

Adult Participants' Experiences of a Sport Program Implementing the Easy-Play Model:

Implications for an Active Lifestyle

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Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Education

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Abstract

The Easy-Play Model is a useful framework for facilitating sport among a diverse group of participants of different ages and ability levels. The model's focus on de-emphasizing competitiveness in an effort to establish an optimally competitive environment has facilitated positive play experiences. This study investigated the experiences of players who have been a part of a weekly soccer program implementing the Easy-Play Model. In-depth interviews of 8 participants provided insight concerning the benefits and weaknesses of the approach and the notable experiences of the players. Results provided data confirming the model's effectiveness in facilitating positive social interactions, safe play experiences where injury is generally a negligible concern, and productive opportunities to be physically active through sport. This study of the Easy-Play Model sets the foundation for future research which should further add to our understanding of productive ways to engage people in physical activity through sport.

Acknowledgements

There are three people who I know prepared me to write this: Lew, Chellew, and Lu. The first showed me how hard it was; the second showed me how easy it was; and the third showed me how capable I was.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

This study investigated the Easy-Play Model (EPM), a sport model that can be used in schools and the community. Qualities of the EPM are described to articulate how it provides an effective framework to promote physical activity through participation in sport. The design of the EPM is based on the belief that to enjoy play and maximize fun experiences in sport, games can be organized under minimal pressure of competition. An understanding of the EPM as it is currently implemented is described through the experiences of adults who play weekly soccer sessions using the model at a community gymnasium in Southern Ontario. Confirming the EPM's capacity to foster an environment to facilitate play that participants believe is beneficial in creating a fun experience while encouraging physical activity is the ultimate goal of this investigation.

The EPM is a framework that modifies the rules of traditional games, the style in which games are delivered, and defines ideal sportspersonlike courtesies for players to adopt (Lu & Steele, 2012). The goal of the framework is to establish an environment which encourages fun and physical activity among a diverse group of participants in a safe and productive environment playing team sports. The model is intended to be implemented in the context of popular team sport (e.g. soccer, basketball, hockey, handball, lacrosse). The sport being play using the EPM should be recognizable to participants and outside viewers, however to assure characteristics of the EPM are adhered to certain aspects of sport may be modified. In comparison to a traditional approach to playing team sports, some of the essential characteristics which define a game using the EPM include: limiting the number of players on the field to maximize each players' touches; decreasing the size of the field of play to accommodate players at

different skill levels; and providing regular breaks in play as dictated by the needs of participants as oppose to traditional standards or sporting rules. Players are freely interchanged between teams during a game and to encourage equal playing time substitutions occur at regular time intervals. Formal score is not kept in the EPM since there may be a regular exchange of players between sides in a competition causing the continuous reorganization of opponents—the EPM does not require form scorekeeping, timekeeping, or league standings.

In the EPM, teams will strive to score as often as possible, there is never a formal declaration of which side won, and there is a concerted effort to keep scores close. Thus it is important to informally organizing a relative balance of skill on each team.

Additionally, highly skilled players play an instrumental role in balancing scoring to ensure the competitive balance of the games. All players are asked to observe and practice courtesies beyond the expectation of the game's formal rules to allow the facilitation of competitions without a referee. These characteristics are designed to foster an easy and safe environment to enjoy play. Most of these characteristics resemble or replicate recommendations to improve the facilitation of organized sports (Coakley & Donnelly, 2009). Even though the model is designed to facilitate easy-play, it can be difficult to comprehend and implement because it requires players to appreciate specific courtesies and value modifications to traditional rules which govern game play (Lu & Steele, 2012). Easy-play implies that play in the model strives to facilitate an environment where participants feel supported, so that regardless of the players' ability or physical fitness they can access and enjoy physical activity through sport. Coakley and Donnelly (2009) acknowledged that efforts to implement changes to the traditional

delivery of sports have been challenged by sports agencies and have previously failed. The EPM provides a framework to implement some of the changes Coakley and Donnelly recognized as important in reforming the way sports are administered in order to establish a positive and easy play environment. The benefits of an environment which actively de-emphasizes competitiveness must be better understood to ensure practitioners are providing ideal opportunities to be physically active through sport.

Background

Play has an incredible capacity to engage people of all ages in physical activity, and enjoying our playful activities is an important quality of all play experiences (Fink, 1995). However as people enter adulthood they become less involved in play as a way to attain regular physical activity (Bateson, 2011; Statistics Canada, 2011). In the opinion of the author, the EPM has the potential to facilitate play experiences in community settings to encourage physical activity while developing skills in team sports. The goal of the model is to promote sport participation as a way to be physically active and develop athletic skills, while at the same time provide a social occasion to build relationships and increase confidence. The EPM is designed to foster an environment where goals are oriented less toward winning (ego oriented) and more toward skill development (task oriented) while encouraging physical activity through sport. The EPM's framework engages a diverse population in play with an approach emphasizing fun, while de-emphasizing competitiveness. Anecdotal observations have led the researcher to believe the EPM has had a positive effect in encouraging play and physical activity.

Intense competitiveness has been entrenched as a defining characteristic of sport. Although many athletes embrace a competitive environment and value competition as a

motivating factor to participate in sport, it is important to consider how overly competitive approaches to playing sports can discourage participation. The EPM is designed to facilitate participation in team sport while maintaining an environment which limits detrimental effects of competitiveness arising from players' ego-oriented goals. Daniels (2007) describes ego-oriented goals as being norm referenced, wherein participants compare themselves to peers' performances and their relative success or failure is based on the outcome of a competition. Overly competitive ego-oriented environments are not ideal to facilitate physical activity through sport among a group of diverse participants (Daniels, 2007). A description of the EPM framework in the context where it is currently implemented provides a concrete example of an environment that is able to facilitate a fun experience while encouraging physical activity through sport.

Purpose of the Study

The EPM has evolved as a facilitator of regular indoor and outdoor soccer games (Lu & Steele, 2012). The purpose of this study will be to investigate participants' experiences playing soccer in the EPM. Participants' descriptions of experiences will seek to provide evidence that the EPM facilitates a fun play environment and encourages physical activity. The investigation of participants' experiences will also help us to authentically understand the benefits, value, and weaknesses of the EPM. This research will address the following empirical questions:

1. What do players describe as their experiences (e.g., positive/enjoyable or negative/disliked experiences) when participating in a soccer program using the EPM?

2. What do players describe as their feelings (e.g., cheerful/satisfied or frustrated/discouraged feelings) when participating in a soccer program using the EPM?
3. In what ways have their reported experiences in the EPM differed from previous sport experiences playing with other community groups?
4. Do players' described experiences in the soccer program align with characteristics of the EPM?

The results from this study are intended to provide information to community sports organizations and physical educators about a defined sport model which focuses on play and having fun. The process of conducting an empirical research study on the EPM provides the opportunity to better understand its unique characteristics and how they facilitate a positive playing environment. It is valuable to understand if players' experiences reflect the inherent qualities of the model or if their experiences are unrelated to the EPM. Participants' reports will also identify its strengths and weaknesses to provide information on ways to improve the model's delivery. Currently there is limited literature describing a practical model for playing team sports which explicitly identified the necessity to de-emphasize competitiveness. This study will provide a written description of a model that has facilitated regular soccer session for many years. The availability of the EPM in text may further encourage its promotion to facilitate team sports in settings beyond the soccer sessions assessed in this study. An empirical understanding of the EPM is anticipated to provide evidence for its value as a model to promote physical activity through sport.

Theoretical Framework

The framework for this empirical research is based on the need to determine the benefits of participation in sport and how players influence the environment in which they play. Play theory and complexity theory will be applied to interpret the function and value of the EPM. Qualities which define play are apparent in the inherent characteristics and practical implementation of the EPM. Each of Burghardt's (2011) five criteria used to define play provides a basis to evaluate the EPM in order to better understand its suitability within play theory. Complexity theory can be applied to help understand or describe the behaviour of participants in the EPM. The group of individuals (teams playing soccer) represent a learning system capable of determining collective goals (Davis, Sumara, & Luce-Kapler, 2008). Participants are required to understand their roles as players who cooperatively influence the conditions which facilitate the learning environment (Davis et al., 2008). Complexity theory provides a context for understanding the impact of players in facilitating an environment that is fun and promotes physical activity through the EPM framework.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter reviewed related literature from five aspects: ontology of Models and the EPM; decline in sport participation; physical education models promoting sports; cooperation and competition in physical education and organized sports; and motivation, play, and the complexity theory.

Ontology of Models and the EPM

An ontological understanding of a model can be widely interpreted depending on the context in which it is being examined. Frigg and Hartmann (2006) classified the existence of models as they are commonly referenced in academic contexts. In their analysis, which identified many ontological understandings of what a model is, they recognized that models are common stylized descriptions of a system. This is the most valuable definition to understand why the Easy-Play framework for playing sports is considered a model—the EPM is a description of a system which facilitates a specific style of play. The laymen’s understanding of a model considers it something which is designed to be imitated, replicated, or duplicated within a similar context. The EPM is designed to be replicated to achieve specific physical activity goals in various contexts (Lu & Steele, 2012).

As noted earlier, the EPM was conceived and has been developed over the past two decades (Lu & Steele, 2012). The model was not developed through a review of literature; rather it was built and described based on a culmination of experiences and practice organizing soccer games in numerous urban communities across Canada. Through experiences and reflection it has been continuously refined in an effort to achieve developmentally appropriate play among a diverse group of participants. The

model provides a framework to facilitate team sports through an approach that emphasizes inclusiveness and enjoyment of play regardless of participants' skill levels. The framework describes how to organize games using a number of defining characteristics. Adhering to these characteristics strives to establish a play environment which facilitates inclusiveness. Below is a description of the primary characteristics which define the EPM according to Lu and Steele (2012).

The concept of self-regulation and management of game play without formal refereeing structures should be introduced to all players in games facilitated using the EPM. To ensure that this is achievable, courtesies should be extended beyond rules when a foul and infraction occurs. For example, possession of the ball can be surrendered to the disadvantaged defensive player in an instance when a no fault collision occurs between opponents. In addition, participants should adhere to the following guidelines in order for self-regulation to be effective: fouls should be acknowledged with the courtesy of an apology regardless of fault; play should be stopped immediately in the event of an injury; players should be substituted at regular time intervals; and players should be freely interchanged between teams to ensure balance and to maximize player enjoyment and effectiveness within game play. Although this type of self-regulated game play may not provide a win-lose outcome to be celebrated or bemoaned, score keeping and league standings are not a part of the EPM framework. McLaughlin and Torres (2005) suggest win-lose outcomes are not fundamental and that when winning or losing is sidelined more attention may be appropriately focused on the central purpose of a sporting experience as oppose to the outcome.

Adapting games to ensure they are developmentally appropriate is widely believed to be a beneficial practice in order to encourage player engagement and fun experiences for all participants (Orlick, 2006). In the EPM, traditional *rules* of sports are modified. Sport rules may be changed for games played on a smaller field or for a game which does not necessitate a player for every traditional position on the field (e.g., playing soccer without the corner kick, offside rule, and lined boundaries and markers). With concern to this feature of the EPM, Orlick (2006) specifically advocates for games without lines over the traditional “play in a box” (p. 120) version popularized by professional sports organizations. Through its embracement of modified sport rules, EPM also advocates to: (a) decrease the size of the field according to the smaller number of players and their ability levels (e.g., it can be difficult and counterproductive to learning for less skilled players to effectively navigate their way on a full size field); (b) maximize participation by increasing the number of opportunities to play while focusing on player interaction within each game (e.g., more games operating simultaneously and/or the reduction of the number of players to effectively maximizing the interaction with teammates, opponents, and the implements during game play); (c) adjust the size of the net or scoring area to optimize and prioritize the concept of scoring; and (d) allow frequent breaks based on the players’ needs (e.g., 5 minute breaks every 20-30 minutes).

Optimal competitiveness should be established and maintained by all players participating in the EPM. In physical education curriculum documents, Öhman and Quennerstedt (2008, p. 372) found that practitioners were acknowledging that it is necessary to “defuse the element of competition” in order to achieve developmentally appropriate play. They recognize that competition is a natural part of sport, but in

physical education it must be de-emphasized to accommodate developmental goals (Öhman & Quennerstedt, 2008). In order to establish optimal competitiveness, skilled players in the EPM should encourage others to score and should focus on the inclusion of others through the use of their advanced skill set. In addition the EPM recommends that: (a) players should not have fixed positions on the field (goalie, offense, or defence may rotate every 5 minutes or as needed) or on a specific side/team; (b) players should cheer and congratulate all good plays regardless of which side/team is involved; (c) players should minimize aggressive attacking and tight defence in an effort to enhance opportunities to score and minimize the chance of injury; and (d) players should not aggressively use the implement in the game (e.g., kicking the soccer ball too hard or too high, slashing an opponent's hockey stick) if there is a potential to harm other teammates or opponents. The EPM also suggests that skilled players have a key role in facilitating productive play. A skilled player's responsibility in the EPM may include management of game play through their ability to control or adjust the equilibrium in the game to assure it is balanced. However skilled players can also develop their personal skills by challenging themselves to attempt a difficult pass or scoring opportunity.

Participants play "easy" on each other (especially against less skilled or novice players) and play hard for each other (e.g., support, care, maintenance of vigorous play). This is important in order to assure that developing skills can be more easily achieved in an optimally competitive environment. When implemented appropriately using the EPM, this should allow everyone to have the opportunity to score and contribute to team and individual success while allowing players to enjoy and have fun with a minimal chance of injury. Ultimately we assert that developmentally appropriate play facilitated by the EPM

is important to ensure success for all participants. Orlick (2006) has demonstrated the immense value of developmentally appropriate play through his practical guides to facilitating cooperative games and sports. The EPM also acknowledges how developmentally appropriate play can ensure an inclusive playing environment by modifying rules, the size of the field, and the periods of play to accommodate and recognize the continuum of player ability. When the EPM is implemented effectively, different players should be challenged at different levels and obstacles should remain optimal (not too hard or too easy) in response to players' developmental levels (e.g., abilities, ages). An optimal challenge in the EPM is defined as an impediment during play which provides players the opportunity to feel success in attempting to achieve a significant goal through the execution of a skill or tactic. These optimal challenges are crucial for all players to develop necessary skills, confidence, and enjoyment whether the player is highly skilled, a novice participant, or old or young. Ultimately the goal is to offer players a supportive and cooperative sporting environment that allows the participant (especially novice participants) space to grow and learn.

Adhering to these primary characteristics during play can provide an experience that is easy. When this easy-play environment is established through these primary characteristics, valuable residual qualities can be achieved through this model. Most importantly, an inclusive environment can be established to allow players of different ages, genders, and ability levels to enjoy play. Participants can learn to develop sport related skills in an environment in which activity attempts to ensure there is minimal pressure of competition. Lu and Steele (2012) acknowledge that the design of the EPM is intended to be appropriate for: schools and community environments, families to attain

physical activity through play, and parents to engage in play on the field with their children.

The appeal of the EPM as an approach to facilitating team sports is believed to be its emphasis on constructing relationships between teammates and opponents which allow for the sharing of positive experiences. Lu and Steele (2012) describe the Daoist nature of this relationship between participants: “the equilibrium between you (yin) and your opponent (yang) can foster a healthy relationship which promotes enjoyment and lasting positive effects as you (yin) and your opponent (yang) are in fact one (e.g., interdependent)” (p. 12). When scrimmaging players compete against their teammates in a supportive environment to emphasize a skill learnt in practice or refine cohesive relationships on the field of play. Although coaches demand different levels of intensity based on the developmentally appropriate goals of the team, the interaction teammates experience during a scrimmage is the closest common examples of the intended experience in the EPM.

