Physical Education Students’ Experiences In Group Work

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Abstract

The purpose of the current study was to investigate physical education students’ experiences working in groups, looking to see how these experiences promote communication and leadership skills. The participants in the study included three different physical education classes in the faculty of Sport, Health and Physical Education at Vancouver Island University. This action research project included a qualitative survey of open-ended questions and Likert scale response statements.

The study confirmed that students experienced opportunities to practice leadership in their groups in the following ways: organizing, delegating, and staying on task. Monitoring progress of the group and sharing responsibilities were key in how leadership was shown and needed. Regarding communication, students reported needing effective communication skills to work with others and identified this as a skill as important to the success of the overall group experience.

These findings confirm that both communication and leadership are key areas for learning to successfully navigate group work.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Purpose of the Study

A primary goal of post-secondary institutions is to prepare students to transition successfully from the academic world to the workforce. Universities are responding to employers’ need for graduates who are well prepared with teamwork skills (Harvey, Moon, Geall, & Bower). Emerging student leaders must develop critical leadership skills with an emphasis on building teams and supporting a collaborative process, this recommendation is supported by researchers Dugan & Komives (2007). They further suggest that when institutions of higher education adopt a mandate to purposefully develop socially responsible leaders these skills converge. Increasing competition in the work force has called upon students to enhance their communication and leadership skills while at university.

There is a growing body of research supporting student leadership at the post-secondary level [Burdett, 2003]. However, little research has been done to explore how higher education develops these skills. Since both leadership and communication skills are attributes that employers are looking for in university graduates, it is important that instructors provide students with strategies that recognize this need of employers, build student confidence, and offer a practical means for students to improve these skills.

This researcher believes that putting students in groups to work together toward a common goal is a teaching strategy that best develops and supports leadership and communication. While some group work may provide opportunities for students to work with others, finding out more about how this teaching strategy affects students’ learning will create a more meaningful educational experience for students. This project will investigate how the
group work environment contributes to the development of leadership and communication skills for students by surveying students’ experiences when working in groups. The study will look at the supporting research around students’ group work experience. Although this researcher has used the term group work in her project, she recognizes that this topic is part of a broader field of study that includes complex learning theories like: cooperative learning, collaborative learning, team learning, and learning groups. For the purposes of this study ‘group work’ will be a general term used which may include some characteristics of the abovementioned group learning theories.

This study will also address instructional strategies for group work that support improved leadership and communication skills. The process of reflection provides insight into instructional practice. As an instructor of physical education for the faculty of SHAPE (Sport, Health and Physical Education) this researcher noticed that she often defaulted to putting students in groups as an instructional strategy and the reasons for this were several. Firstly, the design of the particular physical education course being delivered was predominately activity based, requiring students to practice their knowledge by working together in both small groups of two to three people and at times larger groups of five to seven people. Secondly, some course activities involved the use of specific equipment that was in limited supply. Thus, group work was a practical approach to instruction.

Following the completion of one term of instruction, this researcher reflected on her practice and explored the instructional strategies used by other staff in the Faculty of SHAPE. She concluded that putting students in groups was commonplace for most activity courses offered in the department. The general feedback from students was positive. They expressed being engaged in their learning and having opportunities to be leaders. They also expressed
some challenges including sharing the workload, communication with others, disorganization and unresolved conflicts. This information led the researcher to wonder; what she could do to make group work more of a positive learning experience for her students?

Group work can contribute to a more meaningful learning environment for students by supporting their confidence, directing their personal learning, and helping them become more effective communicators. Yamarik (2007) suggests that cooperative learning, which is one kind of group learning, raises student-instructor interaction and the novelty of working in small groups sparks greater interest in the material covered.

Justification of the study

While group work may be both convenient and practical, it is important to regularly examine one’s practice to assess the kind of learning that occurs when students work together. Increasing employment competition has raised the need for students to enrich their social skills during their time at university. Universities are responding to the need for graduates to be well prepared for the workforce where teamwork skills are valued (Johnson & Johnson, 1993). Students in the faculty of Sport, Health and Physical Education experience group work in many of their courses. To further promote graduates’ social skills in the workforce, faculty instructors could support their instructional strategies for group work, with students’ input about their experiences. Although some research generally suggests that group work results in a positive learning experience for students, it is not always perceived as a worthwhile experience because of the social dynamic of groups and the frustrations they create (Chan & Chen, 2010). Other research suggests that regardless of subject matter, students working in small groups tend to learn more of what is being taught and retain it longer when the same content is presented in other instructional formats (Johnson, Johnson & Smith, 1993). The findings from this study will
inform instructors about students’ perceptions of group work and provide some considerations that could contribute to a more meaningful and relevant learning experience for students.

Adults have some unique attributes that contribute to their success as learners. This statement is supported by the principles of adult learning, pioneered by Malcolm Knowles, an American practitioner who identified the following: that adults learn through previous experiences, are internally motivated and self-directed, are practical and like to be respected, are goal-oriented and relevancy-orientated. Researchers (Johnson and Johnson 1993; Tennent, 1996) in their research on group learning theory suggest that adult students learn well in group settings because group learning calls upon these requisite skills and does in fact promote their need for independence. Knowles' principles of adult learning support that students are more engaged when working in groups.

Group work helps to develop communication and negotiation skills. These skills are some of the characteristics of a leader. Researchers Chan and Chen (2010) suggest that group process of a higher quality include at least four elements: positive interdependence, individual accountability, equal participation and social skills. There has been considerable research done on how to foster leadership skills in adulthood assuming they are present at some level in all adults. A framework of leader development that delineates what is learned before an individual reaches adulthood, can improve our understanding of leadership and leader development. It can help us to understand the relative influences of different factors on leader development (Murphy & Johnson, 2011). Larson (2000) has argued that initiative is one of the most important aspects of youth. Initiative is also noted as a very important trait or personality characteristic for leaders as it is often equated with drive.

This study will investigate the themes that are evident in students’ group work
experiences, particularly focusing on the type of leadership and communication skills students learn and are able to practice. This information will help to inform instructors about how group work affects students’ experiences in an effort to make their learning meaningful with respect to leadership and communication.

Instructors can benefit from understanding how students learn in a group environment. (Wheelan, 2000). Stall (1994) proposed a number of essential conditions that must be present for group learning to be successful, including: learning objectives that are accepted by all students; positive interdependence; positive social interaction, behaviour and attitudes; sufficient time spent on learning and task completion; and individual accountability. These are relevant to this study because they are characteristics that support learning leadership and communication skills.

Research Question

Since group work is a common instructional strategy for physical education classes at a post-secondary level, this researcher decided to investigate:

What are students’ experiences in groups and how might these experiences foster the development of communication and leadership skills?

