discussion, I will be relating thematic findings to relevant literatures in the creative experience of children's play spaces, and the social and familial factors that shape these play experiences and opportunities.

The presentation of results is organized around three main themes and the sub-themes that comprise each of these. The three themes are: Constraints to Play and Independent Mobility, Play for Play's Sake, and the Importance of Neighbourhood. Tables outlining these themes and sub-themes are presented alongside the discussion and engagement with literature to help guide the reader.

Table 3. Key Word / Phrase Analysis

Key Word	Total Times Used
Park/Playground	176
Bike/Biking	128
Organised Sports	114
Walk/Walking	86
Neighbourhood	40
Homework/Busy	38
Friends	30
Safe/Safety	26
Distance/ "Too Far"	15
Kidnapped/Abducted	7
Drugs	2
Alcohol	1

5.1 – Constraints to Play and Independent Mobility

The students participating in this research identified many barriers facing participants. The sub-themes of fear, cost, distance, and time are indeed predictable, as it is presumed that individuals of all ages may contend with the same constraints discussed here. However, these barriers have a particularly limiting effect on children and youth because of restrictions on independent mobility. Because children must negotiate these barriers to access opportunities for organised and free-play, valuable insights can be gleaned from listening to the concerns and perspectives of youth themselves. For example, many participants described how they took part in play despite constraints. In addition, participants discussed ways in which they were not able to be as active as they would like as a result of the constraints discussed below.

Table 4. Theme – Constraints to Play and Independent Mobility

Main Theme	Sub-theme	Description
Constraints to play and independent mobility	Fear	Public space outside immediate neighbourhoods is associated with danger. Children state that parents are fearful of crime activity in public space. Participants are always with a friend(s).
	Cost	In some instances membership and registration fees served as a barrier to accessing fee-for-use resources such as the UNBC gym, pools and sports teams.
	Distance	Independent mobility is limited to local sphere. Participants must rely on parents to access spaces outside immediate neighbourhood.
	Time	Participants and families are highly organised. This organisation limited the time children were able to be active just for fun.

5.1.1 – Fear

Parents are influenced greatly by the media (Valentine, 1997). Feelings of fear and perceptions of safety surrounding the use of public space was discussed in the activity journals and group discussions. While this research did not include interviews with parents, students offered their own ideas of why they thought their parents were afraid of them accessing public space independently. Interestingly, the field portion of the research was conducted after Prince George was designated the most dangerous city in Canada according to MacLean's magazine (MacQueen, 2009).

Children today appear to have less freedom of movement than did their parents or even the generation previous (Tandy, 1999; Kytta, 2004). The public discourse of Stranger Danger (Valentine, 1997; Harden, Backett-Milburn, Scott and Jackson, 2000; Harden, 2000, Carver,

Timperio & Crawford, 2008; Milne, 2009) is indoctrinated in young people beginning at a very young age and plays a role in shaping children's fears while in public. It could be argued that much of the fear of personal crime against children is socially constructed (Harden, 2000) and actual danger is perceived rather than real. Pain (2006, 221) argues that "while violence is most common in the home, fear of stranger danger constrains children's movements and activities in public space at great cost to their autonomy, social interaction and health".

Society portrays children as being in need of protection (Valentine, 1997; Milne, 2009) regardless of real or perceived risk. Geographers such as Valentine (1996), Matthews, Limb and Taylor (1998), Aitken (2001) and Nayak (2003), and Sociologists such as James, Jenks and Prout (1998), have called for scholars and society as a whole to re-evaluate how they view the abilities and competence of children as they participate in the community. Valentine (1997, 70), argues there "is a belief that children are not competent to negotiate space alone because they are unable to understand what danger they might encounter at the hands of strangers and therefore will not take the appropriate avoidance action when confronted by potential abductors". Perhaps there is a disconnect between the view of participants and their parents, as students indicated clearly that they understood potential dangers at neighbourhood parks and how to avoid them. Participants stressed that they played with friends at parks, and left immediately when they felt uncomfortable. Participants may not be equipped to anticipate every potential danger, but they appeared to have a sense of self-awareness, and paid close attention to their surroundings illustrating their ability to manage some risk on their own.

Statements relating to perceptions of safety arose multiple times. When asked about why playspaces were important to them, students commented about the importance of feeling safe, which played a prominent role in influencing how or where they were active. Participants

reported that intimidation by older kids, the presence of the homeless, and worry of being kidnapped were significant fears and deterrents to accessing city parks and playgrounds. Students were clear that they avoided altogether playspaces they thought dangerous or at least mitigated perceived risks by playing with a friend(s).

> One park that my group doesn't like is the skate park because it's not just vandalism garbage and too many older kids, it's because there's violence at the park, and drug abuse and alcohol is served (ICS-DV-Q3-192).

> Because the places could of broke down, other kids are physically abusive... (SHS-DV-Q4-25).

These statements illustrate the concerns of many participants and their feelings of safety. The students voiced their own apprehensions, as evidenced above, about the safety of city parks (Nayak, 2003). Participants never mentioned traffic as a safety issue; rather, they focused on fears of kidnapping, and the intimidation of older youths (Kytta, 2004). In order to mitigate potential danger, participants self-regulated their independent behaviour and activities (Pain, 2006).

The use of parks, especially those with playgrounds, are discussed frequently throughout the activity journals and the group discussions. Participants feel strongly about the importance of parks to their activity. Perceptions of safety among children and parents therefore play a role in whether or not children feel they can access neighbourhood parks for play independently, if at all. All but one student indicated that they are not allowed to access parks outside their neighbourhoods on their own. The children are very aware of the safety concerns of their parents. When asked why parents restrict mobility or park access, participants were quick to mention that their parents were afraid of kidnapping and bullying:

> Safety! Safety! Safety! The buddy system! But there's a lot of people out there that aren't good to children and can take us away (SMS-DV-Q2-130).

> We think our parents want us to be with other people when we play sports because we may get injured, kidnapped, or may get bullied by older kids (SMS-DV-Q2-129).
>
> Because there are creeps out there and you could get hurt (ICS-DV-Q2-178).
>
> Sometimes, my mom doesn't let me go places by myself, because she is very cautious. She is always scared someone will get me. I would really like a pool closer to where I live so I can bike there, all the pools are downtown, so I can barely go there (SHS-08-07-06-10).

The statements shared by students suggest that ideas of children's independent physical activity are influenced by a culture of fear of the outside world, and mistrust in the community, doubts about children's abilities to mitigate potential risks.

Due to the scope and timeline of this research, I was unable to interview the parents of participants. I would have liked to ask them whether or not the views of their children match up to their own perceptions of safety and potential danger. Many of the works by international scholars have found that parents tend to report similar fears and concerns to the ones voiced by the children I spoke with. For example, Veitch, Bagley, Ball, & Salmon (2006) found that parents in Australia restricted their children's free-play activities because of fears of "strangers, teenagers/gangs, and road traffic" (2006, 390). Valentine (1997) suggests that there may be concerns of being labeled a bad or irresponsible parent that contribute to restriction on the freedom of movement of children within a city or neighbourhood. Similar fears of stigmatisation may be at work in Canada.

Not only do children in the study believe that their parents may limit their independent activities based on these kinds of fears, but the children limit their own activities to places deemed safe. Students mention that they feel most safe where they are watched by familiar adults:

> I played soccer at Rotary Fields. I feel safe at the fields because there are so many parents and coaches to watch me... (SMS-46-29-05-10).

While is it important to have a sense of awareness and alertness to one's surroundings, it is unfortunate that perceptions of safety are so prominent, to the point of restricting children at play. As discussed above, freedom of movement is not only restricted for safety reasons by parents, but by the children themselves. Participants shared that their neighbourhoods were considered safe, and independent play only occurred within one's local sphere (Harden, 2000). Although it is beyond the scope of the research to discuss aspects of parenting, the fears of families warrant some attention. While it is understood that the benefits of independent physical activity are many, "what is not well understood is the role parenting has played in children's decrease of independent mobility. Good parenting today often seems to be equated with a high degree of control... there exists a zero-risk culture" (Active Healthy Kids Canada, 2011, 54). The authors go on to say that it is "this philosophy of protection that has led to children being reared in virtual captivity" (2011, 54). Fears about safety should therefore be considered both an impediment to the free-play activities of participants, and a valuable emotion of personal awareness.

5.1.2 – Cost

Geographic literature on the constraints of leisure activities began to appear in the 1980s (Jackson, 1994). This research has largely focused on the "spatial analysis of patterns of leisure and recreation participation" (Jackson, 1994, 111). Studies have shown that the physical activity of adults has been influenced by socioeconomic status and other social factors (Brockman et al., 2009). Cost is considered a structural constraint, and has an effect on the participation in leisure

activities of children as well (Rehman, Campagna, Thompson, Rasmussen & Drosbeck, et al. 2003). At the outset of this research it was expected that financial constraints on families, and therefore participants, would have played a more central role in the children's ability to access leisure opportunities. Instead, statements concerning cost and money only appeared four times throughout the coded data. Three of these statements came from students attending Sacred Heart School, which is located in a Census Dissemination Area with a relatively high concentration of low-income families.

> *[Are there places that you would like to play more often?]* Sports centre at UNBC, Golfing *[What are some of the reasons you can't go to those places as often as you'd like to?]* Prices (SHS-03-19-05-10).