The relationship between play and sport, built historically on a competitive framework, has affected the playful nature of physical activity (Kerr, 1991). Research on the connection between play and sport describes the transformation of play occurring under the development of strict rules and the serious nature of sports (Kerr, 1991). An activity where achievement can be measured through the process of defeating your opponents in competition is one goal of sport described by Edwards (1973). The organization of sport in leagues, both professional and amateur, is typically based on a competitive orientation with rules and structure designed to motivate participants toward winning (Kerr, 1991). One of the earliest described functions of play by Huizinga (1964)

identifies fun as the element which characterizes the essence of play. Kerr (1991) argues that sport has become so entrenched in competition and rituals that it has largely lost its playful nature; the element of fun has been lost to competition.

Findlay and Bowker (2009) distinguish a competitive orientation from a win-orientation, and indicate that non-elite athletes focused on winning have lower self-esteem. Although they found that a competitive orientation is associated with increased self-esteem, this is only when the players are focus on a mastery of skills (Findlay & Bowker, 2009). When the focus shifts to winning, participants' self-concept and self-esteem diminish (Findlay & Bowker, 2009). This finding concerning negative outcomes of a win-orientation is congruent with Daniels (2007), who argues a cooperative and task-oriented environment is favourable when introducing athletes to competitive sport—in this environment the focus on winning is de-emphasized and the development of skills through cooperation is valued.

A cooperative and task-oriented structure has been continually advocated by Orlick (2006) in numerous volumes of his book on cooperative games and sport. Orlick explains that playing with one another is more beneficial than against one another. Orlick argues that the outcomes of a cooperative approach to playing sport maximize the enjoyment of play experiences and encourage physical activity. Orlick provides a wealth of different activities to facilitate cooperative play, but they are not necessarily based on or designed to replicate team sports loved by many in North America (Green, 2005). With a philosophy capitalizing on the value of a cooperative approach to playing games and the capacity to apply this approach to familiar team sports, the EPM has a tremendous appeal to promote physical activity.

Some important assumptions considered when creating this model have guided its design. First, there is a human instinct which drives a person's natural willingness to play. Fink (1995) describes this as, "a vital impulse with its own value and sphere of activity, participated in for its own sake" (p. 100). This model capitalizes on this important assumption through its attempt to design an ideal play experience in sports. Second, everyone, regardless of their ability, is able to play. Creating an inclusive playing environment within the EPM respects this assumption by ensuring its framework accommodates players of different skill levels. Finally, play is a fun experience that is not always enhanced by intense competition. Competition or winning are valuable external motivators for many athletes, however prolonged dedication to physical activity is more likely when individuals are intrinsically motivated (Brunet & Sabiston, 2011).

The EPM was designed based on the belief that easy play has a capacity to encourage physical activity. Lu and Steele (2012) report many challenges to its effective implementation. One of the foremost concerns is how can you adequately address the problem of intensely competitive or aggressive players. Many athletes who are used to highly competitive sport (i.e., goal oriented, where winning is of paramount importance) may find it difficult to embrace some of the goals of the EPM (e.g., supporting other teammates/opponents, achieving task oriented goals). Even if a player is not intensely competitive or aggressive, it can still be difficult to integrate new players who are not familiar or challenge the culture of play. Players who are selfish with their possession of the ball or do not provide others with opportunities by shooting too often will have a negative impact on participants' experiences.

It is also important from a motivational perspective for players to feel they have some autonomy in their approach to playing the game (Brunet & Sabiston, 2011). This can be difficult to ensure if their style of play conflicts with the EPM culture. For example, occasionally groups of players have requested to change the environment by asking to play full-field games. Respecting this request is important for the purpose of perceived player autonomy. Even a suggested change which contradicts characteristics of the EPM (i.e., is seemingly counterintuitive to a developmentally appropriate play) must be democratically considered in order for participants to feel some ownership of the program. This ensures an environment of adequate democracy, another important value associated with the EPM. Ultimately the EPM is designed to provide inclusive and developmentally appropriate opportunities to participate in team sports; a valuable goal considering the declining trend observed in sports participation (Statistics Canada, 2011).

Decline in Sport Participation

Data from Statistics Canada (2011) demonstrate a trend between 1992 and 2005 which indicates a decline in sports participation dropping from 45% in 1992, to 34% in 1998, and then to 28% in 2005. In addition, it appears that younger age cohorts have also become less involved in sports as a way to be physically active. For example, in 2005, 59% of 15-18 year olds participated in sport compared to 77% in 1992; 43% of 19-24 year olds participated compared to 61% in 1992; 31% of 25-34 year olds participated compared to 53% in 1992; and 25% of 34-54 year olds participated compared to 43% in 1992.

Among the many different reasons referenced by Statistics Canada (2011) for this declining trend are an aging population; career, family, and child care responsibilities;

increased interest in other leisure activities related to technological developments and the Internet; and a lack of time or interest. Although Statistics Canada does not further discuss what exactly influences the population's lack of available time or interest, the statistics clearly indicate that sport participation is not a valued activity in the majority of our lives. Although providing alternative opportunities to engage in sport (such as the EPM) cannot be identified as the solution to address this declining trend, this author asserts that the EPM encourages regular sport participation where the model has been locally developed.

Grey (2004) attributes the continual decline in team sport participation to the high school system's focus on elite athletic teams. He adds that the pervasive focus on elite athletics in society, specifically in the media, creates a psychological barrier to team sport participation. Even while most adults "proclaim a deep and abiding love for team sports," participation declines when students leave their high school or postsecondary institution (p. 45). Green (2005) identifies that the pyramid model as the dominant sport development approach in the United States. He discusses qualities of sport programs which maximize recruitment and retention of players in a variety of sports by highlighting the pyramid model's identification and development of elite athletes (peak of the pyramid) from a wider base of general participants (base of the pyramid). Sporting organizations can improve player recruitment by subdividing their collective members into smaller programs which are considered undermanned. Undermanning encourages the participation of new players by allowing them to have a more significant contribution (they may be able to play more frequently, or have an important role as a starter) on the team because they joined a smaller subdivided group in need of players (Green, 2005).

Additionally, when a program is affiliated with a common community or social group, and this is combined with the benefits of undermanning, recruitment into a program is believed to be even more effective. However, Green acknowledges that once you have joined a sports program, many other factors contribute to whether you find value and will regularly commit your time to the program.

Through Green's (2005) examination of individuals' motivation to commit to a sports program, task motivations (e.g., skill development, physical fitness) and social motivations (e.g., friendships, camaraderie) are considered mutually exclusive outcomes. To retain participants Green explains that it is important for sports programs to provide the opportunity to gain both outcomes by appealing to participants' task and social motivations alike. Therefore the program will still appeal to participants' impetus if they have high task or social motivation, regardless of whether the same participant combines this with low task or social motivation. However, Green's explanation of a player's motivation only provides a general framework to understand how to retain participants. There are many specific and psychological factors that contribute to one's motivation to be physically active. These will be examined in subsequent sections of this literature review.

Physical Education Models Promoting Sport

The Sport Education Model (SEM) is a well-developed and researched instructional model (Hastie, de Ojeda, & Luquin, 2011; Kinchin, 2006; Metzler, 2011; Wallhead & O'Sullivan, 2005) that provides a basis for comparison to the EPM. The SEM model was originally conceived by Siedentop (1994) as a framework to promote authentic experiences in sport. Easy-Play shares many objectives of the SEM; namely,

skill development, physical fitness, appreciation of strategic play, and the promotion of developmentally appropriate sports (Siedentop, Hastie, & van der Mars, 2011). The EPM does not, however, value educational outcomes of the SEM which are not directly related to physical activity. These include planning and administration responsibilities by participants, appreciation of sports' rituals and conventions, concern over administrative sport issues, and the development of knowledge among participants concerning umpiring or refereeing. The focus of Easy-Play is, rather, the simple and fun experience of playing sports. Although there is a need for administrative work to implement the EPM, it is not essential for players to participate in these activities to gain its benefits—these tasks are taken on by a few select leaders within the group or other regular participants in their absence. In contrast to the EPM's limited delegation of responsibilities unrelated to physical activity, the SEM values participant engagement in convenor and administrative duties. The EPM does not contest the validity of the SEM; rather it focuses on engaging participants in physical activity and is less concerned with formality, official rules, and the spectacle of sport emphasized in the SEM.

Studies on the formal implementation of the SEM in physical education provide practical context to evaluate its benefits and provide insights concerning apparent limitations. Spittle and Byrne (2009) provide evidence of the SEM's ability to increase student motivation using pre-test and post-test student questionnaires. Although their findings did provide evidence of the model's ability to improve student motivation, they acknowledge that the 10-week time commitment necessary to implement the SEM was not conducive to the constraints of typical physical education programs (Spittle & Byrne, 2009). In addition to this logistical time constraint, teachers who find it difficult to

facilitate the SEM have reported minimal positive improvements to student learning or motivation (McCaughtry, Sofo, Rovegno, & Curtner-Smith, 2004).

McCaughtry et al. (2004) acknowledged the teachers' inability to effectively implement the SEM and found that teachers themselves did not value some of the components of the SEM not directly related to physical activity. Although the SEM itself cannot be responsible for ineffective teacher instruction, it is important to consider the feasibility of a model from the practitioner's perspective. Sinelnikov and Hastie (2010) found that the frequency of student activity toward the achievement of competitive goals accounted for 50% of all the time in the SEM. In addition, the culminating phase of the SEM centered on formal competition was found to diminish positive student experiences (Wallhead & Ntoumanis, 2004). Wallhead and Ntoumanis (2004) suggest that lower skilled participants become less motivated when they feel threatened by the competitive component of the SEM. The EPM was not designed to specifically address the limitations of the SEM made apparent through empirical research, but it may be considered a potential alternative model to promote physical activity given these limitations.

Several models and strategies beyond the SEM are available to employ in both a physical education and physical activity setting (Hellison & Templin, 1991). Many of the established models have been refuted by educators for their irrelevancy to real classroom situations (Hellison & Templin, 1991) and to an extent this was true in the studies examining the implementation of the SEM (McCaughtry et al., 2004; Wallhead & Ntoumanis, 2004). Hellison and Templin (1991) suggest that the development of new models should be based first on values. They argue this will provide the appropriate rationale for a model with intrinsic strength. A values-oriented model encourages

outcomes which will be more specific to the intended qualities practitioners want participants to learn, such as: cooperation, self-esteem, fair-play, or responsibility (Hellison & Templin, 1991). The range of participants' values should also be considered in order to ensure activities facilitated using a designed model are embraced.

Given the importance of a model's values it is worthwhile to identify the core values which have guided the practical development of the EPM. Each of the following core values were identified in the original design of the model (Lu & Steele, 2012) for the purpose of applying it to an empirical research study: (a) inclusiveness: players at all levels must be included, those with low skills should have opportunities to have optimal challenges to experience growth and new players should be given time to familiarize themselves with the easy-play approach; (b) enjoyment: aggressive attacking on offense or tight defence should be discouraged in an effort to reduce injury and maximize opportunities to succeed (e.g., scoring, allowing collaboration), and traditional or standard rules should be modified to maximize players' involvement, nurture their confidence, improve their skills, and maintain an optimal success rate (e.g., not too difficult or too easy to score); (c) cooperation: opponents learn to recognize the symbiotic relationship between one another that is necessary to facilitate a cooperative play environment. Teammates should value the importance of team play and the success achieved when everyone feels supported and involved in game play; (d) healthy competition: EPM requires optimal competitiveness in sport contests to assure they are safe, maximize injury prevention, minimize risk-taking (e.g., safety for self and others), remain developmentally appropriate, and maintain an inclusive, cooperative, and enjoyable environment; (e) de-emphasized winning: sports using EPM normally de-

emphasize winning in order to discourage risk-taking behaviours that may incur injuries on self and others, and this should foster an environment that is not intimidating but caring and supportive to novice or low-skilled players and encourage sustainable participation and interest in play; and finally (f) adequate democracy: collective management and consensus should be valued in the decision-making process to determine when to start or end the game, how to group players, and how to accommodate requests affecting optimal play (e.g., deciding the size of the playing field). Theoretical foundations further support the validity of the EPM which seeks to foster an inclusive, cooperative, and enjoyable environment to facilitate sport participation in the general population (Lu & Steele, 2012).

Cooperation and Competition in Physical Education and Organized Sports

Öhman and Quennerstedt (2008) examination of locally developed curriculum documents and analysis of video of physical education classes describe how the behaviours of teachers embody curricular goals. One goal from the curriculum identifies the importance of cooperation in the physical education classroom, especially when participating in various team sports. Through their examination of teachers' locally developed curriculum documents, Öhman and Quennerstedt suggest that cooperation is a value to be learnt when playing team sports as well as a tool to be used when competing against the opposition—"cooperation aspect appears as an object as well as an aid" (p. 372). Öhman and Quennerstedt acknowledge that students work cooperatively in a physical education setting with teammates and in opposition against one another and that this raises the question of competition in physical education. Although competition was recognized as a component of the physical education classroom, it was valued by teachers for its

developmental capacity to foster “good winners and good losers” (p. 372). Local curriculum documents acknowledge that in order to achieve this development it is necessary to “defuse the element of competition” (p. 372). Competition is a natural part of sport, but in physical education it must be de-emphasized to accommodate developmental goals (Öhman & Quennerstedt, 2008). The EPM provides a potential framework to achieve developmentally appropriate goals while de-emphasizing the element of competition.

Torres and Hager (2007) raises concerns about the recent shifts away from competitive frameworks used in sport leagues facilitating programs for youth. A less competitive orientation in youth sport has been widely promoted to provide developmentally appropriate opportunities for younger athletes to engage in various athletic opportunities (Sport Canada, 2011). Torres and Hager argue that de-emphasizing the competitive aspects of youth sport is driven by misguided and misinformed decision making. They argue the need to maintain competition as a central characteristic of youth sport, but assure that it is not emphasizing a win-oriented mentality. Competition is considered a valuable component in youth sports when it includes elements of cooperation which encourage opponents to work together to produce the best game and create an experience with less stress or anxiety (Torres & Hager, 2007).

In their analysis, Torres and Hager (2007) criticize the characteristics designed by the National Alliance for Youth Sport to promote less competitive environments in youth athletics. Specifically, they critically discuss the perceived value of ensuring equal distribution of playing time and not keeping track of scores or league standings; conversely, both these qualities are considered valuable to improve play experiences within the framework of the EPM. First, Torres and Hager establish that the cooperative

element of sport contests requires “contestants to challenge each other to the best of their ability” (p. 200). They argue that choosing to play inferior athletes to provide equal playing time among teammates prevents a team from presenting an optimal challenge to their opponents. Ultimately, they feel that playing teammates who do not pose the best challenge undermines the contest and the ability of the team to play their best. Torres and Hager also argue that since winners and losers can be determined with or without a formal tally of the score, it is futile to eliminate a score tally from competition in order to de-emphasize the concept of winning and losing in youth sport. Their rationale ignores the benefits of equal playing time or the psychological significance of a posted score. Torres and Hager advocate for scorekeeping and unbalanced playing time under the guise that competition plays an important role in childhood development (i.e., there is a lesson in winning and losing). While the EPM advocates for equal playing time and minimizes the value of official scorekeeping, it is more concerned with promoting a positive environment, and less with competition’s capacity to facilitate childhood development.