Definition of terms

Putting students in groups is an instructional strategy for hands-on experiential learning in physical education classes at Vancouver Island University (VIU). It is not the purpose of this study to delve into the complexities of group learning theories. Instead, some of the concepts of group learning theories will be discussed to support the influence of student skill development in the areas of leadership and communication. Various names have been given to group learning theories and there some distinctions among these including the following: cooperative learning, collaborative learning, collective learning, learning communities, peer teaching, reciprocal
learning, team learning, study circles, study groups and work groups. (adapted from Johnson, Johnson and Smith, 1991). In this study group work, will be defined as a minimum of two or more students working together on a common project. Student’s environment can be informal with no work specific roles or responsibilities outlined by the instructor, or formal with designated roles and responsibilities, or could include study teams where students are working together to learn course work. Students’ experiences include the following: cognitive learning about course content. Communication skills include: taking turns, listening, and paraphrasing. Leadership skills include: self-awareness, negotiating decision-making, problem solving, taking responsibility and organizing.

Overview of Study

The goal of this study was to hear from students about their experiences with group work, looking at leadership and communication themes.

Undergraduate students in the faculty of Sport, Health and Physical Education (SHAPE) are routinely involved in group work.

The study took place on the campus at Vancouver Island University in the fall of 2014. Data was collected from three different classes, each class had a different instructor from the SHAPE faculty. All three classes shared the commonality of using group work to support student learning. One of the classes was theory based where students worked in groups of two to three, on class presentation projects. The second class was predominately a theory-based class where students worked in groups of two to three, working on small group projects that included physical activities and written work. The third class was a theory-based class where students worked on lab projects that also included written work and students worked together on experiments. The total sample size was 75 students. The study was a qualitative design. Data
were to include student surveys and interviews. Data collection concluded with a total of 53 surveys. The researcher set out to include interview data for this study; however, at the end of the data collection period there were no results for interviews.

The findings from the surveys were examined and coded for themes around communication and leadership. These themes are illustrated in the tables and graphs in Chapter 4 of the study.
Chapter 2: Review of Related Literature

The methodology used for instructional strategies in adult education is complex and the research suggests that some approaches deliver better results than others. One such strategy is having students work in groups. While much of the learning and testing in our schools has been aimed at the individual, more often we learn and live with each other (Hattie, 2009).

This researcher investigated group work looking for answers to the following questions: What were the learning experiences for students when instructors used group work? Did working in groups allow students to practice and learn communication and leadership skills? How could instructors improve strategies and planning to foster student learning in the above-mentioned areas?

The growing need for graduates to develop and practice leadership skills is a motivation for instructors to look at strategies that could become part of an instructional approach to support this kind of learning. College graduates are being asked to have the ability to function on multi-disciplinary teams and communicate effectively (Colbeck, Campbell; Bjorklund, 2000). Graduates from post-secondary institutions could benefit from having communication savvy and leadership skills that identify them as qualified confident emerging professionals in their chosen field. Knight (2013) suggests that, “if students are to learn how to interact successfully with others, in school, in society, at home, and later in life, they need to practice effective communication, and that can be done during cooperative learning” (p. 202). As a society, our existence is defined in part by co-existing in a social framework. Consequently being proficient as a communicator would be a desirable attribute for students entering the work force. Researchers Livingston and Lynch (2000) argue that team-based learning can be a method of
increased complexity in the learning experience, which thus strengthens students’ preparedness for the complex environments into which they move after completing their degree.

**Students Experiences with Group Work**

When looking at collaborative learning, Smith (2005) explored the experiences of adult students working in online groups. The study examined how students negotiated the different issues they faced in this learning environment. The instructor put students in groups of three to four to resolve an assigned problem. Students had one week to build relationships and develop their ground rules for their projects. In this particular study researchers’ data collection sources included questionnaires, learner interviews, instructor interviews, debriefing papers and reflection journals. The researchers were looking for themes around the informal leadership strategies students used in a type of group work referred to as project-based learning. Findings from this study suggested that although students appreciated the diversity of this kind of learning there were challenges around making decisions and balancing individual learning needs with the overall needs of the group. However, what was particularly interesting was that the groups were able to reconstruct the role of teacher lead learning and construct knowledge and share classroom authority. These experiences could be interpreted as students gaining knowledge and skills about informal leadership when working in groups. Although the project may not have included designated leadership roles they were created as a consequence of the group process. It is this kind of learning that holds value for students and may represent the positive feedback some students give about learning leadership skills in groups. Some students suggest that group work allows opportunity to generate ideas and share views, build friendships, experience new ways of learning and share workloads (Burdett, 2003).
While the research supports positive outcomes for students’ experiences in group work in has challenges. McLaughlin and Fennick (1987) report that the greatest student complaints concerned the unequal sharing of effort in groups and the difficulties of finding time for group work. In addition, students suggest that included in a group score should be a separate mark reflecting their individual effort for the group project. This suggestion is support by Slavin (1995, 2009), who suggests that two elements must be present if cooperative learning is to be effective, group goals and individual accountability.

A study by Livingstone and Lynch (2000) involved another type of group work referred to as student-centered active learning. They set out to examine the experiences noted by both students and instructors regarding the practical implications of such approaches. They found that in group situations, if careful planning is not taken in the design and follow through for projects, problems could ensue. However when students were given specific direction with clear learning intentions they valued the group-based projects relative to the student centered learning. The study stated that students recognized the importance of this kind of learning for future employment situations where they would need to work with others in different project-based environments. The researchers noted that it is important for graduates to take away a coherent understanding of their group work experience if they are to be equipped to deal with such situations in their future lives (Livingston & Lynch, 2000).

**Group Work and the Development of Leadership and Communication Skills**

For the past 20 years, business and industry leaders have noted the increased need for students to have skills working collaboratively and in teams (Dugan & Komives, 2007). The growth of the technological era is further increasing this need as students use online groups to support their learning. The ever-changing corporate world is calling for graduates to be adaptive
and have interpersonal skills that would contribute to working effectively in groups with diverse needs. The big question then is how can group work support the development of leadership and communication skills for students?

It is the belief of some that little research has integrated theoretical understandings of the college student leadership phenomena to comprehensively explore how the higher education environment shapes this developmental process (Burdett, 2003). It stands to reason that the development of strong leadership and communication skills would serve college graduates well in their transition to the work force. Students working together in groups provide an opportunity for them to develop social skills. Landrum and Harrold (2003) recently surveyed employers across the United States. They found that five of the top 10 most desired skills for psychology graduates related to social relationships included the following; listening skills, ability to be work in groups, getting along with others, focus on customer or client, and interpersonal relationship skills).

However, some researches argue that reliance entirely on group work can only be met if the right circumstances exist. Livingstone and Lynch (2000) suggest that team-based learning is effective if suitable external resources like library materials; team skills materials and technical resources like Internet, can be used to support the group work project.