The three CIS schools are located across the city, making the student population economically diverse at first glance. According to the 2006 Statistics Canada Census, St. Mary's School and Sacred Heart School are located in two of the Dissemination Areas which are home to the city's lowest family incomes. However, it was clear from the activity journal data that the majority of the participating students resided in neighbourhoods outside these dissemination areas, and instead commuted to school from neighbourhoods located away from the bowl area. The Westgate, and College Heights neighbourhoods appeared to be represented most frequently. Other than one dissemination area in The Hart, where the highest family incomes are found, Westgate is home to the dissemination area with the second highest family incomes. Neighbourhoods in College Heights are comprised of families with slightly lower incomes, but still much higher than those in the Millar Addition where Sacred Heart is located. Although St. Mary's School is located in the Dissemination Area with the lowest family incomes, Central Fort George, participants from this school did not discuss cost as a constraint to their physical activity, suggesting that perhaps they resided in a different neighbourhood.

During group discussions at the introduction of the research, I asked the students to share with me some of the reasons they are unable to be active at their favourite places as often as they wished. In small groups, the students discussed, and wrote statements such as the one below. Here, these students from Sacred Heart School and Immaculate Conception School list the reasons they feel they cannot access their preferred city resources:

> ...Ice Rinks and Soccer fields *[researcher clarifies that participant indicated that these places are his favourite places in PG]* I can't go there as often as I would like to because you have to be a member and pay (SHS-02-19-05-10).
>
> BMX track, sports centre. Because you need a membership and you have to pay (SHS-RI-Q3-111).
>
> Pool, gym, sports centre - Broke (no money), grounded, parents cheap (ICS-RI-Q3-72).

The City of Prince George offers two programs to families who fall under the Statistics Canada Low Income Cut Off (LICO). The City of Prince George Leisure Access Program allows qualifying individuals forty free swim passes and 75% off the cost of registered programs. Kidsport is a provincial program with a chapter in Prince George. Again this program works with families who fall under the LICO designation, and assists with organised sport registration fees for children up to the age of 18. Both Provincial and Federal programs exist to assist those lower-income families who wish to enroll their children in Organised programs. The Children's Fitness Tax Credit was introduced in 2007. This tax credit is applied to membership costs of up to $500 per child. Unfortunately, parents in the lowest income quartile were less aware and less likely to claim the tax credit than other income groups, suggesting that the tax credit may be underachieving in the most vulnerable income group it was originally designed to help (Active Healthy Kids; 2011). There are funds and programs available for families, but as reported by

Active Healthy Kids, it is unclear whether or not families of participants have knowledge of these opportunities or know how to access them.

5.1.3 – Distance

Many of the students voiced concerns about spatial constraints on their leisure activities. The issue of distance is closely tied to issues of fear and safety, as well as the limited independent mobility which participants are permitted. Not surprisingly, this constraint seemed to affect those participants living farther away from the bowl/downtown areas.

The problem of distance emerged as a clear constraint for participants. All but one participant were not permitted independent use outside of their immediate neighbourhood. The only student allowed to access parks outside the local environment attended Sacred Heart School in the Millar Addition neighbourhood. Students are heavily reliant on their parents for transportation to and from sporting activities, friends' homes, and play spaces in other parts of the city. Parents were therefore noteworthy influences on the physical activities of their children (Thompson, Reman, & Humbert, 2005). In nearly every activity journal, participants wrote statements which illustrated their desire to go to parks or resources away from their home neighbourhoods. When asked why they do not go there more often, distance was a key factor in determining access. Another key factor to access was time constraints. Being busy with homework, family obligations were common, but were not nearly as prominent as time spent participating in organised sports. These constraints will be discussed in the next section.

The majority of participants reside away from the downtown area. The distance from these outlying neighbourhoods to resources is problematic for participants. Participants want to access distant resources but, at the same time, were fearful of leaving their neighbourhoods. This theme

is closely related to the fears of both participants and their parents, therefore restricting independent access to far away resources was common. The statements below illustrate how distance is a constraining factor:

> Yes there are other reasons that I am not that active is because of the distance to the park and I do not like going by myself (ICS-DV-Q4-32).
>
> Swimming - not enough time, money you may not live in that area (distance) (SMS-RI-Q3-19).
>
> The lake, trails, parks (for pineview) We don't go there as often because: too far, being busy, don't have equipment (SHS-RI-Q3-09).
>
> They [parents] could be busy, their parent's wouldn't allow them to let them go their (SMS-DV-Q4-66).

Destination parks (City of Prince George website, 2011), such as Forests for the World, Cottonwood Island Park, and Fort George Park were discussed frequently throughout the activity journals and group discussions:

> Places I want to go more often is Fort George Park but I can't because it's too far from my home (ICS-25-26-05-10).
>
> I would like to go to the University Trails more often, some reasons that I just don't have the time, and I have to drive there (ICS-RI-Q3-36).
>
> We would enjoy going to Ft. George Park more because it's big and open but it's pretty far away and not enough time after school (ICS-RI-Q3-41).

One student from Immaculate Conception School suggested "[o]ne improvement to Prince George could be to make a Forests For the World type thing in the middle of P.G." (ICS-25-25-05-10). Participants were clear that these parks are important to their physical free-play activities and are generally only accessed when families make a special trip, or are in the area for another purpose. Special trips to destination parks usually occurred on weekends.

Students appeared to accept the restrictions placed upon them by parents, but still wanted greater access. Within the activity journals, participants did not ask to go to other neighbourhoods independently. Nor did they write of disobeying their parent's rules. Rather, their words conveyed a sense of disappointment at the lack of access, and their reliance on parents to take them. Because this reality is vastly different than my own, I had a difficult time relating to the students (I was permitted to travel a large distance independently at a younger age). I understand, as stated at the beginning of this chapter, that it is unlikely that participants would write about instances where they broke the rules and therefore risk punishment or consequence. However, only one of the participants entertained the idea of leaving their neighbourhood independently. If the participants had represented an older age group, I believe the statements provided regarding distance (where it would have been much less of a constraint and perhaps a non-issue) and the context of the research itself would have been very different. For example, research with teen participants, may instead focus on how they navigate the city using the public transportation system, and the constraints they may face and consequently navigate, in terms of time and adhering to curfews.

Distance as a constraining factor in free-play is inherently linked to the issue of autonomous mobility, or the lack of it. At times I wondered if independent travel is so far removed from participant's realities that they believe they do not have the ability to navigate from their homes to a distant play space. Further research might focus on city planning and public transit systems. Perhaps it is the sprawling nature of our city, and the heavy reliance on vehicles that fuels hesitation to allow children to explore the city on their own. If children do not have the opportunity to navigate their city, how will participants gain necessary spatial skills needed to travel outside familiar territory?

5.1.4 – Time Constraints

Family life was shown to have a key influence on the activities of the participants. Many studies have recognised that family can both encourage and constrain the participation of children and youth (Shaw, 2001; Rehman et al., 2003; Brockman et al., 2009; Jeanes, 2010; Active Healthy Kids Canada, 2011). Each of the participants wrote of barriers to taking part in independent free-play activities. The students discussed time conflicts with their sibling's activities, and school responsibilities were among the most frequently mentioned (Thompson, Rehman, & Humbert, 2005). However, participation in organised sports was by far reported as the largest barrier to the students' participation in independent free-play, or just – for – fun activities.

Participation on organised sports teams dominated journal entries with 114 references (see Table 3). There is no question that the participants are highly active. Twenty-eight of the forty-seven participants mentioned, at least once, competing in organised sport activities. More than half the total participants, nearly sixty percent, are enrolled in organised sports activities. The table below indicates the levels of organised sport participation by each participating school.

Table 5. Proportion of Organised Sports Participants

School	Organised Sports. Participants	Study Total Participants	Percentage %
ICS	17	27	62
SMS	8	12	66
SHS	3	8	37
Total	**28**	**47**	**59.5**

Source: Activity Journals (field research, 2010).

The journals of participants in organised sports were filled with entries regarding practice and game schedules. During the research conclusion session, students were asked to clarify their feelings regarding involvement in organised sport and its affect on unorganised free-play activities. Many of the participants felt that organised sport involvement did not hinder their

play time, or just – for – fun activities, because they were having fun playing soccer, or baseball, or swimming. However, there was some concern voiced throughout the journal entries and discussions that the involvement in organised sports took up so much of their time. Many of the participants felt that they were too busy being on a team to play with their friends:

> I would like to go to the park more because I have one behind my house and in front of my house but with Swimming 6 days a week... sometimes I don't have time... Me and my friend try to go bike riding on the weekend but homework and family activities sometimes limit that (ICS-41-20-05-10).
>
> Yes, I swim 6 days a week, eccept for Sunday. It's really hard to get homework done and hang out with friends. They hang out and ask me but I have to say 'no, sorry I have swimming to comite to' (ICS-DV-Q1-08).
>
> Yes, because we don't have time to do anything else because your on a schedule and after your sport your too tired (SMS-DV-Q1-32).
>
> Yes because we don't have enough time to (SMS-DV-Q1-41).
>
> ...but if we were on a team... We would have limited time to go to parks or ride our bikes (SHS-DV-Q1-18).

These statements are just some of the many that arose. One boy mentioned that he had two games in one day and had to change in the car as they drove from the soccer fields to the baseball diamond (activity journal data, 2010). The organised activities of participants are limiting the time they are able to spend engaging in unstructured play activities that are so valuable to childhood and life skill development.