Torres and Hager (2007) believe that the value of competitive sport extends beyond the playing field, and the elimination of those values will only serve to confuse children in other areas of life. Torres and Hager dismiss the assumption that competition is the source of unethical behaviour in sport or it places undue pressure on younger athletes. They argue that the real problem is the value placed on winning and the misappropriated concept of what is permissible in competition (e.g., borderline violence, coercive gamesmanship). They believe that there is a need to change athletes’ attitude toward competition, rather than remove or limit competition from youth athletics. This attitude change would include emphasising positive forms of competition which depend

on the necessity to cooperate to achieve goals of mastery and excellence (Torres & Hager, 2007). Models promoted by sports organizations to achieve this outcome must foster a player's mentality which perceives opponents as the part of the game to provide challenges to learn from and rules as guidelines to facilitate what is considered fair in competition (Torres & Hager, 2007).

While Torres and Hager's (2007) essay lacks practical guidance on how to design game-play, it does provide an excellent conceptual description of good competition in developmentally appropriate sports. As a practical framework the EPM recommends specific qualities which Torres and Hager criticise for their diminishment of good competition. To Torres and Hager, competition has innate value because it teaches lessons which help foster maturity, and if competition is appropriately facilitated its benefits to a child's development far outweigh the risks. The EPM does not refute the value of good competition, but recognizes that when facilitating sport there are many challenges and detrimental consequences of poorly implemented competitive environments. These poorly implemented competitive environments are what Torres and Hager identify as the real problem. Torres and Hager would disagree with methods the EPM implements to achieve developmentally appropriate play; however, the model strives to foster a competitive mentality similar to what Torres and Hager suggest is necessary to create good competition. A competitive mentality to promote good competition is one which perceives opponents as enablers to learning (who present an appropriate challenge) not as obstacles to subjugate.

Coakley and Donnelly (2009) identify major trends which have recently shaped youth sports and offer some recommendations for improving the implementation of

sports programs. A growing emphasis on performance ethic is among the major detrimental trends they identify. Performance ethic describes that the quality of a sporting experience is measured based on the performance of individual athletes. According to performance ethic, whether participants are having fun “is defined in terms of becoming a better athlete, becoming more competitive and being promoted into more high skills training categories” (Coakley & Donnelly, 2009, p. 132). Organized sports programs have embedded performance ethic as an integral part of their program and it is often preferred because it easily allows parents or athletes to measure their progress. Coakley and Donnelly even suggest that performance ethic is not limited to sports, but can be observed in other aspects of children’s lives.

Although Coakley and Donnelly’s (2009) recommendations to improve sports are intended for youth athletics, they are transferable to play context involving older participants. The first recommendation is centered on increasing action. To increase action, Coakley and Donnelly suggest de-emphasizing the value of traditional rules or standardized conditions by modifying the constraints of games which limit scoring (e.g., large basketball nets, smaller playing fields). Increasing personal involvement by encouraging equal playing and assuring that players are not isolated to playing specialized positions on the field is advocated as the second recommendation to improve organized sport (Coakley & Donnelly, 2009). Decreasing the size of teams so all players can be more regularly engaged in the action of the game is also a part of the recommendation to increase personal involvement (Coakley & Donnelly, 2009). The third recommendation to improving organized sports suggests modifications to games in order to facilitate closer scores. Similar to the common practice of using handicaps to

keep competition close, Coakley and Donnelly suggest intentionally unbalancing the playing field to give the underdog the chance to be competitive against a highly skilled opponent. This may include allowing the underdog to have extra players on the field, a smaller goal to defend, more than three outs in a baseball game or more than three downs in a football game (Coakley & Donnelly, 2009).

While the three aforementioned considerations align with many of the characteristics of the EPM (Lu & Steele, 2012), Coakley and Donnelly's (2009) final recommendation to maintain friendships is perhaps the most pertinent to ensuring good competition and a less win-orientated approach (Torres & Hager, 2007). In order to achieve an environment where friendships can be fostered, Coakley and Donnelly suggest that athletes should be encouraged to interact with opponents in supportive ways, otherwise "relationships between opposing players are impersonal or hostile, and players do not learn that games have a human component that is central to having fun in competitive relationships" (Coakley & Donnelly, 2009, p. 139). Coakley and Donnelly claim that the cooperative interaction between players and their opponents allows sports to teach leadership, character, and positive decision-making skills. Overall, many of the qualities identified by Coakley and Donnelly are congruent with the characteristics or goals of the EPM (Lu & Steele, 2012).

Self-Determined Motivation for Play

Self-determination theory describes the complexity of human motivation and can reveal how play appeals to learners' different types of motivation (e.g., intrinsic and extrinsic identified regulation) that encourage autonomous behaviour (Brunet & Sabiston, 2011). Play itself is an activity strongly associated with intrinsic motivation

(Hughes, 2010). EPM capitalizes on the implications of self-determination theory through its promotion of play as the activity to learn sports. Self-determination theory describes human motivation on a scale that arranges amotivation, extrinsic motivation, and intrinsic motivation on a spectrum (see Figure 1) that classifies amotivated activities as those which are the least self-determined and intrinsically motivated activities as those which are most self-determined. Extrinsic motivation is found between amotivation and intrinsic motivation and is further classified into four subcategories on the self-determined spectrum: external, introjected, identified, and integrated regulation (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Intrinsically motivated behaviours are the most self-determined and are engaged in to achieve feelings of pleasure or enjoyment (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Individuals whose motivation is associated with high levels of self-determination will be more autonomous and driven to participate in an activity (Ntoumanis, 2005). Higher levels of self-reported physical activity are associated with intrinsic motivation and identified regulation (Brunet & Sabiston, 2011). Burnet and Sabiston (2011) suggest that programs facilitating physical activity should promote self-determined regulation: these activities should appeal to motivation on the right side of the spectrum. Play is considered an activity with a significant appeal to one's intrinsic motivation (Burghardt, 2011; Hughes, 2010). Therefore, play is potentially valuable to facilitate self-determined regulation and sustain one's motivation to be physically active. Therefore the EPM may also be valuable from a motivational perspective because it emphasizes play as the mode to provide the opportunity to learn sports and encourage physical activity.

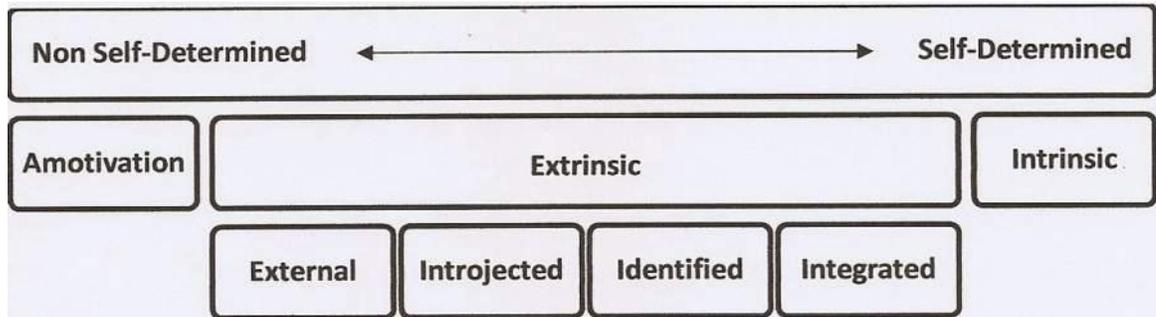


Figure 1. Self-determination theory spectrum: Classifying the types of motivation ranging from those which are least self-determined to those which are most self-determined.

According to behavioural needs theory (a subtheory of self-determination theory), to effectively appeal to an individual's motivations programs should address individuals' basic psychological needs: competence, relatedness, and autonomy (Ryan and Deci, 2000). Consequentially, these needs should be weighted considerably by program administrators when they consider how to best appeal to participants' motivation: competence will not be optimized if a program is perceived by a participant to be too challenging or too easy; relatedness cannot be felt by a participant if programs are not appealing to their personality, strengths, or sociocultural context; and a sense of autonomy cannot be attained if excessive administrative control leads to the perception of limited choice or freedom within a program. A program designed to address the basic psychological needs will be best suited to appeal to the motivations of participants in order to encourage their recruitment and retention into a specific sports program. Providing a program which simply offers an opportunity to play sports may not be enough to retain participants over a long period of time. To retain participant engagement in a sports model, it is advantageous to maximize its appeal to participants' intrinsic motivations by addressing competency, relatedness and autonomy (Brunet & Sabiston, 2011).

The EPM is intended to design an environment to have a maximal appeal to one's motivation to play. With concern to exercise outside of the realm of play, there are a variety of intrinsic and extrinsic factors which comprise a person's motivation, such as the attainment for a desired health benefits, body image, or state of relaxation. It is simpler to understand one's motivation to play because play is associated with intrinsically motivated activities which are freely chosen and have a level of self-

satisfaction (Hughes, 2010). In this sense, the environment which the EPM is designed for differs greatly from the research contexts of self-determination theory—which has often been centered on how to motivate people to exercise (Wilson, Mack, & Grattan, 2008). Nevertheless, self-determination theory offers valuable insights to understand how to design a sport model which optimizes the motivation of participants. Given the influence of our motivations to engage in an activity (Ryan & Deci, 2000), a sports program which maximizes its appeal to participants' intrinsic motivations may be the most valuable way to encourage physical activity among adults.

A recent study by Brunet and Sabiston (2011), that applies self-determination theory to investigate motivations of adults to engage in physical activity, demonstrates that intrinsic motivation positively correlated with higher levels of physical activity. Adults who participate in physical activity during their leisure time are motivated to do so for the inherent enjoyment and fun experience (Brunet & Sabiston, 2011). Based on their findings, Brunet and Sabiston suggest that programs designed to increase physical activity among an adult population should aim to increase their appeal to intrinsic motivations of participants. Increasing competency, relatedness, and autonomy of participants is also recommended as a way to improve physical activity levels (Brunet & Sabiston, 2001) Although Brunet and Sabiston did not specifically examine play as a form of physical activity, it is meaningful to consider its relevancy given Hughes's (2010) association between play and intrinsic motivation. The relationship between play and intrinsic motivation, considering Brunet and Sabiston's findings, provide an argument for the relevancy of the EPM to use play as a way of encouraging physical activity in adults.

Understanding the mechanisms which motivate or de-motivate adult engagement in exercise or physical activity (Brunet & Sabiston, 2011; Wilson et al., 2008) differ from what may encourage adult engagement in play. The arousal-seeking model in play theory provides one of the most suitable explanations specific to adult play. This model explains that the novelty of play provides the initial elevation of arousal, but as a task becomes familiar, the difficulty of a goal while playing needs to increase to sustain an optimal arousal level (Ellis, 1973). The need to attain and maintain an appropriate level of arousal after the novelty of an activity diminishes is paramount to maintaining an interest to play (Ellis, 1973). Ellis (1973) also found that one important component to maintain arousal is the organization of activities centered on individuals' like-minded goals. The complexity of play needs to meet the expectations of participants whether they are driven to attain competitive goals or cooperative social activity.

Allender, Cowburn, and Foster's (2006) recent review of qualitative literature provides some insight concerning other reasons adults participate in playful activities such as sport. Enjoyment and social networks were among the reasons most often cited by adult groups as motivators for participation in sports. Additionally, the desire to achieve perceived health benefits were found to be less significant than the fun, enjoyment, and socialization attained by those participating in sport and physical activity (Allender et al., 2006). Allender et al. determined that the recent qualitative literature is support an approach offering fun, enjoyment and socialization as a means to engage people in physical activity. Overall, Allender et al. found competition to be a barrier to participation in physical activity among adults. Allender et al. determined that the only exception to this was identified by Smith (1998), who found that elite runners were

motivated by the prestige and status of intense competition (Allender et al., 2006)—it should not be surprising that the motivation of elite athletes differs from other participants in the study.

Complexity Theory and Play

Aside from motivating participants to be physically active through sport, it is also important to examine the EPM's capacity to facilitate a productive learning environment. Complexity theory provides one of the most interesting perspectives to examine the EPM's capacity to facilitate learning. According to complexity theory, complex systems cannot be described by understanding the mechanical interactions of their parts (Davis et al., 2008). Research has demonstrated that we cannot adequately understand large-scale economic, biological, or social systems using simple cause and effect deduction (Davis et al., 2008). Davis et al. (2008) describe how complex systems “can never be reduced to their parts because they are always caught up with other systems” (p. 77). Complexity theory, which pertains to the study of complex systems, states that elements of complex systems are interconnected and interact with each other in ways that result in the continual reorganization of their system (Mason, 2008). Complex systems are not universally defined, rather their definition is “hinged to the phenomenon that is of most interest to the person offering the definition” (Davis et al., 2008, p. 78). However, Davis et al. provide a unique perspective to apply complexity theory to education: “complex systems are systems that learn” (p. 78).

Complexity theory can also provide a unique and valuable lens to consider the way groups learn to engage in play. Within the paradigm of complexity theory, learning systems (the groups of people involved in an activity) are the force that drive what will be

accomplished—as elements of a larger system they continually reorganize their behaviour as they interact and learn from one another (Mason, 2008). The actions and subsequent reactions of people in learning systems are constantly effecting and influencing how that system is organized in achieving its goals. Complexity theory diminishes the value of the events or experiences organized to facilitate learning in place of collective actions of elements within the learning system—as described by Davis et al. (2008), “the learning system determines what will be learned” (p. 81). Complexity theory also argues that it is detrimental for learning systems to operate in equilibrium because a system or a group of people operating far from equilibrium is believed to explore possibilities, find new patterns, and evolve (Davis et al., 2008).

Similarly, play allows for the exploration of new patterns which open participants to opportunities providing new possibilities (Bateson, 2011). Bateson (2011) argues that according to complexity theory, the benefits of a learning system operating far from equilibrium are similar to the benefits of play. They both afford the opportunity to learn new possibilities through exploration. With consideration to these similarities, complexity theory can be considered a valuable lens to examine the actions and behaviours of people participating in play. Through its capacity to facilitate play experiences, the EPM may also offer the opportunity to facilitate learning experiences. Learning experiences may occur insofar that the play is facilitated in an environment that allows participants to operate far from equilibrium in order to provide the opportunity to continually reorganize and evolve—both of which are considered fundamental to the learning process according to complexity theory (Davis et al., 2008).

Both play and physical education are implemented in schools and are credited for benefits to physical health and cognitive development (Sattlemair & Ratey, 2009).

However defining play outside the physical education environment reveals many values which are mutually exclusive from physical education. In order to evaluate the playful nature of the EPM, it is important to understand a thorough definition of play in a 21st-century context. Detailed criteria distinguishing play from other forms of physical activity and physical education have most recently been defined by Burghardt (2011).