Researchers Chan and Chen (2010) investigated the conflict occurring during teamwork among college seniors in collaborative learning. They found that conflict emerged with poor communication, task management and work allocation; unequal treatments among classmates; egocentricity; clash of values and lack of responsibility and initiative. To prepare graduating students for the workforce, teachers should equip them with essential skills and foster students appropriate work attitude to improve performance.
Meeting the deadlines for project completion can sometimes be a concern for individuals within a group work environment. Communication hurdles may be difficult to overcome and certain skills are needed to navigate this issue. Blair (1991) contends that groups go through four developing stages: Forming, Storming, Norming and Performing. Forming is when the group is first introduced, good manners and kind-hearted behaviour is exhibited, while the natural leaders are looked to for direction. Group discussions are friendly. In the storming phase the group experiences discord and friction, communication is thwarted because active listening is not a part of the process. During the norming stage the group goes through a metamorphosis and becomes a functional unit adopting a cooperative spirit. The final result is the performing stage where group members respectfully communicate by sharing ideas and feeling heard.

This researcher recognized that in her instructional approach, she had not clearly established specific directives around how students might set up their groups, in terms of their roles and responsibilities, nor were there specific directives for communication strategies within the groups. Some research suggests that group work is more successful if roles and responsibilities within the group are clearly identified, leaving less opportunity for the less motivated students to get a free ride, more commonly referred to as “loafers” (Knight, 2013).

The experiences expressed in informal discussions by some of the students at VIU were that natural leaders emerged in their groups, students communicated fairly well and project completion was generally successful. Although students can have positive experiences in group work situations, the conflicts that arise influence group performance. Issues that were identified included the following; some groups had loafers, some had conflicts with how to develop their project, some students struggled with communication and meeting times and some felt their contribution was not recognized. Although this was informal feedback, it offers a perspective
regarding the obstacles that some students face when working together towards a common goal. Researchers, Chan and Chen (2010) suggest that conflict from teamwork project based learning fall into two specific categories: relationship conflict and process conflict. “Relationship conflict can be defined as an awareness of interpersonal incompatibilities and includes affective components such as feeling tension and friction. Process conflict is as an awareness of controversies about aspects of how a task accomplishment will proceed” (p.26). Hearing from students regarding their experiences in groups is an important way to gather information about how this kind of learning affects them.

Theorists Hartman and Gibbard (1974) suggest that there is kind of ebb and flow in group identity which occurs when group members seek to hang on to their identity, withdraw from the new group as it is forming its own identity. This kind of process creates space and opportunity for the new group to grow. This kind of dynamic shift in roles is in part a reflection of themes that have been identified by other researchers like Johnson & Smith (1999) who suggest that issues for some students in group work include: fear, loss of identity, clarification around roles and responsibilities, control of the outcome, effective communication and conflict resolution. Livingston and Lynch (2000) suggest that group learning is a means of enhancing social skills and this process can be practiced when students navigate through the group process.

As the research has indicated, students who work in groups can face challenges that make group work frustrating. Students at VIU faced similar challenges when working in their groups. These difficulties can prevent them from having a positive learning experience. The current study attempts to address some of issues students face in an effort to improve students’ experiences in groups.
Instructional Approaches for the Planning and Delivery of Group Work

With the growing need for our upcoming graduates to have astute leadership and communication skills, the question then becomes how can instructors develop teaching strategies to promote these skills. Robinson (2006) suggests that teachers need to develop links between how they teach and what students learn. Group goals are an essential aspect of cooperative learning (Slavin, 1991). Chan and Chen (2010) suggest that “college teachers should teach group development, phases of team development, steps in dealing with conflict and decision making process, so that potential conflict situations do not harm personal relationships or reduce team effectiveness” (p. 27). Students need to be reassured that this teaching strategy will support their learning by giving them the tools to navigate issues that they will face. Knight (2012) suggests, “if teachers have false clarity about why students will use cooperative learning, what student’s do and how they are to act, there is real danger that the activity could fall apart” (p.203). As a supporter of cooperative learning Hattie (2009) suggests “cooperative learning is most powerful after the students have acquired sufficient knowledge to then be involved in discussions and learning with their peers – usually in some structured manner” (p. 78). Students need to be clear about the project’s direction and purpose. As well, research suggests that identifying roles for group members offers clarity, accountability and shared responsibility Chan and Chen (2010).

A study by Kao (2008) involved the process of creating a framework to help engage students in cooperative and competitive learning. They defined four types of sharing construction including: basic sharing, using an idea from a peer in the most basic format (discussion), sharing with notification, that is authors of a particular idea are identified and their ideas are used in a discussion. Thirdly is, sharing with feedback, where the users of the information provide
feedback to the original author to revise and improve their work. Lastly is, sharing with interactions where the authors can interact via discussions personally or electronically. The goal of this approach is the following: to work together within a structure that results in meeting a learning outcome, task completion, student role interchange, a cooperative goal, a learning format like active learning and modeling with the end result being a shared mutually created project. The study concludes that this kind of group learning creates a deep understanding of learning material as students work their way through the group process of a personal construction interface which includes feedback and the construction interface which involves the sharing phase. This learning framework supports the notion that group learning organically involves the accumulation of knowledge through social networking and communication skills.

The implementation and understanding of the theoretical approaches to group work are necessary for effective instructional practices. Collegial collaboration around instructional practices would help to support collective expertise and energy. It has been suggested that, “cooperative learning can be a powerful strategy for increased student achievement, but fulfilling this potential depends upon the provision of professional development for teachers that is focused on the approaches most likely to make a difference” (Slavin, p. 173).

The responsibility of improved instructional practice clearly lies with an investigation into the kinds of strategies used in teaching as well as understanding and incorporating the learning principles for students. (Wilczenski, Bontrager, Ventrone, & Correia, 2001) suggest that, “information gained from the group process offers feedback to help guide instructional strategies. Understanding group dynamics and the many psycho-social dynamic that exists between the instructor, group members is integral to the development of an effective framework for more effective teaching practices.
Cooperative learning is relatively inexpensive and easily adopted. Yet, thirty years after much of the foundational research was completed, it remains at the edge of school policy, as governments come to support the larger concept of evidence-based reform, strong evidence base for cooperative learning may lead to greater focus on this set of approaches at the core of instructional practice (Slavin, p. 174).

Researchers Batra, Walvoord & Krishnan (1997) looked at the effective pedagogy for student-team projects based on student feedback. They suggest that in order to strengthen the quality of implementation it is valuable to seek students’ informal feedback several times during a semester. They further suggest that if an instructor is open about informal assessment students will provide valuable feedback for the implementation of effective teamwork strategies. They identified five teaching tools that help to support the process of group work. These included: the outline of the project, specific guidelines, work allocation sheet, question sheet about the project specifics, and a written progress report. These teaching tools are given to groups throughout the semester to support individual and group accountability. In addition, this process also supports the communication with the students and the instructor, making it easier to address the learning or group issues that may arise.

As conductors of the learning process, instructors need to consider group members and their roles in group work situations. Cheng, Lam and Chan (2008) found that identifying specific roles for students within the group work environment creates a safer learning environment, putting to rest the anxiety of high achievers and leading to more successful learning outcomes.