It could also be argued that parents enroll their children in numerous activities in an attempt to gather up and build skill sets which will somehow enable them to succeed in future endeavours such as educational pursuits and future careers (Doherty, 2003). The over-scheduling of children is an emerging field of study in the discipline of Psychology. A University of Minnesota study by Doherty (2003) found that children between the ages of

three and twelve lost an average of twelve hours a week in free-time in the last two decades. As discussed earlier, free-play is an integral aspect of child and youth development. L'Abate argues that play is a "necessity equal to any other educational activity" (2009, 140). There is so much emphasis on academic success and preparedness for adulthood, that parenting is becoming competitive (Elkins, 2010). Both Doherty and Elkins argue that parents struggle with feelings of fear, and a belief that by keeping children busy they will "stay out of trouble" (Doherty, 2003). Also, there is a sense of obligation to provide as many opportunities as possible for their children to succeed later in life (Elkins, 2010). "[T]he adult world of hypercompetition and marketplace values has invaded the family... we are raising our children in a culture that defines a good parent as an opportunity provider in a competitive world" (Doherty, 2003). While the present research did not include parents of participants, it could be argued that parents are facing the same 'peer pressures' and stigmas as their counterparts in Doherty's study.

In addition to participation in organised activities, the free-play of students was also heavily influenced by the activities of siblings and family circumstances (Thompson, Rehman, & Hubert, 2005). Families are busy. Now more than ever, families operate on a highly scheduled timetable, where one parent is often driving one child to swimming, the other is picking up a sibling from soccer practice, then supper, then homework, and finally, bedtime. Although analysis of family structure is beyond the scope of this research, it is anticipated that not only would busy schedules influence physical activities, but perhaps families headed by a single parent might also have a challenging time (Jeanes, 2010). The participants in this research discussed some family related constraints to their leisure throughout their journals:

> Soccer is an organized sport I play. On mondays and Saturdays I play at the Rotary fields and on Thursdays I have a practice at Lakewood school. My mom couldn't get me a ride and thought that my little brother's soccer was at 6:30 pm and my practice was at 6:00 pm. My ___ is the coach of my brother's team, but she read the wrong schedule because all of us 4 children play soccer. My brother's game was actually at 5:30 to 6:30 pm (ICS-43-27-05-10).
>
> Didn't do any exercise because I was babysitting my brother (SMS-46-04-06-10).
>
> I didn't really go anywhere today where I was physically active because I had a science project to work on and I had lots of homework on top of that (SMS-12-09-06-10).
>
> I didn't do anything, but I wish I got to play soccer at the fields. I couldn't because I was working on a project with Julie (*name changed by researcher)*(ICS-22-24-05-10).
>
> I didn't do any physical activity because I had to babysit my 3 other siblings while doing homework all night... (ICS-43-26-05-10).
>
> I wasn't active today because I had a lot of homework to do and my parents had to work (SMS-14-25-05-10).

Family circumstances and organised sports involvement affected students from all three of the participating schools. The fact that family circumstances are influential aspects of free-play for participants may be related to the student's ages, and their lack or independent mobility. Because participants are unable to move across neighbourhoods on their own coupled with a lack of walkability in newer neighbourhoods, they are heavily reliant on parents for transportation. Therefore, participants must wait for parents to attend to work responsibilities, as well as the commitments of their other children.

5.2 – Play for Plays' Sake

This theme and its sub-themes address the importance of engaging in active play because it is fun. Here, the participants are using their neighbourhoods independently. They were not concerned with gaining health benefits. They discussed playing with their friends and their

families. Another important aspect of neighbourhood play relates to the use of bicycles. As discussed below, bicycles allow for a greater sense of freedom to explore territories. Not only does bicycle use increase independent mobility, children who ride bikes have the opportunity to practice way-finding skills and add to their feelings of independence.

Table 6. Theme – Play for Plays' Sake

Main Theme	Sub-theme	Description
Play for play's sake	Free -play	Participants use their neighbourhoods simply to have fun with their friends. Activities are unorganised and casual. Activities include bike riding, street hockey, playground use, walking, tag, etc.
	Bicycles	For nearly all participants, their bicycles played a significant role in their free-play activities

5.2.1 – Free-play

Within the disciplines of psychology, sociology, and others, the term *play* is a controversial, and some suggest impossible, word to define (Pellegrini, 2009). A more detailed discussion of play and the philosophies that surround play behaviour can be found in the literature review. Focusing too much on the details of individual instances of play behaviour, such as particular games of tag, only serves to complicate, and lose sight of, the idea that neighbourhood is valuable for facilitating play in the participant's everyday lives. Instead, the play activities of participants are examined only insofar as they encompass neighbourhood experiences and the delight of childhood.

Manning (1998) suggests children aged ten to twelve years begin to seek play opportunities away from adult supervisors. This typically brings them into the outdoor or neighbourhood environment and, preferably, outside the field of view of their parents. As discussed earlier, engaging in unsupervised play activities is sometimes a challenge for young people, and can be in conflict with the mobility restrictions faced by participants.

At the beginning of the research, students were asked why they thought physical activity was important, and they responded with comments such as this one:

> We feel that it is important to have physical activity in PG because it keeps us fit (SMS-RI-Q1-07).

Other comments mentioned healthy weights, and heart attack prevention. During the research introductory group discussion, it became very clear that participants understood the health benefits of physical activity. However, when discussing aspects of their play in the activity journals, very few participants wrote of engaging in unorganised free-play for any other purpose than because it was fun. While it is widely acknowledged that there are many benefits of physical play for health and development (Veitch, Bagley, Ball & Salmon, 2006), participants appeared to be more interested in sharing statements that illustrated the fun and enjoyment they were experiencing while they were being active. Thompson, Rehman and Humbert argue: "[a]t this age, most children [do] not choose to be active in their leisure time because of health benefits or long-term outcomes. Rather it [is] simply their way of life" (2005, 429). The physical exercise that participants gained from outdoor free-play was acknowledged in activity journals, but only after fun aspects of the activities were discussed. For example, this participant from ICS wrote:

> I took Zeus, my dog on a huge walk we went down Brentwood, onton, Bellamy, then back up brentwood... It was fun and we jogged a lot of it so my heart was beating so fast (ICS-43-28-05-10).

In only a few instances did participants write about the health benefits of play. Here is an example of a participant engaging in leisure activity specifically for health and fitness:

> ...When I got home I did 50 push ups and 50 sit ups in my living room (ICS-39-24-05-10).

However, participants did discuss practicing for their organised sport on their own time (e.g., kicking a soccer ball). When practice for sport occurred, they largely practiced with their parents and siblings rather than with friends.

The research found that participants are using their neighbourhoods for free-play in a variety of ways; biking, street hockey, soccer, tag-on-the-playground, and dog walking are just a few of the activities participants took part in during the research. These activities are not out of the norm for children of this age group. However, the quotes demonstrate that participants are using their neighbourhood resources as fully as possible:

> After School I went on this piece of jungle gym outside we call it the spider. I was jumping off the spider and climbing on the bars of it (SHS-05-_-_-_).

> I went to the neighbourhood park (fort St. John st.) and used the swings for an hour or so. It is within close walking distance from everybody on my street (ICS-24-04-06-10).

> Today I went to a park by South Fort George School, I went with 2 friends and we played Basketball and ran around in the field. After that me and Laura walked back to my house (SHS-06-23-05-10) *name changed by researcher.*

When participants engage in unsupervised neighbourhood play, they take part in an activity that is organised by their peers (Manning, 1998) and that take place on neighbourhood streets and parks. Parks were mentioned on a daily basis. In fact, through key word analysis, it was found that the words park and or playground were used 176 times throughout the journals

and discussion questions (see Table 3.). Because "park" was used so frequently to describe neighbourhood activities, it is clearly important to participant's free-play activities. Parks serve as the locations for free-play activities such as the ones mentioned above, they are practice fields, and they are meeting places. Neighbourhood parks were discussed in both positive and negative terms throughout the research.

Although I have been discussing instances of independent free-play among participants, it is important to acknowledge that much of the unorganised neighbourhood play included adult family members. Parents participated with their children and children's friends in activities such as bicycle riding, playground games, and games of soccer. Family leisure activities allow parents to act as positive role models of physical activity and healthy living (Shaw & Dawson, 2001; Zabriskie & McCormic, 2003; Jeanes, 2010). Family leisure also helps to build and strengthen family relationships. Participants never spoke of parent participation negatively:

> I went on a bike ride to Peden Hill Park with my dad and sister. When we got there, we played on the equipment. We go there often because it's close to my grandma's house (ICS-40-25-05-10).
>
> This morning I went for a 20 min bike ride with my brother and dad. We went around our neighbourhood (foothills) (SMS-09-30-05-10).
>
> Today after dinner me and my gurdians family went outside in street to ride a bike. It was so much fun, Actually I can't ride a 2 wheels bike I can now. Because I practice and practice. I ride a bike for 1 hour 45 minetes with my gurdians [sic] son (SMS-15-24-05-10).
>
> I was playing Botchy with my family (SHS-02-19-05-10).
>
> Today I didn't have any soccer but I did go for a bike ride with my friend around CHSS. Her parents jogged and her and her sister biked with me. Her dogs ran with her parents (ICS-32-27-05-10)!

According to the participants, parents and guardians played a noteworthy role in the participation of their children. Participants wrote of the supportive roles of adults in the form of

fellow players, providers of transportation, as well as through financial support. However, participants also discussed the ways in which family dynamics constrained their leisure time. This will be discussed later in this chapter (Rehman et al., 2003; Thompson, Rehman, & Hubert, 2005).