According to Burghardt (2011) play is not fully functional in achieving a direct purpose and the values of play (e.g., being physically activity, developing social relationships) may not be its intended purpose. As a result the benefits of play may be difficult to distinguish or may be delayed; for example, exercise attained while playing causes a delayed benefit in improving the body's cardiovascular health. Burghardt further defines play as an activity that must qualify to meet one of the following seven characteristics: "spontaneous, voluntary, intentional, pleasurable, rewarding, reinforcing or autotelic" (p. 14). Given the antonymous nature of these terms, this is one of Burghardt's least prophetic criteria; in addition, it is also difficult for an action not to be spontaneous, voluntary, or intentional. However, what this criterion strives to exclude are voluntary and intentional actions, such as bulimia nervosa, which are compulsive and self-destructive (Burghardt, 2011). Most play is either pleasurable, rewarding, or autotelic, and it is worthwhile to consider the value of constraining this criterion so the qualification is more exclusive. However, forms of play in children, such as play-fighting or rough and tumble play, require the inclusion of seven characteristics in Burghardt's second defining criterion, even if they are not all necessary for play in sport.

The third criterion for play according to Burghardt (2011) is that it is in some way different from a functional behaviour which it may resemble: either it is incomplete or elements of it have been modified. Consider the differences between automobile racing and driving a taxi, or events at the rodeo and herding cattle. The actions associated between the serious behaviour and what we consider play may be similar, but the structure (e.g., goal, setting, or form) which they are conducted under distinguishes the act of play from the act of business. Burghardt's third criterion structurally defines actions of play from serious behaviours. The fourth criterion defines play as an action which is performed repeatedly in similar ways. This criterion defines an act of play from acts which may be considered an apparition; such acts do not serve the function or purpose of play (Burghardt, 2011).

The final play criterion defined by Burghardt (2011) classifies play as action that occurs when you are at a relaxed state. Although play itself may not necessarily be relaxing (especially in highly competitive situations), to participate in play you must feel safe from physical danger, social instability, and family dysfunction (Burghardt, 2011). Essentially, to participate in play you cannot have strong urges to satisfy other basic needs in your life such as food, safety, or a sense of social support. Burghardt claims that the five criteria described provide the most useful scheme available to identify all types of play. In comparison to criteria defined in leading textbooks on the topic of play (e.g., Hughes, 2010), Burghardt's scheme provides a more comprehensive description and qualification of play both within and beyond its role in development. By any measure the acts which the EPM intends to implement certainly qualify as play.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

This research was qualitative in nature and adopted a non-experimental design that employed semi-structured interviews as the source of data collection. Interview questions were open ended in an attempt to be flexible in understanding the participant's perspective on specific areas while limiting preconceived assumptions of the interviewer (Patton, 2002). Interviews directed participants to provide insight on topic areas pertinent to the study. A semi-structured schedule ensured the interview remained conversational, but at the same time comprehensively covered the range of necessary topics (Patton, 2002). The semi-structured format also ensured the interviewer had the opportunity to pose follow-up questions to encourage participants to expand on ideas which provided valuable descriptions of experiences in the EPM. The interviewer will have to remain vigilant when conducting the semi-structured interview so that he does not omit any questions and is consistent in following the interview guide if the interview becomes too conversational (Patton, 2002).

Participants will be asked to be available for an interview for approximately 30-45 minutes. The semi-structured interviews were conducted at a time and location convenient for the participants. The semi-structured interview was audio-taped for data analysis. The interview was transcribed verbatim. Interviewees were asked to complete a member check, a process which required the participants to review the transcription to verify the accuracy of the information (Shenton, 2004). The member check process allowed participants to add, delete or modify information.

The interview schedule was formatted according to the sequence defined by Lichtman (2010). Introductory questions and questions during the body of the interview

were asked in a different order and were followed by probing questions to encourage the interviewees to elaborate on their responses. Probing questions were used whenever there was the desire to investigate the deeper understanding of the topic brought up by the interviewee. Probing questions were also used when the interviewer was attempting to clarify her/his understanding of an interviewee's response, especially when words were used which may take on multiple connotative meanings (Lichtman, 2010). Interviews were designed to provide evidence to understand the practical implementation of the EPM. Interviews to understand participants' experiences in the EPM were paramount to determine the model's effectiveness and to understand limitations of the model to achieve goals to promote physical activity through sport. A script of the semi-structured interview is attached as Appendix A.

The research design was developed with consideration of practices described by Shenton (2004), which maximize the validity of findings in qualitative research. Findings of this study are not transferable given the study's focus on a specific environment and a small number of individuals (Shenton, 2004). Although transferability of the findings is an important limitation to acknowledge, it should also be considered an opportunity for future studies to further investigate the EPM in other contexts. The design and methodology employed in this particular investigation will provide a preliminary description and an empirical understanding the EPM's application to playing sports.

The assurance of internal validity is a major concern in the design of qualitative research studies (Shenton, 2004). In total, eight interviews were conducted by an interviewer who has had previous social interactions with participants during soccer programs in 2009 and 2011. The recruitment of eight interviewees represents a third of

the potential participants and is predicted to achieve data saturation (Guest, Brunce, & Johnson, 2006). Familiarity with the participants is valuable to establish trust and conduct conversational interviews; however, the researcher had to be conscious that his relationships do not affect his capacity to be critical and objective (Shenton, 2004). The number of interviews is expected to provide a balanced survey of different experiences playing soccer under the framework of the EPM. Each of the participants had at least a season's experience playing soccer using the EPM framework. Selecting participants who were involved with the model for at least a season was advantageous in order to ensure those being interviewed have sufficient experiences to generate detailed responses to interview questions. This study also includes member checks (Shenton, 2004), a process where the interviewees reviewed and approved transcripts for the purpose of assuring their words are congruent with what they intended—this process was considered paramount in the establishment of a study's credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Participant Selection and Recruitment

Purposive sampling and open call recruitment strategies were employed to attain eight participants for the study. All participants had experienced a season or more playing soccer using the EPM. There were no age requirements for this project, however all participants who volunteered were 23 years old or older. The participants were asked to take part in an interview conducted by the student investigator who knew many players as he was previously a participant in 2009 and 2011. Players were invited collectively to participate in the study, the first eight participants who volunteered were later contacted by email to read the invitation letter and arrange an interview time. The participants were assured that: the student investigator would be conducting the interviews at the

participants' convenience; all interviews were confidential and anonymous; all audio tapes and transcripts were numbered; and all final reports would use pseudonyms only. Those who agreed to an interview were provided a hardcopy of the letter of invitation and an Informed Consent form to sign before the interview began. The participants ranged between 23-49 years of age. The average age of participants was 39. Participants' experience in the EPM ranged from 8 months to 5 years—on average, participants had 3 years of experience as players in the EPM.

Participants were recruited from the indoor soccer sessions at a gymnasium in an urban centre in southern Ontario. The gymnasium is typical in appearance and size to those found throughout large high schools in southern Ontario. Some players arrive in athletic wear while others use the change rooms available. Players may not all arrive on time and the start of play may be delayed depending on how sporadically players arrive. Play will begin when a large enough group arrives to have two teams of five. The leader or a core member of the group will take it upon themselves to distribute five coloured pinnies to distinguish one team of five and from another. A timer may be started at the beginning of play so that players needing to be substituted are provided this opportunity at an equal interval throughout the soccer session. Player may also substitute off at will for a short break or to allow a player who has just arrived playing time without having to wait for the start of a new shift. A conscious effort is made to assure players are afforded equal playing time over the two hour duration each soccer session is held.

The eight participants were asked to meet for an interview approximately 30-45 minutes in length. The interview was semi-structured and included questions to obtain information about: their demographics (e.g., approximate age, vocation, educational

history); their previous experiences in sports; their current experiences as participants in a weekly soccer program; and their perspective on the suitability of the soccer program to other populations (Appendix A).

Semi-structured interviews were conducted at a location selected by the participants. In total, three interviews were conducted in classrooms rented at local high schools central to participants' homes, one interview was conducted in a private room at a participant's retail store, one interview was conducted at a cafe located on campus at a southern Ontario university, one interview was conducted in a student lounge located on campus at a southern Ontario university, one interview was conducted in a lunch room for staff at a southern Ontario university, and one interview was conducted at a private office located at a southern Ontario college.

The length of the interviews ranged from 27 minutes to 51 minutes. The interviews were tape-recorded and then transcribed verbatim. Recordings were assigned a code in order to ensure individual responses remained confidential. In order to ensure anonymity, pseudonyms were assigned to any proper names which might identify the participants or locations which were more specific than provincial jurisdictions (regions, cities, or towns were assigned pseudonyms, but provinces or continents were not). Once interviews were transcribed by the researcher, participants were forwarded their transcript by email. The email requested interviewees to complete a member check in order to review the accuracy of their transcripts. Transcripts were then updated to reflect changes requested by the participants before the data analysis began.

Data Analysis

Interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using an inductive analytic approach (Holliday, 2002; Saldaña, 2009). This approach involved three steps. First, the transcripts were read and notes were completed to ensure the researcher become familiar with the participant's views. Second, thematic coding was completed to label data from the transcript into defined clusters, each excerpt was defined by one code that best described what the unit of data was about or what it meant (Saldaña, 2009). Focused coding was the third step that involved the categorization of excerpts identified through a process of thematic coding (Saldaña, 2009). In this stage focused categories emerged from the continual reorganization and categorization of excerpts from participants' interviews (Saldaña, 2009). The labelling of categories remained flexible until the analysis was complete and the researcher was satisfied with the range of distinct categories inductively determined from the thematic codes. The categorization of excerpts was complete when all new excerpts from transcripts were placed comfortably into existing categories.

Transcripts were typed within Microsoft Word to format the text to conduct this analytic approach. Excerpts of data were highlighted using the Microsoft Word comment function and a corresponding comment was affixed to indicate the thematic code being assigned to each excerpt. All excerpts and their corresponding thematic code were copied under tentative a categorical heading, which is the primary purpose of the focused coding stage (Saldaña, 2009). Categorical headings were finalized once every excerpt was categorized under a heading which thematically accounted for the meaning of the excerpt. This analytical process was conducted for all eight interviews. In addition, a

member of the research committee supervising this project conducted a reliability check by separately categorizing the text excerpts of selected interviews to be cross-checked and compared. This duplicate thematic analysis resulted in similar categorization of text excerpts in order to confirm the credibility of the data analysis. Since similar categorizations were identified by the member of the research committee, the overall categorization of excerpts from all eight interviews was considered reliable.

Methodological Assumptions and Limitations

Interviewing participants who were involved in weekly soccer games provided descriptions of experiences playing sport under the framework of the EPM. It is important to note that due to the isolated environment and limited participants included in this study, transferability of the findings cannot be assumed—this is perhaps the greatest limitation of this study. Although this is an inherent limitation, it may call for the further understanding of the EPM’s applicableness to alternative environments in future studies.

The position of a qualitative researcher within the environment being studied is considered advantageous to ensure he or she has an understanding of the participants’ subjective experiences (Cote, Salmela, & Baria, 1993). Cote et al. (1993) advocate for this approach because of its potential capacity to engage participants in revealing valuable information about the research context—researchers familiar with the research context have a great capacity to meaningfully investigate participants’ experiences in this context. Further, Cote et al. argue that in qualitative research “the researcher does not have to be objective and impartial” (pp. 127-128). The primary researcher in the EPM study is a regular participant in weekly soccer sessions. He has engaged with potential participants since November 2011 during 2-hour sessions on Fridays as a regular player.

He also had previous relationships with some participants from 2009 when he was also a regular player during 2-hour sessions on Fridays. During these sessions he established friendly relationships with players within the context of weekly soccer games only. Although the primary researcher became familiar and known by almost all players during weekly soccer games, he did not have any interactions with participants beyond time spent playing soccer. The prominent methodological assumption in this study is that impartiality is not of paramount importance to maintain credibility concerning the researcher's position within the research context (Cote et al., 1993); however, the researcher had to be aware of his bias and refrain from being influenced by his personal perspective. In order to retain credibility, the researcher needed to be cognisant of his position and assure the influence of his bias was minimized.

As a result of the qualitative nature of this study, other important limitations must be acknowledged and explained to recognize the inherent weaknesses of this study. The researcher is also a player in weekly soccer games using the EPM where participants were recruited for this study. Although this provided some familiarity between the interviewees and the researcher, which has shown to be valuable (Shenton, 2004), the casual relationship between the researcher and participants may have deterred or invoked responses to interview questions with a level of bias. The use of open-ended questions was considered an important aspect of the interview process to control this effect. The researcher emphasized his independent nature as an investigator in order to encourage the contribution of participants' ideas and descriptions of experiences without fearing judgement or loss of creditability (Shenton, 2004). The researcher was also conscious of

the potential bias effect of his professional judgement as a result of being immersed in the environment he was studying (Shenton, 2004).

Although obtaining voluntary participation for interviews ensured, as best as possible, that interviewees were eager to provide detailed responses to questions, this approach potentially caused a level of inclusive bias. To an extent, random sampling could negate inclusion bias (Shenton, 2004), but with a limited sample population (approximately 20 people) the advantages of random sampling are minimal. A number of different players with experience in the soccer program were invited to be interviewed, but inevitably those who were more motivated to volunteer for an interview would inherently have a level of bias in comparison to non-volunteers.

Another important limitation to acknowledge is that data collected through interviews will only provide descriptive evidence of the EPM. This study cannot generalize the value of the model outside of what is reported through participants' interviews or beyond the environment where the model is currently implemented. Ultimately the recruitment of participants, accomplished through purposeful sampling, further limited the researcher's ability to generalize the findings of this descriptive study. Although the external validity of the research may be limited, this is a worthwhile investigation in order to provide an adequate description of the research context and allow readers to evaluate the potential transferability of findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Ethical Considerations

This study received ethics clearance from Brock University's Research Ethics Board (File No. 09-294-LU; see Appendix B). The only possible risk identified in the approved application was the potential for participants to feel obligated to participate or

coerced into contributing to this research because of regular contact between participants and the researcher. This risk was acknowledged in the application and the study was cleared and approved. Other steps to protect those participating in research include: the guarantee that all interviews would remain confidential and anonymous, all audio tapes and transcripts would be numbered, and all final reports would use pseudonyms only. To further protect participants' identity the research site was addressed as an urban centre in southern Ontario and geographic regions more specific than a province were assigned pseudonyms. Participants were reminded at the beginning of the interview that their participation was voluntary and they could choose to refuse to answer any of the questions or withdraw from the interview entirely at any time without any consequences.

Interviews were always conducted at the interviewees' convenience. Participants had the opportunity to review the transcription of their interview to add, delete, or modify any information. Players' participation in the project also allowed them to reflect on this EPM. Research records are stored electronically on the personal computer of the student investigator. The computer is password protected and only accessed by the primary investigators. Records will be deleted 6 months after study completion.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

This chapter will present the detailed results of interviews conducted in the study. The results provide data to address the purpose of this study, which is to investigate the participants' experiences playing sport (i.e., soccer) in the EPM. The eight adult participants were interviewed to provide data used to understand their participation in weekly soccer sessions using the EPM. Once the interviews were complete they were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using an inductive three-step approach. This included thematic coding and focused coding to identify common themes across all eight interview transcripts (Holliday, 2002; Saldaña, 2009). The analysis of interviews revealed five main themes. Excerpts have been organized under headings which represent the five themes identified from interview transcripts. Subthemes have been assigned to future improve the organization of the results. Excerpts were assigned to the most suitable theme and were grouped under that theme with similar excerpts from other transcripts.

Experiences in Sport Compared to Experiences in the EPM

Participants regularly described how their previous experiences in sport compared to soccer experiences in the EPM.