Instructors need to lead by creating an environment for successful learning. Researchers Johnson & Johnson (1991) suggest that instructors need to provide structure and guidance, make learning an active process, include individual and group assessment, positive interdependence, teach social skills. It would be naive to suggest that learning does not come with challenges. Any creative approach to learning needs to be constantly assessed and evaluated. Using group work
as a strategy to develop leadership and communication skills is no exception. However, the research seems to suggest that the process of working in groups sets the stage for students to practice ways to verbally interact with their peers, solve problems, articulate thoughts and feelings, and work together towards a common goal. As well, it creates the tendency for leadership to be fostered and encouraged through the push and pull of a safe peer environment that is guided by a skilled facilitator. All of these attributes are life skills worth developing in an effort to set students up for a successful transition into the workforce.

This literature review supports the belief that group work as defined in this study does support student learning. However instructional support regarding roles and responsibilities of group members is integral for a positive experience for students. In addition, teaching students the skills to navigate potential difficulties will support a more successful outcome and contribute to the development of their leadership and communication skills. Putting students in groups has academic and social benefits that support social and emotional growth since being in groups provides opportunity to navigate a team-learning environment. Through careful planning and coaching, instructors can help students have a meaningful group experience that can promote leadership and communication skills.
Chapter 3: Procedures and Methods

Research Design

Qualitative research methods were used to examine students’ experiences in group work. Participants completed a two-page paper-pencil survey that consisted of eleven questions along with seven questions using Likert scales. The survey (Appendix A) addressed the participant experiences regarding social skills like communication and leadership when working on a group project. The Likert scale questions measured how helpful working in groups was with respect to students’ communication and leadership skills.

Description of the Sample

The sample groups of students in the study were from the faculty of Sport, Health, and Physical Education (SHAPE) at VIU. The instructors in three different classes use group work projects as an instructional strategy and were selected on this basis since they would provide meaningful and relevant data for this particular study.

The focus of the group work included small group with two to five students, doing activities in class with occasional meeting times after class. The total number of students in the sample group was 75. The students in the sample varied by gender and ages ranged from 18-35. Students that participated in the research varied in terms of the total number of years attending university. A description of the three different classes included a Physiology class, where students investigate the intricacies of the body systems as well as perform hands-on lab projects; Exercise Prescription class, where students investigate the acute and chronic effects of exercise on body systems including cardiovascular, respiratory, and muscular responses to physical activity; and an Instructional Strategies for Teaching Physical Education class, where students learn the pedagogy for teaching physical activity to school aged students.
Although the content of the three classes was different, each course expected students to be involved in a group project with a similar structure, which is why these particular courses were chosen. The project duration was approximately one to two months long, completed within one university semester.

**Description of Instruments Used**

The instrument used in the study was a pencil paper survey with 11 open-ended questions and seven statements using a five-point Likert-type scale of potential responses including: strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree. Likert responses were looking at specific kinds of skills students learned in their group work situations. These included: negotiating, shared responsibility, problem solving, common vision, communication skills and leadership skills. The researcher developed the questions for the pencil paper survey. Questions 1-4 (See Appendix D) focused on ways in which students may have used leadership in their group work. Questions 5-7 (Appendix D) addressed ways in which group work may have support their learning. Questions 8-10 (Appendix D) addressed ways in which group members used communication. The survey proved to be a valid measure of students’ subjective experiences in group work. The survey possesses a high degree of reliability as it indicates students’ experiences in their group work. Since the survey instrument was designed by the researcher and tested in this study only it may threaten the validity of the instrument.

**Procedures Followed**

After ethics approval at VIU was obtained, the researcher contacted the chair of the VIU SHAPE faculty for permission to contact individual instructors who used group work in their practice. The researcher contacted specific instructors via email (See Appendix G)
permission to conduct the study of the students’ experiences working with group work in each of the three classes previously listed.

The researcher passed out the survey (Appendix A) and asked students to return it to the drop box in the main office within two weeks’ time. On a separate piece of paper, attached to the survey, was a form that included a space for students’ contact information, should they choose to participate in an interview. Students placed this contact information in a second drop box separate from the survey, which was located in the main office for the faulty of SHAPE. Data were gathered and collected from October to December of 2013.

The data were examined using qualitative procedures. A mixed method study included a one page pencil-paper survey that consisted of nineteen questions. Survey questions were opened-ended in order to get rich descriptions of students varied experiences. The seven questions that followed used Likert scales. The survey addressed the participants’ experiences regarding of the kind of communication and leadership skills that required when working on a group assignment. The Likert scale questions represented how helpful working in groups was with respect to students’ existing communication and leadership skills and provided a basis for exploring students’ experiences with respect the communication skills used in their groups. This information may provide instructors with insight into student experiences.

The survey questions were designed to investigate three different aspects of group work. The first group of questions looked at students’ perceptions of their group work in general terms. The second section focused on the kinds of communication and leadership skills that they used while working on their project. The final section of the survey addressed questions regarding the skills students gained in their group experience. Instructors in the abovementioned classes routinely used group work as an instructional strategy. The survey questions were open ended to
get rich descriptions of students’ varied experiences. Themes were identified and results were combined and analyzed for content and clarity.

Interviews (Appendix B) were attempted with students from the sample group. The results showed zero results for the participation in interviews. Research was completed using computer assisted qualitative data analysis software. The content was transcribed and checked for themes by the researcher using Microsoft Word. The researcher hoped to identify themes in the surveys compared to those in the interviews, contributing to the dependability and depth of the research. It is recognized that not having interview results is a limitation of the study. The design the survey questions were grounded in the supporting literature on group learning that suggests students use a variety of social skills to navigate a group learning experience.

**Validity**

The researcher is currently employed as a sessional instruction in the faculty of SHAPE, but chose not use her particular class as a sample group for the purposes of this study. She believes having a relationship with the faculty and staff may increase the threat to internal validity, conversely using different classes improves the external validity because the results are less dependent on the type of group work and more about group work in general. Since the content of each course is different, student experiences may vary accordingly.

Limitations include the sample size of 75 students in total and the length of the study which was one university semester. Individual teacher characteristics and personalities were not considered in the findings, but it is recognized that this could influence individual student experiences reported. Although interviews were attempted for this study the lack of participants may contribute to a limitation.

Other limitations include the fact that all three courses have different instructors teacher
effectiveness in terms of the delivery of the group process may have been reflected in the students’ experiences. Individual students may also interpret the open-ended questions and Likert statements differently. Also, since the researcher created the survey it may contain a certain bias that would be reflected in the results. Some researchers suggest that, measuring the effectiveness of this kind of learning is challenging because of the dynamic nature of groups (Knight, 2013), which is an important consideration when looking at the research around group work generally.

**Analysis Techniques**

The research was completed using computer assisted qualitative data analysis software. The researcher then identified themes in the interviews that related to the data in the surveys, contributing to the dependability and depth of the research. The design of the survey question were grounded in the supporting literature on group learning that suggests students use a variety of cooperative social skills to navigate a group learning experience (Johnson & Johnson, 1981).

There is a growing body of research supporting student leadership at the post-secondary level [Burdett, 2003]. However little research has been done to explore how higher education develops these skills. Since both leadership and communication skills are attributes that employers are looking for in university graduates, it is important that instructors provide students with strategies that recognize this need of employers, build student confidence, and offer a practical means for students to build these skills.