5.2.2 – Bicycles

Bicycles are an important aspect of childhood independent mobility and free-play. Although issues of gender difference are not the focus of this research, it is important to acknowledge that bicycles were discussed by nearly every male participant in this study. Conversely, walking with friends appeared in nearly all the activity journals written by female participants, and not in those journals belonging to male participants. Bicycles played an important role in the mobility and leisure activities of participating students at St. Mary's School and Immaculate Conception School. Students from Sacred Heart School did not discuss the use of bicycles as often. It is worthwhile to mention here, that Sacred Heart School, and indeed the residential neighbourhood of many of its students, are located near the downtown core of Prince George. The potential safety concerns of the downtown location may account for fewer students participating in bicycle riding activities. Because the bicycle is such a prolific symbol of independent mobility, I chose to explore this aspect of the data. Using content analysis (see Table 3.), there were 128 references to bicycles. The students used their bicycles to travel to-and-from neighbourhood parks and along the streets in their local neighbourhood (Tandy, 1999; Rasmussen & Smidt, 2003).

I have been arguing that the general freedom of participants is limited to local neighbourhoods. Bicycles allow children to take advantage of their allotted territory to the fullest

extent. The bicycle offers students the ability to travel faster and farther away from home: "[f]or decades, bicycles have provided an efficient means for children to move around their neighbourhoods, to investigate and to learn through experience in the urban environment" (Tandy, 1999, 156). By using their bicycles, the participants are practicing necessary wayfinding skills such as route finding and navigation within their neighbourhoods. Many of the students recorded in their journals the routes they cycled with their friends. The statements suggest their enthusiasm for neighbourhood biking:

> Today I went Biking to Bear Meadows, BMX Biking place with really awesome jumps with big gaps (ICS-33-26-05-10).
>
> ...then we went for a bike ride around our street. The bike ride was about 15 min. For our bike ride we went around Queens Cres. And Gladstone 10 times.... We stayed in our neighbourhood (ICS-43-26-05-10).
>
> Scootering with my family in our subdivision... my brother rode his bike and we both wore helmets. I like going in my neighbourhood because it is very quiet (SMS-46-30-05-10).
>
> This morning I went for a 20 min bike ride with my brother and dad. We went around our neighbourhood (foothills). Later in the day I went to a one hour bike ride with my friend, He biked to my house and went around the neighbourhood... (SMS-09-30-05-10).

As illustrated by the statements above, bicycles allow students to explore their territory, meet with neighbourhood friends and increase their sense of independence.

5.3 – The Importance of Neighbourhood

As discussed below, the neighbourhood is fundamental to the independent physical free-play of participants. The local neighbourhood of participants shapes the extent to which the children are able to move independently and learn about their environment. This theme explores the idea of public and private spaces, and how the participants' neighbourhoods falls somewhere

in between these two domains. The theme also focuses on how individual neighbourhoods are used and explored autonomously by participants.

Table 7. Theme – The Importance of Neighbourhood

Theme	Sub-theme	Description
The Importance of Neighbourhood	Neighbourhood Exploration	Though some participants discussed activities with family, this theme is concerned with those activities undertaken without adult supervision.
	Autonomous Mobility	Participants permitted unsupervised access to their immediate Neighbourhood. Public locations outside local neighbourhood remain off-limits to independent access.

5.3.1 – Neighbourhood Exploration

Many factors influence the free-play activity of children, including over-scheduling, safety concerns, traffic, distance from home and other issues (Veitch, Salmon & Ball, 2008). These personal and social forces combine to form barriers that hinder children from participating as fully as they might like. Despite these factors, it is clear from the activity journals and group discussions that participants are very active in supervised and unsupervised situations, and their immediate neighbourhoods are important contributors to independent free-play and mobility (Carver, Timperio, & Crawford, 2008). Participants reported on the many ways they utilize their neighbourhood streets with their friends and made use of resources as much as possible. Participants were enthusiastic and eager to share experiences of how they used their neighbourhood to play. Students took part in activities such as playground games, bike riding, and road hockey among others. As part of the local sphere of public space, neighbourhoods offer

participants a sense of safety and community. Local neighbourhoods are necessary for children for a variety of reasons. Although freedom is limited, these residential areas provide a locale within public space where participants are allowed to exercise some degree of autonomy. Participants discussed activities that took them to parks, into forested areas, and along trails. They wrote of games of tag and long bike rides separate from supervision and clearly made their own decisions about where they went and what they did:

> Me and my sister went to the Park. At Southridge, we played grounders and did tricks then we played kung fu (ICS-30-05-10).

Social networks play an important role in determining how active participants are or are not.

> Today I went to a park by South Fort George School, I went with 2 friends and we played Basketball and ran around in the field. After that me and Julie walked back to my house (SHS-06-23-05-10). *name changed by researcher.*

Whether it is clear to participants or not, their neighbourhoods serve as an opportunity not only to make sense of the place in which they live and play (Matthews, 1992), but also to grow and develop "social identities in relation to their peers and other members of society" (Hopkins, 2011, 30).

It may not seem remarkable that participants are using their neighbourhoods to ride bicycles and kick soccer balls. Consider, however, the importance of these activities to the learning that occurs below the surface while engaging with and exploring neighbourhood environments. Scholars such as Hart (1979), Aitken (1994) and others are interested in children's environmental learning, navigation of public space, and use of space in ways other than intended by adults. The way participants are using their neighbourhood streets teaches them valuable skills they will need now and later in life. Environmental knowledge, or wayfinding for example, develops gradually with practice (Hart, 1979). The play activities participants engage in enables

them to recognize landmarks, and understand the connecting paths and routes between them (Aitken, 1994). In this way, participants are getting to know their neighbourhood spaces by "making journeys through" them (Halseth & Doddridge, 2000, 567).

Many students described the routes they took while on walks or bike rides. Often these statements noted specific streets within the neighbourhood and recounted specific landmarks:

> today after school I went with my friend and walked with her and my two dogs all around college heights. Like: St. Patrick, St. Mary, St. Lawrence, St. Mark, St. Kevin and South ridge (ICS-38-25-0-10).
>
> I went for a jog around westgate and past IC for an hour... Went for a walk with my dogs for an hour around westgate (ICS-39-26-05-10).

There are many more statements such as the ones above, and it is clear that informants are comfortable to navigate within the confines of their own neighbourhoods. From the beginning of the field work, the participants possessed basic map reading abilities. They were able to locate landmarks, identify favourite playspaces throughout the city, as well as their own neighbourhoods on the wall map presented at the beginning and conclusion of the research (Stea, Pinon, Middlebrook, Eckert & Blaut, 2011).

The statements in the activity journals, as well as observations made during the group discussion sessions, indicate that children have greater spatial ability than is assumed by adult supervisors and, admittedly, the researcher. Although one aspect of environmental learning involves the ability to travel along familiar streets between landmarks or nodes (Aitken, 1994) such as home, school, a friend's house or the park, it is also about "understanding social and cultural information" (Aitken, 1994, 63). While permission to travel around the city autonomously is not typically granted to children of this age, this should not necessarily suggest that children are incapable of negotiating spaces outside their familiar territory.

The activity journals not only indicated favourite neighbourhood activities such as those listed above, but they also suggested that participants feel strongly about the quality of neighbourhood resources. Students discussed positive aspects of park attributes such as wide open spaces, and areas good for exploration, but they also discussed their dissatisfaction with park characteristics and maintenance. Because neighbourhood parks are a key part of a participant's territory, feelings regarding these city park and neighbourhood resources are valuable and should be taken into account by decision makers. Neighbourhood parks are used daily for a variety of activities, such as running in the open spaces parks provide, biking, and using the play structures (McCormack, Rock, Toohey & Hignell, 2010).

Often times, there were complaints regarding unsuitable playground equipment, garbage, and vandalism. These aspects of neighbourhood parks served as a deterrent to park use, and added to concerns about safety and overall disapproval (Morrow, 2003; Veitch, Bagley, Ball & Salmon, 2006), as illustrated in the following quotations from participants:

> I was playing on the playground at foothills school. The playground was clean but on the slide there were some swear words and words that were making fun of someone. I didn't think that was very nice because little kids play there and then they're going to read that mean stuff (SMS-14-31-05-10).
>
> The parks are small, boring and vandalised!! (SMS-DV-Q5-71).
>
> I wish i could go to parks more but I can't because they are vandalized and people do drugs at parks (SHS-RI-Q3-10).
>
> ...borrring! Too many parks are boring with only three pieces of equipment! (SMS-DV-Q3-139).
>
> ...because the playground are all too little for your age to play on we need stuff for us (SMS-DV-Q3-143).
>
> I think the big problem with parks is that they are too far away from my house and there is usually a lot of garbage there (ICS-DV-Q3-193).

The participants were eager to suggest ways the City could improve parks, such as installing playground equipment more suitable to older children, cleaning up the graffiti, the garbage, and improving sidewalks were among the many suggestions. One student even suggested installing surveillance cameras.

Adults complain about poor roads and snow removal, because those things are important to how they go about their everyday lives. The participants in this research discussed aspects of their neighbourhoods that influence their everyday lives and are meaningful to them. Unfortunately, unlike their parents, these ten-to-twelve-year-old students are generally denied access to city officials to address these issues on their own. Although these citizens are too young to vote, it is important to take their thoughts and feelings into consideration. The neighbourhoods the participants use and belong to are clearly instilled with meaning in relation to what is important to their lives and experience as a child in Prince George (Hart, 1979; Aitken, 1994). Because participants are so limited in their ability to travel independently outside their immediate neighbourhoods to access parks and playgrounds more to their liking, local playspaces and City resources are important.

The state of disrepair of neighbourhood parks plays an important role as to whether or not informants will use neighbourhood resources for their physical activity and independent free play. These issues arose many times in the journals and were key determinants as to whether the park was used with satisfaction if at all. Other reasons parks were not utilised fully include feelings of fear, and perceived danger.

