



“We Can Do Hard Things” Girls’ Experiences with Physical Literacy and Physical Education Through Photovoice

Dr. Alexandra Stoddart

Contact Author: alexandra.stoddart@uregina.ca
Faculty of Education, University of Regina, Regina, Saskatchewan, S4S 0A2, Canada

Ms. Sarah Benson

College of Kinesiology, University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, S7N 5E8, Canada

Dr. Louise Humbert

College of Kinesiology, University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, S7N 5E8, Canada

Abstract

Background: “Physical literacy [PL] is the motivation, confidence, physical competence, knowledge and understanding to engage in physical activities over the lifespan” (Tremblay et al., 2018; Figure 2). Unfortunately, living in a patriarchal culture can impact the development of PL for girls and young women (Whitehead, 2007). Perhaps this is a contributing factor to why there is a paucity of PL research regarding the marginalized population of girls and young women, despite empirical evidence that they are less active (Canadian Sport for Life, 2014; Canadian Women & Sport, 2024), have lower perceived confidence, enjoyment, and participation (Constantinou et al., 2009), have more worry and mood disorders (Statistics Canada, 2016), and mental health disorders that require more emergency department visits (Canadian Institute for Health Information, 2025). Some physical education (PE) studies have now shown that developing PL can reduce gender differences in motor competence (Kriellaars et al., 2019; Stoddart et al., 2021), however work is required to fully understand how to support girls and young women on their PL journey.

Methodology: As part of a larger Participatory Action Research study (Kemmis et al., 2013), students ($n = 12$) from two Grade 9 girls’ only PE classes engaged in photovoice (Wang & Burris, 1997) and focus groups (3; range 30 – 48 mins., $M = 42$ mins.) guided by the following question: “What are your experiences with developing PL through PE?” Students were advised on photovoice protocols (e.g., anonymity, safety, privacy) and had several weeks to select four to five images that they wanted to talk about and share. Due to the provincial cell phone ban in schools (Government of Saskatchewan), students submitted their pictures through a secure Qualtrics link. Institutional Research Ethics Board approval was ascertained for this project, as well as approval from the respective school division. An inductive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2022) was used to generate themes.

Results & Conclusion: Preliminary themes highlight substantially more dialogue around the elements of motivation and confidence. This work corroborates previous literature regarding girls’ experiences in PE (e.g., Flintoff & Scraton, 2006), while simultaneously providing new interpretations using a PL lens. Relationships with peers and supportive environments substantially influence girls’ confidence, competence, and motivation. Why does this matter for physical and health education? Girls and young women are telling us what they need in order to develop PL through PE; it’s up to us to listen and put that into practice.

Keywords: girls’ only physical education; physical literacy; gender



References

- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2022). *Thematic analysis: A practical guide*. SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Canadian Institute for Health Information. (2025). *Children and youth mental health in Canada*. <https://www.cihi.ca/en/child-and-youth-mental-health>
- Canadian Sport for Life. (2014). *Long-term athlete development 2.0 resource paper*. [http://canadiansportforlife.ca/sites/default/files/resources/CS4L%20Resource\\$20Paper.pdf](http://canadiansportforlife.ca/sites/default/files/resources/CS4L%20Resource$20Paper.pdf)
- Canadian Women & Sport. (2024). *Rally Report 2024: A call to reimagine sport so all girls can play*. <https://womenandsport.ca/en-ca/resource/rally-report-2024>
- Constantinou, P., Manson, M., & Silverman, S. (2009). Female students' perceptions about gender-role stereotypes and their influence on attitude toward physical education. *Physical Educator*, 66(2), 85-96.
- Flintoff, A., & Scraton, S. (2006). Girls and physical education. In D. Kirk, D. Macdonald, & M. O'Sullivan (Eds.), *The handbook of physical education* (pp. 767- 783). SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Government of Saskatchewan. (2024). New provincial measures to limit cell phones in Saskatchewan's K-12 classrooms. <https://www.saskatchewan.ca/government/news-and-media/2024/august/06/new-provincial-measures-to-limit-cell-phones-in-saskatchewans-k-12-classrooms>
- Kemmis, S., McTaggart, R., & Nixon, R. (2013). *The Action Research planner: Doing critical Participatory Action Research*. Springer.
- Kriellaars, D. J., Cairney, J., Bortoleto, M. A. C., Kiez, T. K. M., Dudley, D., & Aubertin, P. (2019). The impact of circus arts instruction in physical education on the physical literacy of children in grades 4 and 5. *Journal of Teaching in Physical Education*, 38, 162-170. <https://doi.org/10.1123/jtpe.2018-0269>
- Statistics Canada. (2016). *Mental health disorders and life satisfaction in Canada*. Catalogue number: 11-627-M
- Stoddart, A. L., Humbert, M. L., Kerpan, S., Cameron, N., & Kriellaars, D. (2021). PLitPE: A physical literacy intervention in Canadian elementary school physical education classes. *Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy*, 1-17. 10.1080/17408989.2021.2014438
- Tremblay, M. S., Costas-Bradstreet, C., Barnes, J. D., Bartlett, B., Dampier, D., Lalonde, C., Leidl, R., Longmuir, P., McKee, M., Patton, R., Way, R., & Yessis, J. (2018). Canada's Physical Literacy Consensus Statement: Process and outcome. *BMC Public Health*, 18(Suppl 2). 1-18, 10.1186/s12889-018-5903-x
- Wang, C., & Burris, M.A. (1997). Photovoice: Concept, methodology, and use for participatory needs assessment. *Health Education & Behavior*, 24(3), 369-387. 10.1177/109019819702400309
- Whitehead, M., (2007). Physical Literacy as the goal of Physical Education with particular reference to the needs of girls and young women. CAHPERD Paper. <https://www.physical-literacy.org.uk/library/physical-literacy-pe-and-the-needs-of-girls-and-young-women/>