This researcher believes that putting students in groups to work together toward a common goal is a teaching strategy that best develops and supports leadership and communication. While some group work may provide opportunities for students to work with others, finding out more about how this teaching strategy affects students’ experiences will create a more meaningful educational experience for students. This project will investigate how
the group work environment contributes to the development of leadership and communication skills for students by surveying students’ experiences when working in groups. The study will look at the supporting research around students’ experience with groups. Although this researcher has used the term group work her project she recognizes that this topic is part of a broader field of study that includes complex learning theories like: cooperative learning, collaborative learning, team learning, and learning groups. This study will also address instructional strategies for group work that support improved leadership and communication skills.

The process of reflection provides insight into instructional practice. As an instructor of physical education for the faculty of SHAPE (Sport, Health and Physical Education) this researcher noticed that she often defaulted to group work as an instructional strategy and the reasons for this were several. Firstly, the design of the particular physical education course being delivered was predominately activity based, requiring students to practice their knowledge by working together in both small groups of two to three people and at times larger groups of five to seven people. Secondly, some course activities involved the use of specific equipment that was in limited in supply. Thus, group work was a practical approach to instruction.

Following the completion of one term of instruction, this researcher reflected on her practice and explored the instructional strategies used by other staff in the Faculty of SHAPE. She concluded that putting students in groups was commonplace for most activity courses offered in the department. The general feedback from students was positive. They expressed being engaged in their learning and having opportunities to be leaders. They also expressed some challenges including sharing the workload, communication with others, disorganization and unresolved conflicts. This information led the researcher to wonder; what she could do to
make group work more of a positive learning experience for her students?

Group work can contribute to a more meaningful learning environment for students by supporting their confidence, directing their personal learning, and helping them become more effective communicators. Yamarik (2007) suggests that cooperative learning, which is one kind of group learning, raises student-instructor interaction and the novelty of working in small groups sparks greater interest in the material covered.

**Justification of the study**

While group work may at times be both convenient and practical, it is important to regularly examine one’s practice to assess the kind of learning that occurs when students work together in groups. Increasing employment competition has raised the need for students to enrich their social skills during their time at university. Universities are responding to the need for graduates to be well prepared for the workforce where teamwork skills are valued (Johnson & Johnson, 1993). Students in the faculty of Sport, Health and Physical Education experience group work in many of their courses. To further promote graduates’ social skills in the workforce, faculty instructors could support their instructional strategies for group work, with students’ input about their experiences. Although some research generally suggests that group work results in a positive learning experience for students, it is not always perceived as a worthwhile experience because of the social dynamic of groups and the frustrations they create (Chan & Chen, 2010). Other research suggests that regardless of subject matter, students working in small groups tend to learn more of what is being taught and retain it longer when the same content is presented in other instructional formats (Johnson, Johnson & Smith, 1993). The findings from this study will inform instructors about students’ perceptions of group work and provide some considerations that could contribute to a more meaningful and relevant learning
Adults have some unique attributes that contribute to their success as learners. This statement is supported by the principles of adult learning, pioneered by Malcolm Knowles, an American practitioner who identified the following: that adults learn through previous experiences, are internally motivated and self-directed, are practical and like to be respected, are goal-orientated and relevancy-orientated. Researchers (Johnson and Johnson 1993; Tennent, 1996) in their research on group learning theory suggest that adult students learn well in group settings because group learning calls upon these requisite skills and does in fact promote their need for independence. Knowles' principles of adult learning support that students are more engaged when working in groups.

Group work helps to develop communication and negotiation skills. These skills are some of the characteristics of a leader. Researchers Chan and Chen (2010) suggest that group process of a higher quality include at least four elements: positive interdependence, individual accountability, equal participation and social skills. There has been considerable research done on how to foster leadership skills in adulthood assuming they are present at some level in all adults. A framework of leader development that delineates what is learned before an individual reaches adulthood, can improve our understanding of leadership and leader development. It can help us to understand the relative influences of different factors on leader development (Murphy & Johnson, 2011). Larson (2000) has argued that initiative is one of the most important aspects of youth. Initiative is also noted as a very important trait or personality characteristic for leaders as it is often equated with drive.

This study will investigate the themes that are evident in students’ group work experiences, particularly focusing on the type of leadership and communication skills students
learn and are able to practice. This information will help to inform instructors about how group work affects students’ experiences in an effort to make their learning meaningful with respect to leadership and communication.

Instructors can benefit from understanding how students learn in a group environment. (Wheelan, 2000). Stall (1994) proposed a number of essential conditions that must be present for group learning to be successful, including: learning objectives that are accepted by all students; positive interdependence; positive social interaction, behaviour and attitudes; sufficient time spent on learning and task completion; and individual accountability. These are relevant to this study because they are characteristics that support learning leadership and communication skills.

Research Question

Since group work is a common instructional strategy for physical education classes at a post-secondary level, this researcher decided to investigate:

What are students’ experiences in groups and how might these experiences foster the development of communication and leadership skills?

Definition of Terms

Putting students in groups is an instructional strategy for hands-on experiential learning in physical education classes at Vancouver Island University (VIU). It is not the purpose of this study to delve into the complexities of group learning theories. Instead, some of the concepts of group learning strategies will be discussed to support the influence of student skill development in the areas of leadership and communication. Various names have been given to group learning strategies and there some distinctions among these: cooperative learning, collaborative learning, collective learning, learning communities, peer teaching, reciprocal learning, team learning, study circles, study groups and work groups (adapted from Johnson, Johnson and Smith, 1991).
In this study, group work will be defined as a minimum of two or more students working together on a common project. Student’s environment can be informal with no work specific roles or responsibilities outlined by the instructor, or formal with designated roles and responsibilities, or study teams where students are working together to learn course work. Students’ experiences include the following: cognitive learning about course content.

Communication skills include: taking turns, listening, and paraphrasing. Leadership skills include: self-awareness, negotiating decision-making, problem solving, taking responsibility and organizing.

Overview of Study

The goal of this study was to hear from students about their experiences with group work, looking for themes around leadership and communication. Undergraduate students in the faculty of Sport, Health and Physical Education (SHAPE) are routinely involved in group work.

The study took place on the campus at Vancouver Island University in the fall of 2014. Data was collected from three different classes, each class had a different instructor from the SHAPE faculty. All three classes shared the commonality of using group work to support student learning. One of the classes was theory based where students worked in groups of two to three, on class presentation projects. The second class was predominately a theory-based class where students worked in groups of two to three, working on small group projects that included physical activities and written work. The third class was a theory-based class where students worked on lab projects that also included written work and students worked together on experiments. The total sample size was 75 students. The study was a qualitative design. Data were to include student surveys and interviews. Data collection concluded with a total of 53 surveys. The researcher set out to include interview data for this study, however, at the end of the
data collection period there were no results for interviews. The findings from the surveys were examined and coded for themes around communication and leadership. These themes are illustrated in the table and graph in Chapter 4.
Chapter 4: Findings and Results

The purpose of this action research study was to explore the experiences of physical education students working together in groups, looking in depth at the themes of leadership and communication skills. In addition, the study investigates how this information can be applied to instructional strategies that contribute to greater student learning in groups.