5.3.2 – Autonomous Mobility Outside the Local Neighbourhood

The independent or autonomous mobility of children is described as the "freedom kids have to move in their neighbourhood or city without adult supervision" (Active Healthy Kids Canada, 2011, 53). Children are often viewed by parents as vulnerable, potential victims, and public space is often equated by parents as potentially dangerous space for children (Matthews, Limb & Taylor, 2000). For participants, there are clear boundaries that delineate accessible and inaccessible territory. Participants are granted capacity to make decisions about where they play and move independently throughout their neighbourhood. Neighbourhood parks and the local streets are just far enough away from direct supervision to allow children some freedom, but at the same time close enough to the security of the home that parents and children may hold on to their sense of safety.

The students who participated in the research ranged in age from approximately ten to twelve years. It is at this age that children are generally permitted to travel greater distances from home independently or with peer groups (O'Brien, Jones, Sloan, & Rustin, 2000; Elsley, 2004; Veitch, Salmon & Ball, 2008). Participating students did not state that they travel on their own to play with friends in other neighbourhoods. While children of this age are gradually allowed greater levels of independence, many scholars argue that children have generally experienced a diminishing capacity to navigate their cities and neighbourhoods independently over the last few decades (O'Brien, Jones & Rustin, 2009).

When asked if participants would like to go to other neighbourhoods on their own, many responded that no, citing they would "like to be safe" (SHS-05-_-_-_*participant did not indicate date in journal entries).* This statement suggests that the safety fears of parents have become the fears of children. At the same time that participants want to access playspaces outside their

neighbourhood independently, they appear to share similar fears to their parents, and therefore self-restrict their own mobility.

Although one participant mentioned that it would be possible to go to another neighbourhood on his own, none of the participants discussed actually traveling between neighbourhoods by themselves. The only references to independent mobility came in relation to participants' regular (local) neighbourhood activities. These included riding bikes, going to local parks, and walking with friends. When asked about why they could not access destination parks or other resources more often, the reasons offered related to distance, and the reliance on parents to drive them. The lack of allowance for independent mobility and perceptions of safety serve as a barrier to free-play in most cases.

When measuring children's independent mobility, "territorial range" is used to describe "the geographical distance from children's home[s] to places where [they] are allowed to wander when playing and socializing" (Kytta, 2004, 180). Only one participant from Sacred Heart School, located in the Millar Addition neighbourhood, indicated that he was able to travel to other neighbourhoods by himself. Through analysis of the statements regarding biking and walking routes, the participants have a clear idea of "spatial ranges" or "territorial limits" (Thompson & Philo, 2004, 118). A question for future research is whether or not students of the same age, given the opportunity, and tools such as maps and clear instructions, have the willingness to journey through public space outside their regular territory (Malone, 2007). Addressing the fears and sense of mistrust associated with public space is where efforts will need to be focused.

Children's access to public space is much more limited than most other citizens. It is clear from reading activity journals, and discussing these issues with participants directly, that

neighbourhood public space is important, not only for physical activity, but also for the wayfinding that occurs when children move freely through the local neighbourhood and further into unfamiliar space of the city. Aitken (1994) stresses the ability to navigate one's environment is learned in steps and stages, beginning when children are fairly young. Scholars such as Valentine (1997) and Aitken (1994) suggest that adults have viewed children as constantly at risk in public space, incapable of making their own decisions to manage that risk. It is for this reason that autonomous mobility is so restricted or outright denied to children.

There exists a continuum when thinking about the geographies of public and private space. The "local sphere", must also be considered (Harden, 2000, 44) when understanding how children are using their cities and neighbourhoods for physical activity. Hunter (1995) describes the local sphere as the space *between* the public realm of the city and private domain of the home. For the purposes of this study, local spheres reflect spaces in close proximity to the home and represent, spatially, children's own neighbourhoods, as well as those of their friends which are therefore not always contiguous. Here, private and local spaces are considered safe, and public spaces are thought to be risky. Although neighbourhoods are in fact public space, they feel safe, familiar, and are therefore considered not public at all. Local neighbourhoods are conceptualised as private pockets of space throughout the city. Citizens are largely familiar with who their neighbours are, and aware when neighbourhood outsiders are present.

It is important to maintain the sense of safety that accompanies the local neighbourhood streets in order to continue to promote activity in, and sustain the degree of freedom and control over how children move through, the public space of their own neighbourhoods. At the same time, it is important not to overly associate public spaces outside the local sphere with images of danger which promote mostly unjustified feelings of fear. Independently navigating spaces

outside the local sphere teaches children valuable life skills, instils a sense of confidence, and broadens children's life experiences (Matthews, Limb & Taylor, 2000). Because of parental fears and concerns of safety, children of today's generation have been assigned, or relegated, to specific spaces such as the streets surrounding their homes, backyards or organised sports fields (Malone, 2007), and are therefore prevented from accessing public spaces that fall outside familiar territory.

5.4 – Conclusion

I acknowledged at the beginning of this chapter that the results did not match those I anticipated at the outset of this research. Although cost was found to be a barrier to free-play, I expected socio-economic factors to play a far greater role in the activity levels of the participants. Instead, the participants have shared with me their experiences, thoughts and feelings about neighbourhood, free-play, organised activities, and independent mobility. The statements shared in this chapter reflect the research questions, illustrating how local neighbourhoods influence the free-play of participating children, and how they are used by each of the participants in the study.

In the reporting of the findings, as well as the analysis of the activity journals and group discussions, I have focused on giving weight to the statements of the participants as much as possible by utilising quotations transcribed precisely as they were written in their journals. While I acknowledge that it is impossible to separate myself as researcher entirely from the analysis (e.g., I have reflected upon my own childhood while writing this chapter), I believe that, by providing as much space as possible for the participants' voices throughout the work, their voices are heard more clearly (Kirby & McKenna, 1989) throughout the analysis.

Participants in this study are very active. While they may face some constraints to their independent leisure time, the students used their neighbourhoods in a variety of ways, both independently and with their families. It is clear from the research that the students value city resources such as public neighbourhood streets, parks and playgrounds. These resources are important to the free-play of participants in that they provided a place of exploration, socialisation, and active play. It was also found through the research that the state of disrepair and, feelings safety were important factors for participants, and influenced whether or not the students would use city resources. Statements containing feelings of fear therefore were prevalent when discussing the access of resources independently.

The independent mobility of participants was limited to the local neighbourhood, immediately surrounding participants' residences or those of playmates. However, the participating students used their allotted territory as fully as possible. This was demonstrated by the detailed route descriptions provided throughout the activity journals. As mentioned earlier, only one of the forty-seven participants was permitted to travel independently across neighbourhoods for free-play. These findings are telling of the landscape experienced by children of this generation (Valentine, 1997; Aitken, 1994; Matthews, Limb & Taylor, 2000; Kytta, 2004; Malone, 2007). Instead of being viewed as competent, able, risk managers, children are protected from any degree of risk (Active Healthy Kids, 2011). It is here where my own memories of childhood differed so greatly. Where these students were only permitted to travel a few blocks, I was allowed access to upwards of fifteen blocks at the same age, and even use public transportation on my own. While I feel that these participants would be capable of navigating their city, I believe dominant parenting styles of today prevent participants from being more independently mobile until they are much older.

Participants faced barriers to free-play from a variety of areas. Fear, lack of independent mobility, cost, and distance were all discussed throughout the journals, but involvement in organised sports and time conflicts with family responsibilities were most frequently mentioned.

As discussed above, the participants are highly active. I do not question that they are meeting the recommended daily amounts of activity for their age group. However, participants did share that the amount of time spent in organised activities did in fact hinder or limit the quantity of time they spent being active in just – for – fun activities. Many of the participants shared their disappointment in not having enough time with their friends.

Finally, the physical free-play activities of participants are influenced by much more than simply the local neighbourhood. Free-play is influenced by spatial / temporal constraints, a familial and societal emphasis on competition and organised activities. The parental influence is significant at an age in which youth typically begin to assert independence. The themes and sub-themes discussed here only reflect some of the possible areas for research. The research demonstrates that participating children face complex and interconnected issues that hinder their ability to access free-play opportunities and attain greater independence as they transition into adolescence.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

"I propose we leave math to the machines and go play outside"
(Calvin to Hobbes, Bill Watterson)

6.0 – Introduction

The landscapes of children's physical activity are vastly different than when I was a child in Victoria, BC. As discussed throughout the thesis, a growing number of researchers have added to the literature surrounding the landscape of play. The health concerns among children and youth continue to grow across Canada (AHKC, 2011). Therefore, emphasis on building healthy habits and educating children on the importance of physical activity has become part of the school system curriculum in British Columbia, and indeed across the country. This thesis, while acknowledging the importance of being active for health, focuses on being active for fun and becoming independent. Physical activity, whether for fun or fitness, helps children and youth stay healthy, learn important life skills, and encourages them to live active lifestyles as adults.

This final chapter will revisit the key findings of the research. Although the themes that emerged from the data were indeed different than what I anticipated when I began this research, they are no less important. Constraints to free-play and independent mobility, play for play's sake, and the importance of neighbourhood, are the themes used to organise participant data and frame the analysis and discussion of research findings. Out of these themes emerged key findings which will be discussed below.