Winning Isn't Everything

Many of the participants identified competition as an important part of their experiences in sport, but also implied that a win outcome was not of paramount importance. Through the interview, Gregory identified competition as a quality of sport which he values, "it is important for me to be competitive ... Competitions, I really do enjoy, I want people to, to play hard, all the time and still be fair and friendly" (Gregory, March 1, 2012). Gregory also identified aggressiveness stemming from a win-orientation

to limit enjoyment in team sports so much so that it persuaded him to stop playing in a previous league: “I have gone from in/outdoor soccer leagues where it became, you know the environment was more poisonous and referees were yelled at, and winning seemed overly important, so I switched to another league where it was less important” (Gregory, March 1, 2012).

In the interview, Reuben is quick to acknowledge that serious play can sometimes become aggressive and this can lead to an unfavourable competitive atmosphere:

With a serious game you play hard but you don't POP, lots of people doing that, right? I don't like fighting and when some people argue too much during the game, fighting in the game and bad words, swear words, you know, people are too serious about the game. (Reuben, February 28, 2012)

Reuben further explains that scoring and determining a winner is not what necessarily makes playing fun. He also indicates that an overemphasis of winning has led to injury and describes how soccer is fun when playing sessions using the EPM:

Yeah, I enjoy playing not just to score points, not just who wins or who loses. ... Once you play games that are serious, you want to get into who wins, who loses, then you get excited, then you hurt yourself, then the concept changes, so basically we play soccer for fun, not for who wins and who loses. ... And uh, at South-Hampton you play basically for fun, and you don't practice and you don't take it too serious, so you can relax. (Reuben, February 28, 2012)

Optimal Competitiveness is Everything

Participants frequently described the value of a good competitive balance when playing sport. Below, participants discuss the importance of competitiveness in enriching

their sport experiences. Gordon identifies the EPM as being less competitive than games he was used to playing: “In the league we played in it’s all about competitiveness, and to put in those tackles, and stuff like that. But out here, at least in this league it doesn’t happen in the same environment. That is definitely the difference” (Gordon, March 20, 2012). He explains further that the less competitive environment has been a positive experience for him, as long as there is a competitive balance:

It is about fun and recreation, everyone is out there just to have a good time. Uhh, there is no cup to be won, there is goal in mind when getting on the field, it’s just to come there and have a good time. And uh exercise, so, yeah I think that is the reason why. ... I think when you have a good balance and you play a good game you need not necessarily win, I mean out here anyway we don’t play to win. It’s that feeling that okay fine we played a good game, and you kind of feel satisfied, and I think that those are the things that I really remember. (Gordon, March 20, 2012)

Orlan has a perspective regarding the importance of competitively matched teams in the EPM even if there is not an intense level of competitiveness:

I think that when playing, especially in indoors when you get two teams that are equally matched, it becomes, I mean, even though it is not competitive, you can make out that there is a game going on. I know sometimes it’s like one team is totally just out and there’s no fun playing like that, so yeah, just so when teams are equally matched and you get a nice passing game, and nice passing around. I can remember those instances, going back, thinking I had a good game today. (Orlan, March 1, 2012)

Gregory describes in detail many notable differences between his general sport experiences in comparison to his experiences in the EPM: “often there’s not an emphasis on scoring, that’s a pretty big difference, teams change every ten minutes or 5 minutes at times”; although there are times when scoring became a focus:

Just to keep it, everybody’s mind up, we sometimes keep score, or play for the last three goals and it does help motivate people, because if you are tired, you know we are going to score a goal, but we are just counting. So it seems like that competitive edge does make a difference at the end of the game. (Gregory, March 1, 2012)

Although Gregory expresses his displeasure playing in a league where a win-orientation led to aggressive or hostile actions on the field, he did identify how he personally feels about winning and losing: “It’s less enjoyable I must admit to be on a team that loses every game. ... So there is an element that winning is somewhat important, or not losing every game, could be a goal I suppose” (Gregory, March 1, 2012). Gregory also acknowledges that being the best team in a league is not important to him and his enjoyment is dependent on how his team plays:

I do want to go hard, and I want those around me to go hard, and still have a good time doing it. ... The teams I play on are somewhere in the middle, very seldom do we get to the top, and that’s okay with me ... we played our best, but lost, and I was thrilled with how I played and how our team played. (Gregory, March 1, 2012)

Prior to engaging in the EPM, Bruce enjoyed sports as a way to exercise, even though he may not have always felt they were the best environments to feel success:

Well, I've played on weak teams, I remember playing like 20-0 losing, 20-0, think of of how that felt. I remember that literally, or 15-0 to 16-0 and we're pinned in our own zone, couldn't even get the ball to the other team. And I mean we're here to have fun, and it's not fun when it's so unequal that they don't even have the chance. The skill level is you know, unfortunately five strong players against the weaker players on the team. I enjoyed the exercise, feeling good after the game, actually, that was the key, the exercise. (Bruce, March 26, 2012)

Physicality as a Deterrent to Sport Participation

Some players recounted experiences in sport which led to physical injury. Often players associate aggressive opponents with an increased chance of injury. Experiences Bruce identifies for discouraging his participation in sport centre on rough or excessive physical contact. Many injuries as a result of contact in sports have had a lasting effect on his body and encouraged him to seek other sporting opportunities where players are more cautious and seek to prevent physical injury: "I knocked my jaw out one time. I hurt my back three times, hurt my knee two times. Soccer, nothing, I mean other than the toe, and that's it, and no concussion" (Bruce, March 26, 2012). Specifically, Bruce describes instances when he or teammates were targeted by opponents:

A guy trying to break my leg after 5 minutes on the field you know, another guy hitting me from behind with an elbow to the back of my head, another guy tripping me up, and the worst, the guy was 5-feet tall, fast as anything, I set the ball up for him, he was going on a breakaway and the goalie 6-feet tall came running out, missed the ball completely and put his collarbone through his back and got a yellow card. ... When the other team came out and they started kicking

people's feet in and hitting them from behind, elbowing them in the head, but that was rare, that was rare, because we had a coach that was, he played national teams. And you know, that was rare, that would probably, when I saw that, that is when I wanted to get out of it. (Bruce, March 26, 2012)

Vincent identifies similar negative experiences with physical contact during team sports:

Sometimes you have, guys in the team and in other teams they try to kick you or hurt you and they don't have good language, right. ... My right leg is still not so good now just because one game when I play in the league, one guy tripped me and I fell and hurt my leg and couldn't move for about 3 months. I mean you can win, but if you just focus on winning, that's [laughs]. For now I look back and see that period, that was, it was crazy. (Vincent, March 3, 2012)

Reuben explains how the EPM values safety and how players manage to be safe when they are in the games, which is important when most players cannot afford to be injured: "sometimes we say play easy and that's good. Everybody has a family right now, we are not professional soccer players, playing for the salary, if you hurt yourself then you're gone" (Reuben, February 28, 2012). Reuben deeply values the opportunity to engage in the EPM: "so basically there is no other happier occasion in my life as the soccer at South-Hampton" (Reuben, February 28, 2012).

For these participants a major concern is how their physical well-being may be threatened by their participation in sport. Many participants are strongly opposed to continuing their involvement in sport if it threatened their health.

Favouring Less Aggressive Play

Participants described their waning preference toward aggressive play they

previously experienced in other sport leagues. Throughout the interview process Bruce compare the aggression and hostility he experiences playing in other sports' leagues to those which he enjoys in the EPM:

This one is more civil. It is civilized, that's built in, compared to playing hockey on a Friday night. I played in a league, they wanted to fight every night. I'm not kidding, every time I went out there they had a fight. Who needs that, you know, just because you rubbed a guy or hit the guy wrong. You apologize in our league for it, so you know, are you okay ... fairness, goes into our league. I played last summer or a summer ago with a team, a men's team and I broke my left foot and he stood up and said I'm going to break your other leg, and he walks up to his kids and said this is how you do it guys. I mean who needs that, I mean he's 35 years old this guy. But in our league you can get the exercise, you can get the competition, but you know at the end of the night you're friends, and that's the key here. (Bruce, March 26, 2012)

Vincent identifies similar advantages to the less aggressive approach to play in the EPM:

Still all the sports, and everything, right now as we look back at years ago we know, if you play, you don't hurt yourself, that is the main thing, you should just enjoy the game, and not just have a chance to try to win [laughs]. Winning is good, but not just focusing on winning. ... In other leagues you try to win, that's why some bad experiences occur, and if you just focus on wining, then this is different. This is more enjoyable, than what I played before. ... Also the safety, right. Back then, we are not too concerned with safety, rather I felt as though I have to win I have to get the ball. But now you don't, you don't be so aggressive

to win or get the ball, you just really put yourself in place to enjoy the game and keep your body healthy, and every week you can get some exercise. ... most people don't try to get the ball aggressively, and even when somebody gets it we just stand back or if the ball is too high we just try to stand back, it's not so, you don't try to hurt other people, and also, you try not to hurt yourself ... We should keep the ball under the knee, which should not hurt anybody. ... Shoot real low, at least, it's been so many years and nobody has been really hurt. (Vincent, March 3, 2012)

Being Physically Active in the EPM

Many participants describe how experiences playing sport in the EPM have provided opportunities to be physically active. Exercise is the main characteristic that drew Orlan to participate in the EPM:

I have been consistent with the soccer because I know what I can get from it. And what I get from it far outweighs what pulls me not to play. First, I want to exercise, I hate the gym, I'm not a gym guy. ... I always show up, I show up because of the exercise part of it. I don't like gym, but I still need exercise, I'm not a discipline type to wake up in the morning and go jog, I can't do it, that comes with serious discipline, I can't do that, the only thing that I can do is playing soccer. I am having fun and at the same time exercising, there is no fun jogging with you alone you just go run, wake up in the morning and run, I think it is no fun, I tried it one weekend. So when I involved myself in this soccer, I said it is a good opportunity to do something that I love best, something which was my

first dream, and at the same time will build a healthier lifestyle. (Orlan, March 3, 2012)

Orlan also recognizes that the EPM soccer re-engaged him into the sport and that he is more likely to continue to play when he returns home:

I had a break when I was pursuing my Bachelor's degree, so I stopped from that time until now when I began playing soccer with you. ... I think that even if I go to Africa in future, I will still be playing soccer, which is not the situation in Africa, you can see the best soccer player in his 30s, no I mean in his 20s, but when he reaches the age of 30 and 40 he will not play again. He will not play again because he thinks that soccer is not relevant to him and the environment does not encourage old people to play. Like here, you see that people are active. So I believe that if I exercise now and make it part of my life, I can be as active as someone like Nick. (Orlan, March 3, 2012)

The EPM provides Bruce with experiences playing in fun and competitive soccer games. Below he describes those experiences which have encouraged his participation:

Well because everybody heard of it they heard you know, we have fun, it's good, nobody gets hurt, it's competitive, a lot of good people are playing ... success for us is just I think the exercise, success is when you have the guys come out. (Bruce, March 26, 2012)

Easy is Important in the EPM

Norms of the group described by participants reflect many aspects which made play easy. Often players acknowledged the importance of less aggressive and friendly

demeanors while playing soccer. Orlan discusses many differences he has experienced participating in the EPM's friendly style of play:

Well the experiences, it's clearly obvious, because it's pure friendly, we don't have a referee at the centre of it, we have our own, we have our own moral codes or moralities, concerning hard tackling, concerning just a lot of sensibility, there are a lot of restrictions because it is pure friendly, scoring is not a matter of necessity. You don't need it, you don't need to score your opening, and at the end you don't count the score. At the same time you are playing with people who are 40 years 50 years, there is not much you can do, you cannot go for hard tackle if you are in your right sense of mind, compared to when you are playing with your peers or playing with your own guys. So that's how I see the main difference.

(Orlan, March 3, 2012)

Orlan further explains how the EPM style of friendly play differs from the informal play he was used to where he grew up:

The uniqueness to me is on the way soccer here is, the way it is played, the way we relax, the way we play as if nothing is stake, of which this is true we don't have anything at stake. I think that where I come from in Africa, even friendly soccer is still competitive, it is still competitive in the sense that it isn't right for you to count five goals even in friendly soccer. Your opponent will not allow you to score like you score here, so the main difference is that in Africa when you play soccer it can be friendly, but still there is some sort of aggressiveness and assertiveness, in terms of, you don't want your opponents to score on you, always friendly, so you go all out and play it as if you are going for gold, but in this case

no one cares if he or she scored, who cares because we all know that, we are friendly. (Orlan, March 3, 2012)

Simon appreciates the informal style of play offered by the EPM for its capacity to facilitate a fun experience where as a player he had some freedom:

What I enjoy the most about this is, I want to do whatever I want at the end of the day, it's half enjoyment, and half demonstration of your own personal talent, and half demonstration of team play. If you don't do that you won't really enjoy it, because if you see more formal team players, they are stressed, they have to conform to the set play, the tactic they came up with, and any other strategy that they have to do which constrains their play, so it's full of stress. What we do in informal play is just have fun. So whenever there is more focus on formal outcomes, strategies, I may not enjoy it. (Simon, March 21, 2012)

Bruce reflects on the how easy of the EPM is from a cost perspective:

This is accessible for any poor person in the world who could come out and play with us, all you need is shoes and you are set to go. ... The cost is right, how can you go wrong for whatever, 50 bucks, you can't go wrong for that for a whole season. (Bruce, March 26, 2012)

Gregory also acknowledges that in the EPM play there are no referees and further explains how this established self-regulated play, "Here there are no whistles, you are self-refereeing and if someone tries to get away with a handball for example, someone else will usually call that person on it, that was hands, that was hands, put it down" (Gregory, March 1, 2012).

As someone who is keenly aware of the qualities and characteristics which define the EPM. Bruce incorporated this knowledge while describing his experiences as a participant:

You have all these variables built in, respect, empathy, understanding the rules. And uh the idea that we are there to exercise and have fun. You can have a good competition if you want, you can be very serious, it's up to you, how much you want to run. ... Another tangible quality is the empathy, because you can see it out there, you okay, sorry to catch your foot, didn't mean to run into you. (Bruce, March 26, 2012)

Awareness and Embodiment of the EPM

Bruce and Gregory discuss different ways they embody qualities of the model as players. Gregory explains how the model has impact his practice as a physical educator. Bruce describes how he has embodied some of the important characteristics in the way he participates in the EPM:

Sometimes when I set up somebody and they haven't had a goal for a long time and they come over to me and say, I can't believe that I've scored. Or I can hear them say, how did you get that pass through there. And I'd rather see them have that success, and to me I mean great, I score a goal once in a while. (Bruce, March 26, 2012)

His actions include leadership decisions during play in an attempt to make games more balanced between opposing teams:

Sometimes even I'll ease off, completely and what I do is I switch shirts because I'm switching teams. Because it's just, it's too much. You know when you're in

the other person's zone for like five minutes and you can see they're getting a little frustrated, I'll say I'm going to switch with somebody. ... I do that rarely. But I do that, or I'll ease off, what I'll do, instead of playing defence I'll go forward and I'll stay down there, to let them move out and I'll let them have the chance to get it on the net because you just can't pin someone forever, that's just frustrating. (Bruce, March 26, 2012)

Gregory's experience as a player in the EPM also influences his professional practice as a teacher; his focus on the process, as opposed to the result, has become something he greatly values:

I've adopted a lot of this Easy-Play Model when I teach Phys-ed in school. ... I used to always have a piece of paper in my pants or shorts, and always write down the score, now I don't do that very often. I might just happen to know what the score is, but for me it's been far more important to pick out the highlights of play. So my announcements tomorrow because of intramurals today will pinpoint a girl that had two good headers in indoor soccer, she didn't score a goal, she wasn't even a good player, but that was a thrill for her to head the ball twice when she never headed the ball. So that will be my highlight, the goal scorers will have their names for that split second, but other really good play, like good defensive play, a good goal, good goal keeping. (Gregory, March 1, 2012)

The EPM's Social Appeal and Community

Participants in the EPM recognize and appreciate the social opportunities they have attained as participants in weekly soccer sessions. Many participants acknowledge this as an important aspect which has also contributed to a sense of community.