A pencil and paper 18-question survey was distributed to three different classes with both male and female students ages 18-40 years, in the faculty of SHAPE at VIU. Group work was used as an instructional strategy for learning in each of the classes. Each class had different instructor. Out of the 75 students surveyed there were 53 surveys returned.

The researcher coded her 18 question survey results by identifying four themes for the open-ended questions, numbered 2-11 respectively. Likert scale represented statements 12-18. These data were summarized and given numerical values for comparison (Diagram 4.4).

Each of the following tables below identifies four topics and represents a summary of the most frequently occurring student responses for each question from the survey (Appendix C). The themes were: communication, leadership, supports learning and limitations. The second column within the table is the “key words and phrases” representing a summary of the most frequently occurring responses that were identified for each question.

In Table 4.1 below, regarding the leadership skills they saw in their group, students described organizational skills such as: ‘time management’, ‘being assertive’, ‘staying on task’, ‘making decisions’ and ‘leading the group’, as key areas for leadership shown within their groups.
Table 4.1

Leadership Skills in Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TOPIC</th>
<th>KEY WORDS/PHRASES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Ask questions, verbalize, Facebook group, voice opinion, checking in with others, listening</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>Organize, help, take initiative, take charge, keep on task, make decisions, time management, be assertive, lead group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supports Learning</td>
<td>Stay focused, help, teach others, take ownership for self, use knowledge to help others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations</td>
<td>No shows, loafers, aggressive behaviour</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.2 and Table 4.3 focus on leadership specifically, in terms of how students acted as leaders in their group and the kinds of leadership that was required in their group. Students noted that regarding communication, they showed their leadership skills by ‘listening’ and ‘sharing ideas, similarly these kinds of communication skills were also noted as being needed in the groups (Table 3). When comparing Table 2 and Table 3, regarding the leadership theme ‘staying on task’ and ‘organizing’, were seen as key in terms of leadership shown and leadership needed within the group.

Students identified having their learning supported within their groups by: ‘helping’, ‘being friendly’, and ‘encouraging’, with the most frequent response stated being, the ‘sharing of responsibility’. In contrast, when asked how the learning could be supported, ‘teaching’ and ‘
being focused’ were reported as needed. As well, clarity around ‘the direction of roles and responsibilities’ was a frequently occurring response.

Table 4.2

* Denotes the most frequently occurring response.

Table 4.3

* Denotes the most frequently occurring response.
Table 4.4 below summarizes the challenges for students in their group learning. Identified communication challenges included: ‘inability to verbalize feelings and thoughts’, ‘conflicts and arguments’ and ‘feeling forced to communicate’. Challenges in terms of leadership included ‘needing to help others’, ‘relying on others’, ‘learning and practicing leading’ and ‘problem solving’. Interestingly, students indicated that ‘learning more about themselves and others’, ‘learning from others through compromise’, and ‘understanding strengths and weaknesses’, as ways group work supported their learning.

Table 4.4  

*Denotes the most frequently occurring response.

The majority of students believed that group work meant less work for them individually and this is supported and previously noted in their responses in Table 4.3 where “shared
workload” was listed as a benefit of working together. Other benefits of working together are indicated in Table 4.5 below, where students say that learning from their colleagues through ‘support’ and ‘shared responsibility’, were significant in supporting their own learning.

Table 4.5

*How Group Work Supported Learning*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TOPIC</th>
<th>KEY WORDS/PHRASES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Learning to talk to others about shared responsibilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>Teaching and learning from others to others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supports Learning</td>
<td>Support for learning from peers, shared workload and energy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations</td>
<td>None listed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Diagram 4.1 shows that very high percentage of students expressed that overall, group work generally required less effort for them than working independently.

Diagram 4.1

*Effort Needed in Group Work*
Diagram 4.2

`Communication Choices`

Diagram 4.2 represents the different ways students chose to communicate about their group work. The predominant trend was to communicate face to face with fellow group members, followed by communication using technology. It is interesting to note that ‘formal group meetings’, was indicated as being the least popular kind of communication. Students identified that they used technology such as Facebook, email or texting for communicating but also used verbal communication skills like: asking questions, sharing opinions and listening to others, when they met in person, as show in the Tables 1-5 respectively.

Regarding communication students noted that the skills they felt were needed in their group shown in Table 4.7, such as: ‘explaining’, ‘being assertive’ and ‘speaking’ were similarly noted as *limitations* for communicating, as seen in Table 4.8, described as ‘lack of communicating’, ‘not sharing ideas’, and ‘lack of understanding’.
Table 4.6

*What kinds of communication skills were needed in your group?*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TOPIC</th>
<th>KEY WORDS/PHRASES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group Communication</td>
<td>Assertive, sharing presenting information, speaking, explaining</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.7

*What were some of the limitations to communication with group members?*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TOPIC</th>
<th>KEY WORDS/PHRASES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Limitations</td>
<td>Lack of communication*, not sharing ideas*, meeting places and times*, work ethic, schedule conflicts, lack of understanding</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Denotes the most frequently occurring response.

Diagram 4.3 below, shows that the majority of students believe that working together in groups contributes to shared responsibility and deeper learning, while others believe that group work is supported by completing the task more quickly than if they were to do the work individually.
Diagram 4.3

*Support For Working in Groups*

![Diagram 4.3: Support For Working in Groups]

Diagram 4.4 is a summary of the student responses for the Likert scale statements.

Questions 12 - 19 represent what students learned when working in their groups. Question 12 – Shared Responsibility, Question 13 – Negotiating with others, Question 14- Problem Solving, Question 15 – Resolving Conflicts, Question 16 – Developing a Common Vision, Question 18 – Communication Skills. Overall, students indicated that they *agreed* that they called upon the abovementioned skills to navigate their group work. In particular, they *strongly agreed* that they learned leadership skills while doing group work.
Diagram 4.4

*Student Responses to Learning in Groups*
Chapter 5: Summary, Discussion, Limitations and Recommendations

"Individual stars do not make the sky, a system does”

Michael Fullan

Summary

This study was the consequence of the informal feedback from physical education students at VIU about their group work experiences. Some of the benefits students expressed regarding group work were as follows: meeting new people, making friends, and sharing workloads. Although having students work together in groups has benefits, it also creates challenges on some levels. Some of the reported challenges both in the research and in this study included navigating conflict, sharing of workload, loafing, lack of accountability, not having effective communication strategies, and the need for leadership. Therefore the intent of the study was to learn from students what their experiences were, with the ultimate goal of improving their learning.

The supporting research has shown that students working together in groups have opportunities to practice the above mentioned skills. Researchers, Johnson & Johnson (1993), looked as cooperative learning as a type of group work and concluded that it must be guided by an instructional practice that defines the roles and responsibilities of students within those groups. In general, two elements must be present if cooperative learning is to be effective, group goals and individual accountability. Group goals and individual accountability motivate students to give explanations and take one another’s learning seriously (Slavin, 1995).