At the conclusion of any research project, it is important to think about the research process as a whole. This project taught me a great many things about social research in general, and about research with children, the appropriate use of methods and the responsibility of writing critically about the realities of participants. It is also important to evaluate what I would do

differently if I were to undertake another project. Thinking critically about the study as a whole serves to better prepare researchers for future research endeavors (Kirby and McKenna, 1989). Finally, at the completion of this project, I feel that there are numerous and exciting directions of study future researchers could take. Choosing to study the influence of gender on free-play activities, and exploring how children and youth could be better included in city planning and decision making are just two areas of research which would be valuable.

6.1 – A Summary of Key Findings

There are a number of research findings that call for emphasis. The themes discussed in chapter five, focus on issues that are important to the research participants in a number of significant ways. The findings reiterated here underline the constraints participants face as they seek out opportunities for independent access to neighbourhood and city resources, the importance of neighbourhood to participants, and the engagement in free-play for no other reason that because it is enjoyable and fun.

A significant constraint to free-play activities is the problem of distance. The majority of participants reside outside the bowl area of Prince George. This made accessing destination parks such as Fort George largely impossible without the reliance of parents to drive them. Many of the participants expressed with some disappointment that they are not able to go to places within the city more often because they are required to wait until it is convenient for their parents to take them. This often means waiting for their siblings as well. Not accessing resources on account of being too far away from a participant's place of residence is connected to the findings mentioned above. Participants are not able to travel outside neighbourhoods independently because of fears and perceived danger, and mistrust in the ability of children to navigate from

one's home to a far away destination.

The last significant constraining factor on free-play activities is a lack of time. Participants repeatedly mentioned their commitment to organised sport activities, schoolwork, and the schedules of younger siblings (Thompson, Rehman, & Humbert, 2005) as hinderances to their ability to engage in free-play. More than half of the participants are enrolled in at least one organised sport. Many participants play on two sports teams. The activity journals are dominated by discussion of soccer games, baseball practices, lacrosse, and hockey, to name just a few. While the students convey a sense of pride when they discuss their activities, there is also a feeling of regret that these activities accounted for so much of their time. It is clear in many cases that participation in organised sports inhibits participation in free-time neighbourhood activities. Many students wrote of having to say no to friends when they are asked to come out and play, citing they have pervious sport commitments. The students acknowledge that they feel they are missing out on time they could be spending with their friends.

Participants were keen to discuss aspects of parks and playgrounds that fell short of their expectations. These more negative aspects served to discourage use of a particular park or playground. For example, many informants wrote of their dissatisfaction with the age appropriateness of playground equipment, stating that the structures are too young for children of their age. They also wrote of disappointment in the maintenance of some parks. In these cases, children mentioned graffiti and the presence of garbage.

After such statements, the students were quick to offer suggestions as to make the park or playgrounds better. Installing security cameras, while maybe a little extreme, suggests a level of concern and consideration for a public policy issue in an age when youth are said to be increasingly disengaged from such things (Checkoway, Allison and Montoya, 2005). Perhaps

children are disengaged because they are excluded from discussions, and few attempts are made to adjust discussion formats (such as city council meetings) to reflect children's abilities to participate in a meaningful way.

Other suggestions included the creation of additional park space and more suitable play equipment. By taking into account the concerns of children, policy makers would be including a different and arguably more forward thinking and perhaps more creative, approach to city planning. It is this inclusion of, and partnership with, children that emphasises their ideas and which in turn contributes to a well-rounded implementation of planning decisions and city policy (Sinclair, 2004).

Complaints about parks also included discussions of fear and feeling safe. Safety and fear have proven to be important inhibitors of free-play activities. For both participants and parents, fear and the perceived danger of occupying public spaces greatly influence whether or not participants feel they could access and utilise pubic parks, as well as the amount of independent mobility participants are granted. Interestingly, the participants suggest that they share the fears of their parents. At each stage of the fieldwork, it was clear that the participants were acutely aware of the fears of their parents. The concept of stranger danger (Valentine, 1997; Harden, Backett-Milburn, Scott and Jackson, 2000; Harden, 2000; Carver, Timperio & Crawford. 2008; Milne, 2009) is taught to children in the elementary school system from a very young age. This sense of mistrust of unknown members of the public, therefore, is embedded within children, regardless of the level of actual danger.

This sense of personal awareness while in public space, underlines the participant's abilities to manage perceived risk. The students appear to assess for themselves whether or not they feel safe, and make the decision to remain or remove themselves from a situation. It is

important to acknowledge that fear is a healthy and positive emotion. Fear helps us evaluate, and mitigate potential dangers to personal safety. However, where the sense of fear is based on perceived, rather than actual danger, participants may be limited in their access to neighbourhood play resources.

The participants' local neighbourhoods serve as the centre of independent activities. It is in this local sphere of public space where participants exercise their limited autonomy, practice their spatial and navigational skills, and are active with friends and family. As my fieldwork progressed, it became clear that the participants have knowledge of, and are able to navigate their local neighbourhoods independently. The participants wrote of landmarks, street names, and specific route information. As discussed earlier, the participants have far greater wayfinding abilities than initially anticipated. The children use their neighbourhoods extensively. Because of this frequent use, the children learned about routes and pathways, and whether intentionally or not, they ascribe meaning and sense of place to neighbourhood resources according to how these resources are used (Aitken, 1994).

Finally, it is important for participants to engage in free-play simply for play's sake. While they are excited to be part of sports teams, very few of the participants discuss playing for the benefits of health. The children understand that being active keeps them healthy, fit, and prevents issues such as heart attacks later in life. However, these benefits are only mentioned after the fun aspects of the activity is described (Thompson, Rehman, & Humbert, 2005).

Although neighbourhood play activities sometimes include adult family members, free-play within the bounds of one's local territory is usually unsupervised. Neighbourhood parks are important destinations and meeting places among peers, and they are used for informal soccer practices with family. Neighbourhood parks are described both positively and negatively as

discussed above. Regardless, park and playground use is described in activity journals daily, thus highlighting the importance of these resources to play. The high rate of use of parks and playgrounds should prompt attention and action to address the concerns of the city's young park users. Perhaps city officials could conduct a survey of elementary school students regarding their preferences for playground equipment, ways in which to make landscaping and greenspaces more amenable to active play and running games, and general maintenance. It is evident from the activity journals that participants have strong feelings about these aspects of the city's park and playground resources.

6.2 – Research Reflections

I chose to conduct research with children for many reasons. The purpose of this study was to better understand how children are using their local neighbourhoods for free-play. Before choosing methodologies for any study, researchers should consider the study's purpose, and who will be the research participants. Child-centered methodologies "allow for a deeper and more complex understanding of children's experiences and perspectives" (Hemming, 2008, 160). Although this research cannot be described as truly participatory research, as the children did not assist in the research design process, a central tenet of participatory research methods seek to readjust power relations between adult research and child participant (Hemming, 2008). In this way, using methods that are child-centred such as journaling, revisited below, recognising my position in relation to participants, and focusing on the voices of the children by representing statements exactly as they were written, acknowledges the child as a valued participant rather than solely a mine of information.

Journaling allows for participants to express themselves any way they choose, sharing what is important to them with words or drawings. For the two weeks of the field portion of the research, participants recorded their activities in journals. I chose this method because I expected it to be familiar to students. I felt that the children would feel most comfortable sharing information with me in this way, and because this was the least disruptive to regular class-time requirements. The qualitative methods used in this thesis produced data that are full of important details about participant's lived experiences, as well as valuable insight to how they feel about the spaces in which they are growing up. It would be difficult, if not impossible, to gather such rich text from quantitative methodologies such as standardised survey questionnaires.

As a researcher concerned with hearing from individuals who might not always be given the chance to voice opinions and concerns, reflecting on the research process, has been important to me (Kirby and McKenna, 1989). Although unequal power relationships cannot be fully removed (England, 1994), I have strived to conduct the research from a place of collaboration and knowledge sharing. This has helped me to maintain greater attention to detail during the analysis and discussion, as well as to embrace unexpected results and findings.

6.3 – Research Limitations

Upon reflection on the research process, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of the research design, the methods used and the insights and opportunities forgone because of methods and decisions not taken (Patton, 2002). For example, the timing of the research in the late spring allowed the children to play outdoors for the entire two week period they were writing in their activity journals. On the other hand, classroom teachers were busy with end of year activities, and there was a sense of urgency to complete meetings with school principals,

teachers, and classes to present and conclude the research before the school year came to a close.

Also, in spite of great care and effort to ensure the journal instructions were clear some children misunderstood what I was asking of them. I made considerable effort while visiting each classroom to spend as much time as possible explaining journal instructions, and answering student questions about how to complete journal entries each day. In hindsight, I would have made sure to spend yet more time on this portion of discussion. It is also possible that, despite our multiple efforts to write clearly and explicitly, I still could have improved the written instructions included in the journal. In the end, many of the students completed their journals in their own ways and shared with me thoughtful insights and perspectives that I may not have received if instructions were followed so strictly.

This study can only speak about the experiences of participating students at each of the three CIS schools in Prince George. Findings cannot, and should not be applied to young people more generally. However, I will reiterate here, that aspects of the findings discussed in chapter five can be relevant to other settings and contexts. It is reasonable to believe that the fears and circumstances influencing the physical activity of children in other communities are shaped by similar aspects of culture. If time and budget allowed, I would have liked to speak with the parents of participants to achieve a greater depth of perspectives. Perhaps gathering parent's perspectives could be included in future projects alongside of their children's voices.