EPM Facilitation of Socialization

Opportunities for social interaction are highly valued by participants in the EPM. Many participants acknowledge the positive social environment players experience in the EPM have made soccer sessions appealing as an opportunity to be physically active:

I think it's a, it's a chance to have some physical exercise, and I think for many people probably less for me, it is more than physical exercise, it is socialization. ... It's also different in terms of I think the objective, I think people have, many of us I think, are there to enjoy, to play, and to mingle, and so it's balanced, the kind of physical exercise part, is a part, but there is also socialization aspect. (Blake, February 29, 2012)

Orlan recognizes that the EPM soccer sessions have provided an opportunity to socialize: “this one is pure friendly with an aim of exercising the body, with the aim of socializing” (Orlan, March 1, 2012). Gregory also references social experiences which have greatly contributed to his enjoyment in the EPM: “The camaraderie, the community aspect, that everyone that is there has, yeah, the positive feedback you get from people” (Gregory, March 1, 2012). Specifically, Gregory recounted his interaction with a teammate from the EPM:

I've had conversations with him, but they are very short, two–three sentences long, and that would be a good night. Even if I would talk about his work, open ended questions, don't go very far. He really feels an important part of the team because people have encouraged his ability to score. Yes, he's a cherry picker, but he scores, he scores, he scores, at so many different angles. (Gregory, March 1, 2012)

Through his explanation of the EPM, Reuben describes how social and physical benefits make this style of play so appealing: “You can exercise and you can also make lots of friendships” (Reuben, February 28, 2012). He further explains how the love of playing soccer is also something he considers valuable along with the social interactions: “Most important reason first, I like it, it is also better to have it, right? Secondly I play with friends, those are all the reasons” (Reuben, February 28, 2012). More specifically, Reuben describes how the relaxed playing atmosphere facilitated by the EPM makes the environment more conducive to social interactions:

Yeah it’s for the social interaction, you try to be, once a week everybody, they have the same habit, they have the same topic so you can talk, it’s easy to get to talk with other players. And also because of the game it is not as serious as a league, there is no arguing and no, it is very peaceful it’s easy to get together with other players who talk different, are Canadian, there are lots of different countries, right. (Reuben, February 28, 2012)

The structure of the program, its lack of formality and competitiveness, allowing for socialization is also something that appeals to Blake as a participant in the EPM:

I think the positive aspect of it is the fact it is just, you know simple, simple games, if you miss one week it’s no problem, you can go to the next week and you’re not falling behind, it’s not like a structured kind of teams. ... It is not competitive, or at least less competitive, so I think those who just want to enjoy physical exercise, soccer, to socialize, I think they might enjoy the lower intensity, the less competitive and open nature of the games. (Blake, February 29, 2012)

Social Benefits Beyond the Game

Players participating in the EPM have also engaged in social interactions which have enhanced players' relationships off the field to create a greater sense of community:

We've had a couple of Christmas gatherings, making dumplings, games for kids, where we've actually got together as families and got to see each other as families and speak different languages, and play ping pong, and on and on. I thought that was really really neat, to help foster the community that we have, especially the core group right, because then we know each other in different ways and you have an idea of what their families are about. (Gregory, March 1, 2012)

Gordon recognizes how the EPM's social atmosphere has provided him the opportunity to become familiar with Canadian culture and establish new friendships:

I guess the relationships that you build, it's not only about the game it's about the friendships that you build through these teams, it's certainly something that I cherish. ... I guess one thing that I didn't mention is probably the friendly atmosphere, especially for me it's kind of different because this is a new culture, I'm basing my opinion on Canada and Canadians on my experiences in these seven months. So for me the whole friendly nature, everyone talking and encouraging. This short football experience is really creating my whole impression about Canada. (Gordon, March 20, 2012)

Social Bonds and Safe Play

The play experiences and sense of community within the EPM assure that there is a major focus on player safety and caring for one another's well-being:

People caring more for other players, there is more of a deal made if somebody goes down. People from either side come and uh care for a person that is hurt, ... If the ball here indoor is raised over the head for example, very often, not always, very often both teams will essentially say, hey hey hey, no no, we are not about that, we don't want anyone to get hurt, I know that ball didn't go anywhere close to someone else's head, that is essentially what is said. ... and if a person happens to bump an individual, the person that would bump would say my bad, backs away give the ball to the opponent (Gregory, March 1, 2012)

Vincent believes that this focus on safety, which is collectively enforced, contributes to the enjoyment of the EPM experience:

It is very good. And if somebody kicks very hard, other people are going to remind them to oh, keep low, relax, I think this is really good for the positive experience for all us, almost all of us, can keep and have family. You want to be safe, you just want to enjoy without hurting other people. (Vincent, March 3, 2012)

Although Bruce did not repetitively discuss social benefits of sport throughout the interview, he identifies it as a major component which appeals to him in the EPM. For him, it appears that the social aspect of the EPM assures safety is observed because there is a certain amount of respect between opponents:

So it was a whole pile of things, socialization I guess of, of, how to play easy, how the easy model works, socialization, empathy, you know, understanding, respect, competition is there, you know, and I always said too, at the end of the night, that nobody's hurt, and you have a good night and go home the next week

and we come back again, or we come back on Sunday. So we are still friends at the end of the night and you don't get that in other leagues. The friendship thing is a big thing. (Bruce, March 26, 2012)

Building a Sense of Community

Beyond regular social interactions during soccer sessions, participants recognize the community which they have established as regular participants. Together the players' engagement seems to establish a sense of community:

The people especially make the difference. I think that everybody is mature and considerate, and if you have a problem the people around you will not run and score a goal. Everything freezes and the people rally around you to make sure that you are okay. I think that is very good. ... Another difference I noticed is obviously the background, it's a mix of people from different cultures, context, and it's interesting, a very interesting mix. (Blake, February 29, 2012)

Blake specifically describes the type of personalities who engage in the EPM and how their involvement creates a sense of community:

I think that everybody is mature and considerate, and if you have a problem, e.g. an injury to the people around you, you will not run and score a goal. Everything freezes and the people rally around you to make sure that you are okay. I think that is very good. (Blake, February 29, 2012)

Vincent indicates that the EPM playing atmosphere allows him to get to know his teammates:

We play together before, we don't know each other, and as we play one year, two years and as we not play we stay there and chat a little bit and everybody is very

happy and it is a very positive experience, and everybody after the game, is happy to go home. (Vincent, March 3, 2012)

Gregory also describes instances that are evidence of the supportive community established in the EPM:

With Easy-Play there's more enjoyment for more people all around, and if ah a person scores indoor soccer here he'll have, if it's a really nice goal, he'll have people applauding and saying, from everybody, it's not just from one team. it's not just your own teammates that will congratulate you, it's the whole community. ... [Nick] really feels an important part of the team because people have encouraged his ability to score. He feels like he is part of the team. ... like to score a goal and have everyone applaud it if it is a good goal, like if it is a cheesy one, I don't need anyone to say that's a good goal. But like even a really good play, sometimes really good play you get a high five from somebody on the other team, that even means more than somebody on your own team. (Gregory, March 1, 2012)

Simon recognizes the social environment established by the EPM as a positive setting to engage with his students:

I notice in here I had the chance to play with sometimes many of my own students, so what makes it unique is the students feel free, they feel open to talk to me in the formal classroom environment, they change their attitude towards learning, they try to understand that this is an important element, many of the players are professors, if they do it it must be something that is important. I can see them being more committed to it, they come regularly, and the number of

students who are coming is expanding over time, so it is basically we are setting examples to our students, staying active in sport is part of learning so that is a unique aspect, but it is basically you are playing as one of your friends, as one of their friends. (Simon, March 21, 2012)

Gregory recounts a social interaction with a player that appeared to have a profound effect and demonstrated the kind of supportive community established through the EPM:

I remember when they had, the guy from the Middle East, he tore his Achilles, there were emails that went to him and he never did play again because he had to go back to the Middle East. And he came just, he came to league, to this league play like a couple nights before he left because he wanted to see us and he wanted to say thank-you and he felt part of the community still. Even after a year after being off with therapy, I think that that just says a lot. Yeah, like in league soccer for example, I don't think that kind of thing would happen, I think it would happen with, some close friends or the friends that would go down, like hey, how are you doing, shoot me an email, let me know how therapy is going. But here he received quite a few, like for him this was a family and people really cared, first of all that he was in pain and wanted him to get better, that really say's something, there's something special happening here. (Gregory, March 1, 2012)

As a result of the emphasis on social interactions a sense of community becomes important in the EPM:

You are actually interacting with people with easy-play, it is less if you are with a pylon or a ball, you are actually interacting with people and the goal is far more

than the actual skill you possess, or try to disposes from other people. You're creating community, if there isn't community, than the enjoyment, I think really drops for a lot of people, even if you win. (Gregory, March 1, 2012)

Diversity and Inclusiveness in the EPM

Most of the participants recognize that the group of players is diverse in age and cultural background. The diverse abilities and skill levels in the group are also noted by select participants.

Appropriate Players Foster Inclusiveness

Players' willingness to embrace the diverse abilities of teammates and opponents seem to be important criteria to including new participants. The inclusive environment is something that Blake recounts when he first joined the team, although he does elude that the right fit would depend on a player's personality:

I, uh I, think it is a personality question more of than the performance, I think it's more a personality issue. I think we don't have any filter, I don't know, that's why I ask. Is there any filtering? As far as I know, I knew a friend who was playing with the team, and I don't know if there is a formal process or not. And every year I get an email and I respond so I play. But I don't know if there is any procedure. But I think people would screen themselves out if they don't enjoy, I think it's not for everybody. (Blake, February 29, 2012)

Gregory acknowledges that the EPM group warmly accepts new players and the personalities or demeanors of the players are valued:

I've brought a couple of players into the league myself, and they have been very warmly welcomed, and not just you know, looking at their skill, but looking at

their person. I remember inviting my first friend, I asked if I could bring someone, and the question was, is he a nice guy? I said yeah he's a nice guy, and he's such a good player, and he's very skilled, no no no, is he a nice guy. Finally I got the idea that ohohoh it doesn't matter what the skill level is, he needs to be the right person, and as long as the right person remains the right person he will be invited back, and that is good. (Gregory, March 1, 2012)

Cultural Diversity

Many participants recognize the predominantly Asian but still highly culturally diverse make-up of players in weekly soccer sessions. Reuben recognizes how his playing experiences in the EPM both allow him to engage with many different cultures as well as people from his Asian culture:

It's team work, you know it's fun. You have five people there, one from Asia, all different countries, so it's fun, its team. ... Asian people we don't have too many organizations here, so we organized it together, with professor Xavier who organized it together and most Asian people can come and find a soccer team where you do not only play soccer but it is also social. (Reuben, February 28, 2012)

Simon sees the EPM playing environment as one which he is able to gain a better understanding of different cultures:

Positive experience as I mentioned to you is knowing a culture better. Because my work, on the one hand give me the opportunity to know students from different backgrounds. But this is also another opportunity to know how people from a different country think or work with others. Because sport personalities are

indicative of behaviour, personal behaviour—is a person result oriented, is a person process oriented. And soccer is a team and you can easily infer behaviour from it. (Simon, March 21, 2012)

Adjusting to Diverse Play

Players of different ages and skill levels influence how teammates and opponents behave in the field. For some this means making an adjustment to their normal approach to soccer. Blake discusses in great detail the diversity of the group and how that has influenced his playing experience:

But one main difference is that we, are different age levels, you have younger and older age dynamics. I think the level and the intensity of the games also comes with age. ... another difference I noticed is obviously the background, it's a mix of people from different culture, context, and it's interesting, a very interesting mix. ... [It's a] very heterogeneous group. But you don't, you don't feel that when you are in the soccer field. ... The other thing which I noticed is that actually, when I first joined, which is a very good thing about this program, is that it is open to anybody, you know, whether you are major league, or you're just kind of starting, it's open. I see people probably never played soccer before, but you see that they can pick up, so after a couple of sessions, in fact you see people starting to play good. I first joined there was a lot of kicking, you know a lot of physical contact [laughs], but uhh, gradually I think it is coming together, people are enjoying and playing as a team also. That is also why and how you join in that kind of team. You probably come to the team because you know your friend or somebody. You

don't know any of the other people, so it takes time, but 2 weeks, 3 weeks, then it becomes like a big team, that is very interesting. (Blake, February 29, 2012)

Orlan acknowledges that the diverse age of the players sometimes limits how competitively he can approach the game, resulting in a different style of play than what he is used to:

At time you want, you have that instinct of competitiveness in you, but because you are playing with 45, 60, or 50 year olds, you want to play competitive, at times you want to play the flow of soccer that I know. The one I experienced in Africa, the one you have everything equip, passing going through, passes flowing, with speed, with energy and when you give the ball you make the move thinking that the person will just put the ball in front of you, the person wants to do whatever you want to do with the ball, and you cannot get the ball again, and this becomes frustrating, it becomes frustrating at time because you want to play the same type of soccer that you know, but the other side is also interested in scoring, scoring, scoring goals. ... Where I come from whether it's for exercise or not it is still competitive. So it can be frustrating because of my background, you want to play very competitive, aggressive. (Orlan, March 1, 2012)

Blake describes how the playing behaviours of the group are something which allows it to be a productive environment. Characteristics of the individuals who play also allow him to enjoy the playing environment established in the EPM:

And everybody has the same goal more or less, to play. It doesn't matter whether we have different language and culture, background. People are just running around looking for the one thing, the goal, that fascinates me. ... It is natural, you

tend to, play better with people you played before or with people you are familiar with. I think it's overall a very good experience. It's uh, people are mindful of things, mature and considerate and open. (Blake, February 29, 2012)

The Value of Strong Leadership in the EPM

The leadership provided by Xavier was acknowledged by most participants as a factor which is essential to the proper functioning of the group.

A Model Leader to Lead a Model

The leadership role sets the example for players on the field, but also it is important when orienting new players to the group's norms. Within the EPM, Gregory acknowledged the importance of leadership, whether it be an individual or a group of players, which models the characteristics of the EPM:

The leadership is key to this, even like playing on the street. It's kind of the person that rallies everyone around that can make or break it. If the wrong person is gathering people they won't play the next time. The amount of enjoyment has a lot to do with the league or the core group. Xavier has often talked about the core group. ... That is part of the model if he knows it or not. Even in the outline of Easy-Play, I don't know if that is in there. The core group. (Gregory, March 1, 2012)

Strong individual leadership is also recognized by Gregory for assuring some of the defining qualities of the EPM are adhered to:

The primary reason this works is Xavier himself. I've even seen it, the evening he's not there, he's almost always there, a few evenings a year he's not the uh, it's a slightly different environment, slightly less warm. People don't interact as

much, like if there's a new player, it's Xavier's, he takes it upon himself to introduce that player to everyone around him. Even in his humour to bring out the best in people too, there's a lot that he does himself, so Easy-Play Model, brilliant, but if you don't have the right quarterback behind it or coach, it just won't be as successful. ... even saying no, this group is very large group at one time, we are not going to play full field, last week you were just a bit too rough, you're young, you're running around all the time, you are just not passing enough and your are a bit too rough, so when we are going to play with our pylons over here you can have your game over there. And I appreciate that, that direction. ... But I think that Xavier makes sure that even outdoor, if there is too many players he wants to have players that exhibit the model and not always are there people that do exhibit that model, and there needs to be more, much more of massaging of what goes on even during the game. (Gregory, March 1, 2012)

Once again, the importance of leadership is mentioned by Reuben in his interviews. Specifically, Reuben describes the value of the leader as an on field facilitator who is also engaged in the play:

Uhhh, professor Xavier can control it, he can control it very well, you know he's a good organizer, so if something happened, some people say some bad words or they play too hard, he's going to stop it right away. So it prevents things from getting worse and worse. ... The guy who controls it is important, who set up the rules to the game so people play ... he can see when some people play hard, he can stop it so they won't hurt themselves, it is just for fun ... so that is very important. (Reuben, February 28, 2012)

Similar to other participants, Blake specifically acknowledges the impact of good leadership and the value of a strong leader to assure social development in the EPM:

You know I think it is going very well, and uh, Xavier is doing a really great job.