The themes that were looked at within the survey for this study were students’ communication and leadership skills. The researcher hypothesized that based on the literature students would be engaged in the practice of being leaders and communicating within their
groups to complete their project or assignment. These skills are transferrable to real life situations and help set students up for success in the work world. Since leadership and communication are key areas for students in the physical education setting, it is important to draw on these skills as a focus to further personal and professional development.

Discussion

This study investigated students’ experiences in a group work environment. In terms of leadership, they reported that staying on task, and monitoring and sharing responsibilities, were key in how leadership was shown and needed. Shared responsibility also came up as being something that was needed in their groups. Supporting research suggests that defining roles and responsibilities are key to the success of group work. Key findings this study suggest that lack of direction along with the delegation of roles are integral to the leadership needed in groups.

Regarding communication the results indicated that students reported a need for more communication skills for their group experience. This may be a reflection of the lack of skills of individuals collectively within a particular group or the result of the effectiveness of individual communication skills generally. Approximately 66% of students chose to use verbal communication to connect with participants in their groups. This may have been because group work was mostly done in class, or that it was seen as more productive to connect face to face for the completion of a particular project. This method of communication could present challenges if relational trust and group cohesiveness was limited in the groups. Some of the reported issues around communication like students ‘not feeling their voice was heard’, ‘lack of understanding’ or general lack of communication’ support this notion. Blair (1991) contents that groups go through phases of development including: Forming, Storming, Norming and Performing.
The survey results reported in this study about communication may be a reflection of the forming and storming stage of development. It should be noted however that, each group comes with its own unique characteristics and challenges, which make it difficult to generalize and make assumptions that may be applicable to all group situations. Nevertheless, these factors do play a role in the development and dynamic of any group process.

In terms of leadership, students expressed overall that they ‘strongly agreed’ (Diagram 4.4) that being in a group work environment gave them an opportunity to practice being leaders. Examples of leadership shown and practiced included: monitoring the group by staying on task, organizing tasks, teaching their peers and sharing responsibilities. Shared responsibility came up as a key term in how students saw leadership and how it was shown in their group, which may be a reflection of importance of this particular trait for students working in groups. There was an emphasis on the need for direction, staying on task and organization in terms of how students thought leadership was needed in their group. This information is supported by the research, which recommends that establishing roles and responsibilities for students in group work will help make the experience more successful.

Students believe that general challenges with group work are as follows: a result of the lack of roles within the group, personal accountability and the direction of the task to be completed. Although there were challenges with group work, this study suggests that students appreciated group work because of being able to experience the following: work with others, work through conflict, work through establishing roles and responsibilities, and in particular, it gave them insight into themselves and how their behaviour and work habits affected members in their group. The comment about personal insight was clearly identified as a frequently occurring student response (Table 4.4).
In terms of research, there are challenges in measuring the effectiveness of this kind of learning because of the dynamic nature of groups, however the research also indicates that studying group work is important because it allows students to work together to achieve a common goal and this kind of engagement does develop communication skills and prepares students for life (Knight, 2013).

**Limitations and Recommendations**

Although the results of this study share similarities with the findings of different kinds of group work such as collaborative learning, cooperative learning, teamwork and study groups, this general comparison does not take into account the many independent variables that may effect the validity of this particular study. As well, although data collection results included a total of 53/75 surveys completed, there were no interview results to compare to the survey results. Having interview results may have contributed to the validity of the study. The survey questions were designed by the researcher and thus may have a certain bias influencing the reliability of the results. The reliability of the study may also have been threatened since each of the groups measured in the survey had unique personal characteristics, different instructors and were working on different projects. The consequence of this has an effect on the overall generalizability of the study since the different group projects within the independent classes create many variables within the study making it difficult to get a definite measure of experiences within a specific context.

The success of learning in groups can be supported by teaching students particular communication skills and defining roles and responsibilities within groups. Through assessment for learning practices, instructors can learn about the kinds of skills students require to navigate their group work. This learning can promote the development and practice of both leadership and
communication skills. The necessary time for student learning pre-learning around communication strategies to support their work in groups may present time challenges for instructors. The investment of time for this learning may not seem valuable for some, however the research supports that when students have the skills to communicate effectively in their group they are more successful and can therefore practice being leaders. Group based learning is seen as a means of enhancing social skills (Livingston & Lynch, 2000). Not only do students need requisite skills, instructors need to support this learning by providing opportunity to learn and develop these skills.

Given the demand among employers for graduates who can operate successfully in teams, it is important to engender a positive response from students for team working. It is also necessary that students can reflect on and take away coherent understanding of their group work experience, if they are to be equipped for dealing with such situations in their future lives. Well-structured and managed group work provides students with a set of transferable skills and a vehicle for critically examining their subject, both which are important components of modern courses” (Livingston & Lynch, 2000).

Overall in this study students reported meaningful positive learning experiences in their groups. It is worth noting that even perceived negative experiences were expressed as opportunities for growth. Since there is a growing mandate by employers for students to have group work skills when they enter the workforce, further attention should be given to addressing how best to support students’ learning in a group work environment.
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doi:10.1080/713696161.


Appendix A: Recruitment Script

My name is Barb Propp. I am a student at Vancouver Island University, enrolled in the Masters of Leadership Education Program. I am currently working on a research project looking at physical education students’ experiences working in groups. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary.

I will be handing out a pencil - paper survey to you today. The survey is anonymous. There are no known potential risks for your participation in this study. You may skip questions or quit the survey at any time, for any reason, and without penalty. Please read all the information on the statement of consent form. Please detach the consent form part and keep it for your records.

I am also looking for volunteers to participate in a follow up interview. Attached to the survey is an interview participation form. Please fill in your contact information if you are interested in
volunteering for an interview. Interviews will take approximately 30 – 45 minutes and will be conducted here at VIU.

There are drop boxes available for both the survey indicated by (survey drop box) and the interview indicated by (interview drop box), located in the main faculty office. All surveys are completely anonymous and interviews are confidential.

Drop boxes will be in the main office for two weeks from this date (I will give the specific date at the time of recruitment).

I would like to take this opportunity to thank-you for your participation in my research study.
Appendix B: Survey Statement of Consent for what social skills do students use when working in groups?

Purpose of the study:
This action research study aims to explore the social skills that university physical education students use when working in groups. It is the hope that the findings from this study will inform instructors about students’ perceptions of group work and the skills required in this learning environment. It is hoped this information will contribute to the development of instructional approaches to group learning that may lead to more meaningful learning experiences for students.

Study Procedures:
To participate in this study you are being asked to complete an anonymous pencil-paper survey. The survey should take no more than 15 minutes of your time. You will be asked to answer questions about the social skills you use during your group work experiences. Your participation
is completely voluntary. You may skip questions at any time or not complete the survey for any reason, and without penalty. Once completed the survey can be placed in the drop box, indicated by “Survey Drop Box”, in the main faculty office. Attached to the survey is an interview participation form for you to indicate if you are interested in participating in a follow up interview. Should you be interested please fill out this form and place it in the second drop box indicated by “Interview Drop Box” in the main faculty office by October 20, 2013.