6.4 – Future Research

The key findings of this research suggest many other areas for further study. Although the research occurred during the summer, some of the participants discussed the kinds of activities they take part in during the winter months. Because physical activity is important for

health all year round, some attention needs to be paid to how children and youth can be active during the long winters Prince George experiences. Because of the winter climate in Northern British Columbia, it is important to understand whether, and in what way, children engage in physical free-play in winter weather conditions. Tucker and Gilliland, (2007) suggest that physical activity does in fact vary with seasonality, and argue that research concerning seasonality has been neglected in favour of access to parks and playgrounds.

I have argued that children be allowed to participate in the decision making process of municipalities. Ellis and Caldwell argue "when youth have a voice, they are more likely to be able to advocate for the resources needed to make their interests become reality" (2005, 284). Scholars from the new social studies of childhood have recommended that children be included and consulted about decisions and policies which affect them. Rather than simply observing children to gather information about what is important to them, the act of asking children can result in far more detailed and insightful ideas and suggestions. Children and youth are important members of the community who should be viewed as "resources" who have valuable information to share (Checkoway, 1998). Frank (2006) thinks of children as stakeholders who should be considered as equally as others within the city and, therefore, should have equal weight in the decision making process. A study with a research focus such as this would add to the literature of environmental and city planning with children, but could also help cities establish procedures with which to include children and better understand neighbourhood planning and design from a child's perspective.

The issue of over-scheduling is of concern to the participants in this study. Whether children are participating in team sports, music lessons, or other organised activities, it is clear that many children are very busy. Some studies have suggested that children have experienced

"anxiety and depression" as a result of participating in so many organised activities (Melman, Little & Akin-Little, 2007). In addition to health problems, there is concern that, with so much time spent on the sports field, there are fewer opportunities for free-play and socialisation with peers. It would be worthwhile to investigate the effect such busy schedules have on young people, and a more comprehensive assessment of the benefits and harms of enrolment in multiple formalised activities.

Certainly there is a need in Prince George for recreation and leisure organisations such as the Family YMCA. As discussed earlier in the thesis, some cities only offer limited recreation and leisure programming, and citizens rely on private and community groups for such programming. Greater research is required to better understand how Prince George residents navigate the landscape of leisure and recreation in the city. How does the commercialisation of recreation resources in Prince George affect the accessibility of families and their overall physical activity? And, along with the commercialisation of recreation in the city, if families are unable to register for programs for financial or other reasons, how do children negotiate their inability to participate in team sports and other registered activities?

Finally, although gender differences were not within the scope of this research, the data suggested there may be differences in the ways girls and boys engage in physical free-play activities. As discussed in the analysis and discussion chapter, it was noted that more boys than girls rode bikes, and more girls than boys discussed walking with their friends. The Active Healthy Kids Report Card (2011) states that girls tend to be less physically active than boys by the time they reach early adolescence. Future research might explore how girls and boys in Prince George are engaging in physical free-play differently. If members of one sex are found to be less active, what can educators, health professionals, and others do differently to encourage

greater levels of participation? Understanding how each of the genders experience their neighbourhoods and instances of play differently could help adults implement policy which promotes greater levels of action for both girls and boys.

6.5 – Conclusion

For the young participants in this study, neighbourhood is central to their everyday lives. Local neighbourhoods serve as containers for the children's realities and experiences, and are the nexus of social and physical environmental factors. Neighbourhoods hold special meaning, to children, and are therefore critical to the formation of place attachments and senses of place (Cosgrove, 2000). Organised sport seems to be prevalent and occupying an increasing amount of time for children and has implications and impacts on free-play need to be better understood. By far, the farthest reaching barrier to free-play is perceived danger in public space. This mistrust seems to be an issue that participants and parents need to negotiate. Feelings of safety influence the degree of autonomy the children are granted, the access and use of public parks and playspaces, as well as the ability to travel independently to other neighbourhoods.

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Appendicies

Ethics Approval

UNBC UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN BRITISH COLUMBIA

RESEARCH ETHICS BOARD

MEMORANDUM

To: Brooke Eschuk

From: Henry Harder, Chair
Research Ethics Board

Date: May 3, 2010

Re: **E2010.0421.066**
Come out and Play! Exploring the social and spatial barriers affecting the physical activity of children in Prince George, BC

Thank you for submitting the above-noted proposal to the Research Ethics Board. Some changes and clarification have been requested;

- Use more appropriate and audience friendly language in the information sheet and consideration should be given to shorten the letter if possible
- Contact phone number for the reb should be 960-5650 (not 906-..)

If you have any questions please contact Debbie Krebs in the Office of Research (250.960.5650) for further clarification or provide her with a copy of your proposal with these modifications and a letter of approval will be forwarded.

Sincerely,

Henry Harder

Letter to CIS Superintendent

Dear Ms. McCracken,

I am a graduate student at the University of Northern British Columbia (Prince George campus) working with Dr. Neil Hanlon, associate professor of Geography. My research is concerned with how the urban environment and characteristics of neighbourhoods influence children's active play outside the home. I want to learn where children most like to play, for how long, what kinds of physical play activities children take part in (organised sports or other games), as well as when they play etc.

As part of my research, I am hoping to work with children in upper level elementary school grades (six or seven). My thesis advisor, Dr. Hanlon, suggested we investigate the possibility of working with the three Catholic Independent Schools in Prince George; Sacred Heart, St. Mary's and Immaculate Conception. Dr. Hanlon is a member of the Immaculate Conception Council. In particular, I would be asking permission of these children and their parents to keep a journal in which they would record their recreational activities outside the home.

I am committed to designing a study that minimizes disruptions to regular classroom activities, and am open to working with teachers to integrate this activity into established curricula so that the benefits of the research extend to students and schools.

My Thesis advisor and I would very much appreciate the opportunity to meet with you to discuss this matter in greater detail. I recognise that much work is still needed to obtain the support of the principals, teachers, parents and students at the three Catholic Independent schools in Prince George (protocols for obtaining consent and ensuring the privacy of confidential information that is shared with us.)

I understand your schedule is very busy, and would be grateful if you are able to meet with us. If you are willing, please replay with your interest and we can arrange with your administrative assistant to book a time.

Yours Sincerely,

Brooke Eschuk

Principal Approval Letter

Principal
c/o St. Mary's School
1088 Gillett.,
Prince George, BC
V2M2V3

Ms. Brooke Eschuk
c/o University of Northern British Columbia,
Rm 8-149, 3333 University Way,
Prince George, BC,
V2N 4Z9
Office Phone (250)960-5311
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March 23rd, 2010

Dear Ms. Eschuk,

Please accept this letter as permission to contact the teachers of grades six and seven at St. Mary's and recruit student participants for your thesis research regarding children's outdoor play space.

I understand that you are required to pass through your university's research ethics board and expect that you conduct this research according to the guidelines and regulations the ethics board places on graduate student research. I also anticipate that parents will be informed of the research project and protocols and that consent forms will be signed. The participating teachers and I expect that the confidentiality of students be kept strictly between yourself and your thesis supervisor Dr. Neil Hanlon, and look forward to working with you on this study.

Sincerely,

Principal

Proposal for Research with Catholic Independent Schools of Prince George

Thesis research questions (version 3)

- How do neighbourhoods influence the levels of physical activity of children in Prince George?
- How do children perceive their access to opportunities for physical activity (unorganised play or organised sports)?
- What are the spatial and social barriers that contribute to children's physical activity in Prince George?
    - How are these barriers overcome?

What I am asking of students, parents and teachers:

To allow me to spend up to an hour in each grade (6 and or 7 TBD) presenting project details

I will begin by introducing myself and my project to participants by presenting a wall map of Prince George and the neighbourhoods surrounding each of the CIS schools. This map will include Statistics Canada Census 2006 Dissemination Areas (proxies for neighbourhoods as per literature review); streets; parks and playgrounds; trails; Catholic Independent Schools and other base data. In presenting this map to the students, I can ask participants if my map is accurate; have I missed neighbourhood features that the children think are important? How can I make this map better?

I will provide a journal/notebook for each participant, a handout including the instructions to students (written below), and an 8.5 x 11 map of the neighbourhoods surrounding their school.

I am committed to:

- Completing a criminal records check
- Distributing packages containing information regarding my research project, contact information
- Distributing consent forms to both students and parents before entering the classroom for first presentation.
- Ensuring the confidentiality of each participant through journal anonymity and through the use of pseudonyms in written thesis, and by aggregation of results to areas of the city rather than individuals and households.
- Passing research proposal including student journal instructions through University of Northern British Columbia research ethics committee.
- Returning to each of the participating classrooms at the end of the research project to share results, present children with an updated map, and request validation of results from students.
- Returning journals to students at end of project.

What I am asking the children to do:

- Complete journal entries for two weeks documenting how, where, when they are physically active.

What I want to learn from journal entries:

- Where do children like to be physically active?
- What kind of physical activity do children take part in?
- Do children feel they are able to gain access to resources for physical activity (spatial or social barriers)?
- Why do children use some areas and not others to be physically active?
- Are children volunteering to take part in physical activity or are parents pushing children to be active?

Research Project Information Sheet

Researcher: Brooke Eschuk
1826 Larch St.
Prince George, BC V2L1V3
Home Phone (250) 564-5282
Office Phone (250) 960-5311
Email Address: frykas@unbc.ca

Supervisor: Dr. Neil Hanlon
UNBC Faculty Geography
Prince George, BC
Office Phone: (250) 960-5881
Email Address: hanlon@unbc.ca

Title of Project: Come Out and Play! Exploring the Social and Spatial Barriers Affecting the Physical Activity of Children in Prince George, British Columbia.

Research Purpose: To understand the socio-economic and spatial constraints on leisure that limit or prohibit children's access to resources for the purposes of physically active play in the City of Prince George.