I think I forgot to mention what I think keeps this program going is, one main reason is Xavier's leadership. He has a very nice personality, he's a glue, he

brings people together and he give constructive remarks and feedback, and he's

very good at that. He's running the program very well. (Blake, February 29, 2012)

The leader also has the important role of facilitating play: "Who organizes teams, that is very important, you know the concept is good, but it is hard to organize all those people together, so if you want to make more teams you need more good organizers" (Reuben, February 28, 2012).

Respecting Leadership

The implicit respect Xavier seems to have among the group is valuable, especially when a decisive action or decisions must be made. With consideration to the importance of leadership in the EPM, Bruce acknowledges that the leader's perceived authority among his peers provides him the clout to assure the sessions run smoothly: "It's Mr. Xavier that creates the rules for the game, but because you have the respect from the top down you're always going to have it" (Bruce, March 26, 2012). Specifically, Bruce describes an instance where, in Xavier's absence, a confrontation arose between himself and another player:

We were playing out on a Sunday, and I said be careful to one guy and the guy

started yelling at me. Who the hell do you think you are, you know the guy came

sliding in with the tackle. And I had to say if professor Xavier was here he would

say the same thing to you. And the guy looked at me and says you're not professor Xavier. (Bruce, March 26, 2012)

Orlan also acknowledges the influence of Xavier's respect as a leader in the group:

We are we all respect Xavier, and we all give him that respect because he is up there and we see him as a professor and we see him as somebody in terms of age wise he is up there. ... There needs to be the person who searches online for the weather prediction and make the decision to call off the, the match, or play because according to his analysis, the weather is going to be bad. And everybody will accept it in good spirit. The implication of such assertiveness is that we have confidence in him, and we have a strong belief in him and we know that whatever he is doing he is doing it in the best interest. ... He makes that decision and you accept it, nobody challenges it. Again, when we are in the field of play and somebody kicks a shot or something does something bad, he is able to shout, keep it low, you can't just do this in game, nobody challenges him. It's a passive acceptance of his leadership. Everybody accepts it and that is what is keeping us going. (Orlan, March 2, 2012)

Challenges and Opportunities to Enhance the EPM's Implementation

The EPM is not without its inherent challenges and limitations. Although most participants appeared pleased with the structure of their weekly sessions, many identify frustrations they have or ways their experience playing could be improved.

Finding the Competitive Balance

Participants acknowledge that finding a competitive balance can exclude players who may not embrace de-emphasized competitiveness. Players' enjoyment decreases

when the competitive balance becomes too intense or diminishes. When challenges have been faced in implementing the EPM, leadership is also recognized as an important component in order to assure situations are appropriately managed and decisions remain democratic:

I do remember one guy that was just overly competitive, and was a bit sour with guys saying come on come on, let's have fun here, lets calm down, so that tainted the atmosphere. But that was dealt with in relatively firm ways so that individual knew he was not invited back, he would need to prove himself outdoors, when he proved himself outdoors to be a positive person, then he would be invited indoors. And I thought that was well done, and that was a small blip there. ... I know the issue having kids play under 18 that was somewhat explosive. And some people were ready not to play. Some of those things need to be worked through and Xavier interacted with quite a few people, it's not completely, it's not completely satisfactory for everyone, but I think this is amazing how little conflict or dissonance there is. So it's uh a huge success to have so few negative, and so many positives, I'm just very very impressed. (Gregory, March 1, 2012)

Bruce speculates that one of the qualities which made EPM successful was the presence of mature players who understand the expectations; he believes that this may be a limitation of the model if the EPM was applied to younger aged participants:

I think the maturity for us is the key, and I've see younger groups play, and I've seen the aggressiveness, and I don't know, and we're at a stage where we know the expectations. We're not winning a world cup here, we're out here trying to keep in shape, resemblance of shape. And the maturity level would be a problem

with other groups because they're competitive, they want to win and I've seen that. ... So it's, it's just the competitiveness would be a big big problem with the younger kids. (Bruce, March 26, 2012)

In some cases Simon sees the informality as a hindrance to game play, whereby players became disengaged: "there were cases in the past when the game becomes too informal and I know we lost some players" (Simon, March 21, 2012). Simon explains that informality has occasionally limited the excitement in the EPM: "so those things could be frustrating sometimes, you get out to release your frustration, and when you see the game being monotonous, that is not good" (Simon, March 21, 2012). Gordon explains similar frustration playing in the EPM when participants' engagement diminishes during informal or less competitive play:

Even though we don't play competitively and sometimes people just give up in the middle of the game. Like I know they're tired and all of that, but if they are tired, they need not be on the field. They're people who, I just, it's kind of frustrating when there are just one or two people playing and the rest are just standing there and not really moving. I mean I'm saying that and I mean even I do that, but yeah, if you are asking me what is frustrating, I guess that is frustrating. (Gordon, March 21, 2012)

Simon explains that although the EPM is friendly, a level of competition must be maintained to retain players' interest in the game:

It could be too friendly, and it may not give you a chance to move around. So there must be some level of competition, probably this could be also one of the unique aspects of this, friendliness should be the umbrella word. But there must

be some kind of informal competition in the game that will keep the game going. Unless you do that the game will be boring and some people will be disinterested. (Simon, March 21, 2012)

Although this is not exclusive to play in the EPM, Blake recognizes that some instances have arose where individualized play interfered with the positive environment: “within the soccer game people play sometimes very individual, they don’t pass the ball, but I think in general it’s not a problem” (Blake, February 29, 2012). Gordon also suggests that selfish play diminishes the enjoyment in the EPM because opponents are less likely to aggressively challenge that player: “obviously everyone wants to go solo, but what’s the fun, you go there, no one’s going to tackle you ... it doesn’t make sense and isn’t fun for everyone” (Gordon, March 20, 2012)

Logistical Frustrations

Participants expressed some of the practical challenges which affect their enjoyment in weekly soccer sessions. Here Reuben alludes to time constraints that may limit himself or others to engage in both recreational and competitive league play: “you know everybody doesn’t have enough time to put time into a league. If they have lots of time for example, they may put a couple days into relaxing play” (Reuben, February 28, 2012). Bruce expresses that he wishes he had more opportunities to play soccer using the EPM:

Get more games. ... Yeah, keep doing it. ... I think that a lot of people like it, especially in the winter time you don’t have a place to play, so twice a week, summer time we play twice a week. So if you get it twice a week that would be good. (Bruce, February 28, 2012).

Gordon also advocates for the program to run more often, citing the current sessions are so faithfully attended by participants:

Have soccer more regularly. A week, probably twice a week if not... uhh yeah, I guess that, I'm not too sure about schedules if everyone can make it, but I know a lot of people, I mean even out here there's many people who don't miss a single day, so I'm guessing everyone loves to play so yeah. I guess make it more regular. (Gordon, March 20, 2012)

Simon identifies that the EPM's informal nature can encourage tardiness amongst players in the group, which has limited playing time in the past:

The other thing, not coming on time, when you're committing to this kind of sport, if 7:00 is the starting time you shouldn't show up at 7:30. You should show up at 6:45. So if everyone showing up 30 minutes late, 45 minutes late, by the time you want to start the game, you lose so much time. And it doesn't give you the number people to play the game. Those things at times can be very frustrating. In the email we have a 100 people on the list, but only ten, nine, eight people may show. (Simon, March 21, 2012)

Gordon echoes the frustration of Simon about punctuality among participants in the EPM:

If everyone comes on time then we can get the full two hours or three hours because I think even this time when we played outdoors, we were just kicking the ball around for an hour or so, so I guess if we could just stick to time, we could get in more football or soccer. (Gordon, March 20, 2012)

Vincent identifies the same concern, and also mentions that participants should be courteous in assuring playing time is equal: “everybody should try their best to follow the timeline, go there 7:00, it’s 7:00, and as you play, if you have 15 people, five people need to change, if you play twice you come down” (Vincent, March 3, 2012). Vincent also acknowledges that the inconsistent attendance of participants can be one problem resulting from the informal nature of the EPM:

Because we are not really, not really a competitive team, it is not very big ... So not every night you can get, or every Friday night you can get exactly 15, sometimes it’s less, sometime too much, of course if it’s too much people, many people want to stay out there, play longer, and you get less chance, which is a little bit. (Vincent, March 3, 2012)

Reuben implies that players who are more motivated by intense competition may enjoy formal league play over the EPM:

It really depends on the personality, some players really like the challenge right, and they really want very exciting games they want to get at the opponent, get at the goal and they don’t want to play those team, they want to play in a league. (Reuben, February 28, 2012)

Appropriate Engagement of Youth

A dichotomous opinion among the group about the suitability or appropriateness of younger players in soccer sessions provided a variety of different perspectives related to this topic. When asked about how appropriate it would be to offer the EPM to younger age groups, Reuben explains that they would enjoy the style of play, but he prefers not to play with younger aged players:

They will like it, but you make a different team, a younger team, a different level, if you have a child playing with adults, that's a little bit, yeah dangerous. ... When you play with younger people, it is a different level, you have to know how to control yourself against younger people, I really want to hurt them but you cannot control yourself sometimes, it is a different level, we are strong we are tall, right? So you hit the same guy, no problem, but if he's ten years old they may get hurt.

(Reuben, February 28, 2012)

Simon sees the EPM's potential to engage younger player and believes it may facilitate a positive social environment for them to learn from one another:

I believe so and I think it would be good training of style for the youngsters especially. Most of the youngsters these days are indoor, they are focused on indoor games and the formal nature of some of the leagues may not motivate them because there is expectation, there are too many rules, it doesn't give them the room for their own personal styles or freedom in the nature of their play. If you approach them in this kind of informal sporting program it may definitely help them understand one another. (Simon, March 21, 2012)

Simon also believes that the EPM style of play may be conducive to children and adults playing together:

I think they may enjoy the, general get together idea, the social networking side, especially rarely we give their attention, because they are preoccupied with their indoor games, unless it is about the school work, we may not get the chance to talk to them. We always say how's the school? This is not the part they want to hear all the time. So if you pay attention to an informal sport, parents watching

them doing that, having fun with many other kids, they may feel they are being watched, not in a confrontational setting, but in an environment where the parents are enjoying, but not expecting them to score a goal. In some other formal setting, there is half fear, you know, people are watching me and I may not play well. But in an informal setting they don't care, they just kick the ball and they are just having fun. And at the same time the parents are enjoying, so that's probably something they would enjoy the most. (Simon, March 21, 2012)

Vincent explains the benefits of engaging adults and children together with the EPM:

Umm, I think that we could uhh, play with also younger, young kids, young players, because all of us, we are old, we have experience, that's why we try, but we are not running like they are. If you can play together, for instances, on one team, if you have two or three other young kinds, I think it is good for the young kids too. They are going to learn how to relax in the game for their future, I think they are going to learn a lot from experiences with us and for us, because the young kids are running so fast, you can try your best to run or to play and enjoy the game with them. It can be positive too. ... I think there are a lot of young players of all ages and sexes, they would enjoy less pressurized, free, flexible soccer. (Vincent, March 3, 2012)

Appropriate Exclusion of Youth

By contrast, many participants feel that the participation of younger players would not be appropriate. In contrast to Simon and Vincent's remarks supporting the inclusion of younger players, Orlan believes they would be a cause of a certain amount of restraint among adults on the field:

I don't really think that the dynamics will be the same because if you have more youthful, more younger guys, there will be more energy, there will be more assertiveness and aggressiveness in the game, so I think that you will not have the same, the same dynamics that you are having now ... If you bring in more women into play, the chemistry is also going to change, we are going to see more, sort of relaxed soccer then we are experiencing, depending on the type of people we are going to bring in. Like if the girls are small that we are going to play with anybody who's trying to go for tackle with her, the person always has to be careful, the person must be careful first not to intimidate her, the person is careful because he doesn't want to hurt her. Assuming we have three or four of her kind, when you are playing, you become more careful on how you go for tackles and it slows down the game, so it all depends on your view, but that is how I view it.

(Orlan, March 3, 2012)

Orlan expresses a concern pertaining to how the inclusion of younger children might be difficult regardless of the precautions taken: "If you have little people, it slows it down. So that is not to say we should change it and make it more careful, or change the game and make it more youthful, or bring in more girls" (Orlan March 2, 2012). Gordon argues that the EPM format may not necessarily appeal to all young players, but it certainly will appeal to those looking for a fun and less formal game:

For the younger crowd, this kind of game would be good for people who are not really interested in football and are just out there to have fun. But for people who are a little bit serious or take the game slightly seriously, I don't think they will like this kind of game at all. So for people, for the younger generation who's there

just to have fun, it would be awesome. I guess the fun of just playing the game just for the heck of it and not, uh playing it to hurt someone or to win something, just coming out there to have a good time. Just to come out there whether you win by ten or lose by twenty goals. I guess it's just coming out there, running about, running around, I guess that's something they would really like. I guess that is probably the most difficult thing, to probably adjust to when we play out here for people who played elsewhere. But for people who want to just come out and have fun they won't really find a difference. (Gordon, March 20, 2012)

Orlan also fears that a more youthful group of players would not connect with the style of play in the EPM:

If a younger person wants competitiveness, wants to play and let everybody know that he is the best of the best, if the younger person is friendly, still wants to show his flare, on the ball, if he just wants to use the ball and use it in a certain way, he will not find it very good. Because our game is friendly and you want to get the ball and release it to your partner and get it back to you and work your way through as a team before you score. But if a young guy who's having flare, who watches the likes of Mesi, Zidane, Ronaldo, and wants to be like them and wants to stand on the ball and do his own thing on the ball. Dribble one, two, three men before you apply, before you pass, I don't think a person would find our ball very interesting or appetizing. (Orlan, March 3, 2012)

Summary of Results

The Danger of Competitiveness

In discussing their previous experiences, participants clearly identify that

competition is a valuable component of sport. Nearly all participants acknowledge that environments which include a level of competition contribute to positive team sport experiences. Gregory describes previous experiences where he felt it was important to establish formal competition and keep track of the score in order to elicit the maximal effort from his teammates. Although he acknowledges that the score was not at the forefront of his mind, he enjoys the maximal effort of players around him when they were working towards winning the game. Orlan and Bruce acknowledge that balanced competition was also important, whether that meant not losing every game or not being blown out by your opponents. However, the more predominant theme echoed by all participants is the danger of competitiveness which might produce aggressive or dangerous play. Orlan, Bruce, Reuben, and Vincent all explicitly recount experiences in competitive sports where aggression or play that overemphasized competitiveness resulted in injury or the potential for injury while playing team sports. Specifically, Bruce and Gregory acknowledges that these types of negative experiences encouraged them to seek alternative sport leagues. Although many participants identify that negative experiences in competitive sport were relics of their youth, even participants in their 20s share similar concerns and appreciation for the EPM's de-emphasized approach to competitiveness.