Potential Risks: No known potential risks

Confidentiality:

No names will be recorded during the data collection in this study. Interviews will not be anonymous but will be confidential.

Only the researcher will have access to your survey data. Study documents will be kept in a locked filing cabinet for 5 years in the office of faculty professor, Rachel Moll. Participants will not be identified by name in any reports of the completed study. Electronic data and results of this study will be stored on a secured computer with restricted password access.

Contact information about the study:

If you have any questions or desire further information with respect to this study, you may contact Barb Propp at barb.propp@viu.ca

If you have any concerns about your treatment as a participant in this research, please contact the Vancouver Island Research Ethics Officer at reb@viu.ca or by telephone at 1-888-920-2221 (local 2665).
Consent:

By completing any questions and by submitting this survey you consent to participate in this research project and for the information you provide to be used in the study results.

Please keep this statement of consent for your records.
Appendix C: Survey Questions for 3rd Year Physical Education Students

Think about the group project you had to work on.

For demographic purposes please indicate your PHED course name and number here__________

1. Describe the group project you worked on (please indicate the topic of your project, the number of people in your group and the project expectations).

2. What kinds of leadership skills did you see in your group?
3. How did you act as a leader in your group?

4. In what ways was leadership needed in your group?

5. In what ways did group work challenge your learning?

6. Did working in groups require less work for you?

7. In what ways did group work support your learning?

8. How did you communicate with members in your group?
9. What kinds of communication skills were needed in your group?

10. What were some of the limitations to communication with group members?

11. In what ways did working in groups support the project completion?

For questions 12 – 18, please circle the answer the most closely represents your response.

SA (Strongly Agree)  A (Agree)  U (Undecided)  D(Disagree)  SD (Strongly Disagree)

12. I learned to negotiate with other group members.

SA   A   U   D   SD

13. I learned to share responsibility.

SA   A   U   D   SD
14. I learned to negotiate to solve problems.

SA A U D SD

15. I learned to resolve conflicts.

SA A U D SD

16. I learned to develop a common vision with members in my group.

SA A U D SD

17. I believe working in groups helped to develop my communication skills.

SA A U D SD

18. I believe working in groups helped to develop my leadership skills.

SA A U D SD

Should you wish to participate in an interview please fill in the consent to interview form attached and place it in the drop box in the main faculty office. If you have any questions you can contact the researcher, Barb Propp at 250-713-1282 or barb.propp@viu.ca
Appendix D: Interview Instrument for 3rd Year Physical Education Students

For the purpose of the study, think of social skills in your group experience specifically in terms of communication and leadership.

1. Describe your group project.
2. What role did you have in your group?
3. How would you describe a leader?
4. Can you describe an instance or situation where you needed to act as a leader?
5. How was this group experience helpful in contributing to your skills as a leader?
6. How do you feel you could transfer these skills to other parts of your life, personally and professionally? If so - in what ways? If not – why not?
7. Did you practice communication skills in your group work? If so, what were they?
8. How did working in a group give you opportunity to practice these communication skills?
9. How did you learn how to negotiate problems in your group?
10. How did you resolve conflicts in your group?
11. What kinds of leadership skills did you develop working in your group?
Appendix E: Interview Participation Form

The following form is to acknowledge your interest in being contacted for a voluntary interview conducted by researcher Barb Propp.

Research Question: What social skills do students use when working in groups?

Please fill out the information below to indicate your interest in participating in a follow up interview. You will be asked to sign a consent form before the interview starts. With your permission, the interview will be audio recorded. Interviews will be about 30-45 minutes long.
and will take place at a time and location on VIU Nanaimo campus that is convenient for the researcher and participant.

This form is to be placed in the drop box labeled (interview drop box) in the main faculty office.

Name: ________________________________

Email: ________________________________

Phone: ________________________________
Appendix F: Interview Consent Form

FACULTY OF EDUCATION
Vancouver Island University
900 Fifth Street, Nanaimo,
British Columbia, Canada V9R 5S5
Tel (250) 740-6221 Fax (250) 740-6463
http://www.viu.ca/education/

CONSENT TO AN INTERVIEW

Research Question: What social skills do students use when working in groups?

Please sign and fill in your name below as an indication of your consent to participate in an interview regarding the above-mentioned study.

Purpose of the study:

This action research study aims to explore the social skills that university physical education students use when working in groups. It is the hope that the findings from this study will inform instructors about students’ perceptions of group work and the skills required in this learning environment. It is hoped this information will contribute to the development of instructional approaches to group learning that may lead to more meaningful learning experiences for students.

Study Procedures:
For the interview you will be asked as series of questions by the researcher, related to communication and leadership in your group work experience. Interviews will take place at a time and location on VIU Nanaimo campus that is convenient for the participant. If you agree, the interview will be audio recorded for accurate transcription purposes only. The interview will last approximately 30-45 minutes.

Potential Risks: No known potential risks

Confidentiality: Interviews will be confidential.

Only the researcher will have access to your interview data. Study documents will be kept in a locked filing cabinet for 5 years in the office of faculty professor, Rachel Moll. Participants will not be identified by name in any reports of the completed study. Electronic data and results of this study will be stored on a secured computer with restricted password access.

Contact information about the study:

If you have any questions or desire further information with respect to this study, you may contact Barb Propp at barb.propp@viu.ca

If you have any concerns about your treatment as a participant in this research, please contact the Vancouver Island Research Ethics Officer at reb@viu.ca or by telephone at 1-888-920-2221 (local 2665).

Consent:

I have read the above form and consent to participate in an audio recorded interview.

Name: _____________________________________ Phone: ___________________

Signature: _________________________________
Appendix G: Email Letter to Physical Education Instructors

Attention:

Les Malbon - les.malbon@viu.ca
Rick Bevis - rick.bevis@viu.ca
George Kelly – george.kelly@viu.ca
Guy Lemasurier – guy.masurier@viu.ca

As some of you know I am completing my Masters of Leadership Education at VIU and will be conducting research in the fall of 2013. My study is looking at the development of students’ social skills during group work in physical education. I spoke with Brad Reimer, Chair of the Department of SHAPE and he indicated that all of you use group work as an instructional strategy in your classes. I would greatly appreciate the opportunity to visit your classes to survey
your students about their experiences with group work. The timeline I’m looking at is the fall semester of 2013.

All survey information will be anonymous. I will also be asking for volunteer participants for interviews. Interviews will be confidential.

Following approval from the VIU Ethics Board, I would hope to visit your class in October of 2013 to recruit participants for the survey and interviews. I will take about 5 minutes of class time to provide a brief overview of the study and to hand out the survey. Students will be asked to complete the survey on their own time and to return it to the drop box in the faculty main office. Those wishing to participate in an interview would fill out their contact information on a separate form and put it in a second drop box in the main faculty office.

If you are able to accommodate this request, please contact me at barbpropp@shaw.ca at your earliest convenience.

Kind regards,

Barb Propp