Start Date: Fieldwork to commence in May 2010

End Date: Fieldwork to conclude End June 2010

Potential Benefits: By participating in this study, students will benefit from learning about the research process and by gaining a better understanding of how their physical and social environments influence patterns of play. Students will also learn about the mapping process by identifying favourite play spaces and neighbourhoods, and schools on city and neighbourhood maps.

Potential Risks: There are no physical risks associated with this study, but participants may find the time it takes to write journal entries each day difficult or inconvenient.

Recruitment: Participants were selected to participate in this research based on several criteria. For example, children in grades six and seven at each of the three Catholic Independent schools are knowledgeable and experienced in the area of study, they are capable of fulfilling research requirements (completing journal entries and participating in discussions regarding mapping and the spatiality of neighbourhoods), and have some degree of freedom of movement within neighbourhoods. The superintendent of the Catholic Independent School system was approached through an introductory letter asking permission to approach individual school principals and teachers. The superintendent, all three principals, and the teachers of grades six and seven each expressed interest in participating in the project.

Participant tasks: Participants will be visited twice during the study to minimize disruption to

regular classroom activities. Participants will be asked to document their physical activity daily in a journal after they are physically active outside of the home or school for a two week time period. Smaller maps and detailed instructions will be included with the journals. Participants will also be presented with a series of neighbourhood and city maps and have the opportunity to make additions, edits, or comment on maps displaying areas of and resources for physical activity.

Consent Form: A Parent or Legal Guardian will be asked to sign an informed consent form which allows the student to participant in the study. The consent form will detail the project goals and objectives, the contact information of the researcher and project supervisor.

Access to Data Collected: Only the researcher and the thesis supervisor will have access to the raw data gathered throughout this study. As stated above, key findings will be shared with participants.

Participant Compensation: To show my appreciation, and if funding allows, participants will be compensated with a one-time swim pass to the either the Four Seasons Pool or the Prince George Aquatic Centre. Teachers and Principals of Participating classrooms will be given a thank you card.

Confidentiality: The identities of participating students will remain confidential and anonymous. Participants will be asked to print their names inside the front cover of their journal and will be assigned a corresponding number when they are returned to the researcher. Only the researcher and the thesis supervisor will have access to the journal identification key. The names of participants will not be included within the written thesis, and all results will be aggregated to the neighbourhood level, NOT to individual participants.

Data Storage: Data gathered throughout this study will be stored in the secure office of the researcher in a secure filing cabinet for five years after project completion after which it will be destroyed.

Inquires: All questions and concerns regarding this research can be directed to Brooke Eschuk or Dr. Neil Hanlon with the contact information listed above.

Research Results: Key findings will be made available to students at the conclusion of the study. Complete results in the form of a written thesis will be available to participants upon request from Brooke Eschuk or Dr. Hanlon at the completion of the thesis research.

Information: Requests for additional information can be directed to Brooke Eschuk at the contact information listed at the top of this document.

Complaints: Complaints regarding this research can be made to the Office of Research and Graduate Studies, UNBC, (250) 960-5650 or http://www.unbc.ca/research/ or reb@unbc.ca

Participation in this study is voluntary and participants have the right to withdraw from the study at any time.

Informed Consent Form

Dear Parent or Guardian,

Thank you for taking the time to read through this information. My name is Brooke Eschuk. I am a graduate student at UNBC here in town. I have received permission from each of the three principals of Catholic Independent Schools in Prince George to do research with children in grades six and seven at each school. This work will be carried out in May and June 2010.

The purpose of my research is to learn about the physical activity of children, outdoor play spaces and the socio-economic and spatial barriers that children may face when accessing resources for physical activity such as parks and playgrounds, hockey rinks, swimming pools and recreation centres. This research is part of my thesis titled: *"Come Out and Play! Exploring the Social and Spatial Barriers Affecting the Physical Activity of Children in Prince George".*

Students at the ICS schools were selected as potential participants for a variety of reasons. First, my thesis supervisor, Dr. Neil Hanlon is a member of School Council at Immaculate Conception School and has a good working relationship with staff and administration at that school. Secondly, students at Immaculate Conception, Sacred Heart, and St Mary's come from neighbourhoods all across the city and can speak to experiences in many different neighbourhoods. Finally, students in grades six and seven are at an age where they can appreciate this kind of research and what is being asked of them.

In order to minimize disruption to regular classroom activities, students will be visited only twice throughout the research project. During the first visit, students whose parents have provided consent to participate in the research will be presented with a series of neighbourhood and city maps displaying resources for physical activity throughout the city. These resources include parks, greenspaces, playgrounds, trails, rinks, pools, recreation centres, and so on. Students will have the opportunity to comment on, make edits, discuss these resources, and offer insight as to where I have left out important resources, and the kinds of places they like to play. Students will then be given an activity journal in which they will be asked to document how they are physically active over a two week period. Please find a copy of the journal instruction form included in this information package.

Because of the sensitive nature of these data, participant responses to the map and journal exercises will be held in the strictest of confidence. Only the researcher (Brooke Eschuk) and the thesis supervisor (Dr. Neil Hanlon) will have access to participant data. Journals will be scanned to disk and original journals will be returned to the students. Disks will be stored and maintained in a secure office in a secure filing cabinet for five years after the study. During analysis, data will be stored on a laptop computer in a password protected file. Because the classroom visits are largely oral exercises, I would like to digitally record the classroom visits so that I can document the children's questions, thoughts and insights as well as their responses to maps and the journal exercise for the sake of data validation. These recordings will be stored and cared for in a secure research office and only the researcher and the thesis supervisor will have access to the recordings. The recordings will be stored for five years after project completion after which the

recordings will be destroyed.

By participating in this study, students will benefit from learning about the research process and by gaining a better understanding of how their physical and social environments influence patterns of play. Students will also learn about the mapping process by identifying favourite play spaces, local neighbourhoods, and their schools on city and neighbourhood maps. There are no foreseen risks to this study as the findings will be disseminated in ways that protect the identities of individual students.

Understanding the sensitive nature of these data is important. The identities of participating students will remain confidential and anonymous. Participants will be asked to print their names on the inside front cover of their journal and will be assigned a corresponding I.D. number when they are returned to the researcher. Only the researcher and thesis supervisor will have access to the identification key. The names of participants will **not** be included within the written thesis, and all results will be aggregated to the neighbourhood level, and **never** to individual participants.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. Students have the right to withdraw from the project at any time and their data will be withdrawn from the project.

If you or your son/daughter have questions regarding the project or the research process, please contact me or Dr. Hanlon (see contact information below). Key findings of the research will be made available to students at the conclusion of the study. Complete results in the form of a written thesis will be available to participants upon request from Brooke Eschuk or Neil Hanlon at the completion of the thesis research (expected completion in Fall 2010).

Finally, complaints regarding this research can be made to the Office of Research and Graduate Studies, UNBC at (250) 960-5650 or www.unbc.ca/research/ or reb@unbc.ca

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I, _____, have read and understand the purpose and requirements of this research outlined above, and agree to allow my child to participate in this study.

_____ _____
Signature of Parent or Guardian Date Signed

_____ _____
Signature of Researcher Date Signed

Letter of Assent

April 12th 2010

Dear Student,

Thank you for participating in this research project! I am interested in learning about where kids your age like to spend time playing and being active in Prince George. I want this project to be a lot of fun for you and your classmates. We will be using journals and large maps as well as open discussions in your classroom to identify opportunities for outdoor play and physical activity. You will have the chance to add your ideas, and discuss play spaces that are important to you in your neighbourhood and across the city.

You will be given an 'activity journal' where you can document your daily physical activities. You can help me by writing in your activity journal every day for two weeks after you are physically active outside. You could be climbing trees or the monkey bars at the park, or playing tag or soccer with your friends after school. Your journal entries will be kept anonymous. This means that nobody but my professor and I will be allowed to see your journals, and you will get them back at the end of the project! Don't worry, I will give you some questions to think about and some guidelines to follow which will make the process easier every day.

By participating in this project, I hope that you will learn more about where and how you and your classmates can be physically active in your community, how to read a map, and what research is all about!

If you have questions about this project, you can email me at frykas@unbc.ca or, you and your parents can call me at 250-960-5311.

Thank you for taking part in this research project, and I look forward to meeting and talking with you soon!

Brooke Eschuk

(Researcher)

Project Introduction Discussion Questions

How to you feel about the importance of physical activity?

What kinds of places do you like to be active the most? Why are they so special to you?

What kinds of places do you wish you could go to more often?

What are some reasons you don't go to those places as often as you'd like?

Do you travel outside of your neighbourhood to be physically active? Where do you go?

Data Validation Discussion Questions

1) You told me that you play soccer, hockey, baseball, and swim on a team. Do you feel that all the time you spend being on a team limits the time you can be active just for fun? Why or why not?

2) No one told me that they play by themselves or that they are allowed to travel to play spaces on their own. Why do you think your parents want you to be with someone else when you are active?

3) Some of you said that you have very specific dislikes about the parks where you play. You suggested things like vandalism, garbage or too many older kids hanging around. Can you think of other dislikes? Where are these places?

4) Some students wrote that the reasons they don't go to their favourite play spaces as often as they'd like are because of distance, homework, busy parents, and cost. Are there other reasons you can't be as active as you'd like?

5) What are the parks like in your neighbourhood? Are they safe to walk or bike to? For example, are there sidewalks and crosswalks? Is there a lot of traffic? How would you improve the parks in your neighbourhood?

6) When you are not being active at home, what are you doing instead?