Safe Play

In contrast to environments emphasizing competitiveness, the EPM was shown to facilitate competition in an environment emphasizing safety. Most interviewees identified that the focus on play in the EPM is not to win or replicate the professional approach to sport, but rather it is about being active and having the opportunity to exercise through

safe play. Some participants acknowledge that their play during weekly soccer sessions would be an opportunity to engage in a fun leisure activity and would often counterbalance their day to day routines at work. Participants describe how players would try to keep ball strikes low and avoid aggressive defending or reckless manoeuvres. Participants recognize that this has allowed players to enjoy the games, have fun playing and further develop their skills in a safe environment. Furthermore, participants acknowledge that the capacity of the EPM to reduce the chance of injury creates a game where they enjoy play and physical activity in a safe and supportive environment. When a foul, collision, or injury did occur during the game, participants describe that opponents immediately acknowledged and apologized after the incident, or everyone on both teams stopped play immediately depending on the severity of the contact. These types of actions embody courtesy, an important quality of the EPM which also contributes to the positive social environment participants appreciate.

Community and Social Inclusivity

Participants identified the EPM's social appeal and its capacity to establish a sense of community among players as the predominant factor contributing to enjoyment. All participants explicitly reference friendliness, the opportunity to socialize, or the supportive community as an important aspect of the EPM. Many participants identify how the weekly soccer sessions provided a chance to have pleasant social interactions with a familiar and friendly group of people. Furthermore, participants recognize that the positive social atmosphere helped to reinforce the respectful, supportive, and safe playing environment established by the EPM. Some participants further acknowledge that the sense of community fostered among players brought them together for social interactions

beyond soccer sessions. Most notably, Gregory explicitly acknowledges how a sense of community on the field has enriched his enjoyment of play, and how gatherings with the EPM group have further established a sense of community off the field.

Participants' value of social interactions for encouraging their continued engagement in the EPM is not a remarkable finding given previous research on the importance of social interaction in sport (Allender et al., 2006). However, the frequency in which participants referenced friendships, social interactions, and a sense of community established among players makes this aspect of the EPM particularly noteworthy. Whether the players within the EPM ensured a positive social atmosphere existed, or the EPM allowed players to more easily develop positive social relationship is not a distinction the methodology allows us to determine. Nevertheless, it is apparent from the interviewees' experiences that an exceptionally positive social atmosphere was established during players' experiences in the EPM. Positive social experiences recounted by participants includes: (a) the rallying and support of players when problems arose during a game; (b) the rich opportunities to build friendships and exchange culture; (c) the opportunities to socialize in a non-competitive atmosphere; and (d) the supportive or congratulatory interactions in sharing the success of teammates and opponents alike. Whether the players facilitated the EPM's ability to ensure a positive social environment or the EPM establishes a playing environment for players to enjoy positive social interaction, it is evident that the EPM effectively facilitated positive play among this diverse group of participants.

Profound Accounts of Community

The benefits of social interactions and a sense of community are also aspects

which can be associated with some of the most profound statements from interviews. For participants the outcomes of this invaluable aspect of the EPM were embodied differently: (a) Simon described how it has allowed him to more effectively engage with his students; (b) Gordon acknowledged that the relationships he has made playing have provided him a positive impression of Canadians; and, most notably, (c) Reuben identified the experiences in the EPM as the most enjoyable times of his life. Gregory's account of the player who returned to express his gratitude for all the concern from the soccer group after his Achilles injury is also a poignant story indicating the type of positive community established in the EPM.

Value of Strong Leadership

While the value of leadership was not anticipated to be an aspect of the model identified for its paramount importance, several participants considered it to be a very important part of the EPM sessions. The quality of Xavier's character and the efficacy in which he implemented the model were both identified by many participants. His capacity to have the respect of the group, to understand and enforce the desired EPM guidelines, and to administer the program effectively were all important qualities identified during interviews. Both Gregory and Bruce recount how play changed for the worse in the absence of quality leadership, and Blake and Orlan acknowledge how important the leadership role is in administering the program. Respect among all participants for Xavier's position as a leader in the group resonated throughout many interviews. Furthermore, effective leadership was considered a key component in integrating new participants and allowing them to become accustomed to the rules and guidelines followed in the EPM. In this sense, the leadership role was also pivotal in

introducing new players to the group in order to assure the positive social environment was maintained.

Engaging Diverse Participants

The cultural diversity within this particular group is further evidence of sports' capacity to bring different nationalities together in a harmonious environment— however this study's methodology cannot determine if the cultural diversity is a circumstantial coincidence or a consequence of the EPM. Nevertheless, the diversity of players' age and ability levels is something specifically identified by participants for attributing to the way in which play is implemented in the EPM. Blake discussed this aspect of diversity and inclusiveness in the most detail, identifying that the group is open to anyone, players' skill levels vary and improve over time, and the intensity of play is often influenced by the mix of younger and older players. The importance of including players with a mature and considerate disposition is also something identified by participants. Gregory specifically recounted the importance expressed from the group that a new player he wanted to invite is the right person, someone who would get along and fit well with the group. Blake echoed this sentiment in describing how a player's personality is more important than her/his soccer performance in determining whether the EPM approach is suitable. He further acknowledged that this style of play was not for everybody. Orlan specifically identified that the EPM style may be frustrating for players who want to be competitive or aggressive; and although he appreciates the approach of the model, where he learned to play, even sport where the primary purpose is to attain exercise is more competitive than his experiences in the EPM.

Limitations of the Model

Challenges and limitations identified by participants are the most imminently valuable findings to the current implementation of the EPM, and perhaps the most salient points to consider concerning future research opportunities and application of the model in other settings. The question of competition and how intense competition is in the EPM was the most frequent challenge identified by participants. The most poignant and confrontational description of this challenge was shared by Gregory, who described a player who was not encouraged to return after his first session with the EPM group. Many players identified that the EPM approach would not be suitable to those who were concerned with winning or lacked the maturity level to embrace the values of the EPM. Blake suggested participants discouraged with the style of play in the EPM have left and it may be worthwhile investigating their perspective as player who voluntarily chose not to participate in the EPM after initially experiencing it. Gordon acknowledged that the informality of competition in the EPM can foster players' disinterest which will at times diminish the quality of play. Simon shared this concern and suggested that while friendliness is an important aspect of play, without a level of competition players become disinterested and play becomes less exciting.

One topic described as somewhat divisive was the inclusion of players under the age of 18. As an insider actively engaged and present at the time the question of including these youth players arose, I can specifically identify that these players were 14 or 15 years old. Although in the interview Gregory commended the effectiveness of Xavier in handling this problem with the input of many other players in the group, it does bring to light an interesting conflict which seemed divisive among a few participants. Simon and Vincent

discussed the positive outcomes and appeal to incorporating youth players in sessions facilitated using the EPM, while Gordon felt that it could be enjoyed by younger players if they approached the games with the intent to have fun. Conversely, Orlan, Bruce, and Reuben felt that the style of the play in the EPM would not be conducive to youth and the inclusion of younger players was somewhat of a concern from their perspective. Half of the study's participants did not support the inclusion of younger players whether it was due to the absence of maturity youth would possess to engage cooperatively in the model, the disinterest younger players might have toward informal or de-emphasized competition, or the safety concerns in having adults play alongside youth. Regardless, further investigations with a larger number of participants are warranted to investigate the efficacy of the model for younger players. The design of this study may directly engage youth aged players in a series of sessions that are explicitly intended to facilitate the EPM.

Investigating some of the perceived limitations and challenges faced by those participating in the EPM yielded some of the most illuminating results. The informality or de-emphasized competitiveness was acknowledged by Gordon and Simon for occasionally diminishing the engagement of players, causing the games at times to become monotonous. Vincent and Blake also echoed the concerns of Gordon and Simon concerning tardiness, another negative outcome which could be associated with the level of informality fostered by the EPM. Collectively, these four participants identified that late starts as a result of players arriving sporadically diminished the amount of quality playing time during a given soccer session. In this sense the informality, although it may play a part in fostering a relaxed environment, can also incite outcomes which many participants identify for reducing their engagement in productive play and physical activity.

Experiences in Sport Compared to Experiences in the EPM	Winning Isn't Everything
	Optimal Competitiveness is Everything
	Physicality as a Deterrent to Sport Participation
	Favouring Less Aggressive Play
	Being Physically Active in the EPM
	Easy is Important in the EPM
The EPM's Social Appeal and Community	Awareness and Embodiment of the EPM
	EPM Facilitation of Socialization
	Social Benefits Beyond the Game
	Social Bonds and Safe Play
Diversity and Inclusiveness in the EPM	Building a Sense of Community
	Appropriate Players Foster Inclusiveness
	Cultural Diversity
The Value of Strong Leadership in the EPM	Adjusting to Diverse Play
	A Model Leader to Lead a Model
Challenges and Opportunities to Enhance EPM's Implementation	Respecting Leadership
	Finding the Competitive Balance
	Logistical Frustrations
	Appropriate Engagement of Youth
	Appropriate Exclusion of Youth

Figure 2. Summary of results: Chart summarizing thematic codes that emerged through the inductive analysis of interviews. Codes are categorized under headings in the order they appear in the results.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

This study investigated the experiences of players who participated in regular sport (i.e., soccer) sessions facilitated using the EPM. Eight participants from the soccer group completed an interview designed to solicit information regarding their previous experiences in sport and their current experiences in weekly sessions. The sample comprised participants between the ages of 23 and 49 (average age 39 years). The ethnicity of the population should also be acknowledged. Approximately half of the participants in the program have Asian heritage, however only a quarter of the interviewees in the study were born in and educated in Asia. Other interviewees were educated in Africa, Europe, Canada, and South Asia. Overall the population in this study is very ethnically diverse and the interviewees represented a complete cross-section of this diversity. This may be a limitation with regards to transferability to other populations with a different ethnic diversity. Participants had 8 months to 5 years' experience (average experience 3 years) playing in soccer sessions facilitated using the EPM.

The research questions in this study intended to determine the nature of participants' experiences in soccer sessions using the EPM and how those experiences compared to their previous experiences in sport. The following research questions guided this study:

1. What do players describe as their experiences (e.g., positive/enjoyable or negative/disliked) when participating in a soccer program using the EPM?
2. What do players describe as their feelings (e.g., cheerful/satisfied or frustrated/discouraged) when participating in a soccer program using the EPM?

3. In what ways have their reported experiences in the EPM differed from previous sport experiences playing with other community groups?
4. Do players' described experiences in the soccer program align with characteristics of the EPM?

In the effort to better understand experiences of soccer players participating in the EPM, interviews revealed participants' perspectives to address the research questions. Most of the responses directly addressed the first research question, providing data which described positive or negative experiences playing soccer in the EPM. The organization of the interview script (Appendix A), with questions first addressing previous experiences in sport then addressing participants' experiences in the EPM, elicited direct comparisons between the EPM and participants' prior sport experiences. Research questions were operationalized in parts B through D of the interview script. Parts B and C of the interview script provided the opportunity to operationalize the third research question. To do this, part B encouraged participants to discuss their previous sports experience before comparing those experiences through an active discussion of their current experience in the weekly soccer sessions using the EPM in part C. In the interview, part C also provided the opportunity for participants to discuss topics pertinent to the domain of the first and second research questions. Part D of the interview script attempted to specifically address the second research question by directly probing participants about their feelings during play at weekly soccer sessions. The participants' rich descriptions of play during soccer sessions also provided evidence to indicate that their experiences reflect the key characteristics of the model. The fourth research question was often addressed by participants' description of play experiences in both parts C and D of the

interview. It is important to note that only Bruce and Gregory were aware that the EPM was used to facilitate the soccer sessions. Other participants understood the simple rules and norms which govern the group, but were not aware that the soccer sessions were designed to adhere to the EPM characteristics.

This study revealed important findings concerning the capacity of the EPM to promote positive experiences in sports. The entrenched ego-oriented and overly competitive environment that can diminish the desire to attain physical activity through sports was the problem situation this study sought to address (Daniels, 2007). Prior to the investigation of participants' experiences in the EPM: (a) only anecdotal observations provided support of the model's ability to provide positive opportunities to be physically active through play; (b) the residual social-emotional benefits fostered by the EPM could only be assumed; and (c) presumptions concerning the capacity of the EPM to engage participants in physical activity to further develop their skills in team sports were unfounded. Evidence to support the capacity of the EPM to address these areas can be identified from participants' interviews. The fourth research question was addressed thoroughly through the account of interviewees experiences in the EPM. Data collected from the interviews indicated that participants' playing experiences reflected a number of the characteristics of the EPM. Whether participants were aware of the EPM or not, many participants referenced fundamental characteristics of the EPM such as the modification of traditional rules, the effort to competitively balance teams and the focus on player safety. Participants also described how the sessions provided them the opportunity to socialize and established a sense of community. Overall many of the characteristics, values, and qualities of the EPM were referenced in participants' interviews. The elicited

comparisons between previous experiences and current experiences in the EPM through part C and D of the interview (Appendix A) addresses the third research question. Stark differences between previous experiences in sport and current experiences playing soccer organized using the EPM were also revealed through participants' interviews.

Furthermore, participants' experiences provided evidence that the EPM's fostering of de-emphasized competitiveness is a valuable alternative approach for promoting physical activity through sports. Illuminating results concerning interviewee's experiences and feelings, elicited during parts C and D of the interview (Appendix A), addresses the first two research questions concurrently. Although there was reluctance from participants to specifically identify feelings or emotions, many details of players' experiences were provided through narratives describing weekly soccer session. Additional discussions to illuminate how the research questions are addressed in this study are further organized below as they relate to theory, practice and future research.

Implications for Theory

The effort to understand the benefits, value, and weaknesses of the EPM through the description of one group's experiences has demonstrated that players support the model's approach to facilitating physical activity through sport. This study demonstrates that the appeal of the EPM to engage participants in play extends far beyond the player's desire to achieve the physiological benefits of physical activity. Specifically, participants' social interactions were the most memorable and valuable parts of their experience in the EPM. This quality, combined with the friendly environment which they recognized for minimizing their fear of injury, ensured their soccer experience was fun. In short, the accounts of participants' experiences in the EPM suggest that the model has the potential

to engage participants in sport and playing sports can be a fun way to attain physical activity.

Fun is a simple idea, but it carries with it tremendous implications. When physical activity is fun it is inherently enjoyed and participants are more intrinsically motivated to continue their involvement (Brunet & Sabiston, 2011). According to self-determination theory, intrinsically motivated behaviours are the most self-determined and are engaged in to achieve feelings of pleasure and enjoyment (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Individuals whose motivation is associated with high levels of self-determination will be more autonomous and driven to participate in an activity (Ntoumanis, 2005). Therefore play facilitated through the EPM is potentially valuable to facilitate self-determined regulation and sustain one's motivation to be physically active. The EPM also satisfies basic psychological needs (competency, relatedness, and autonomy) which further encourage engagement in the model (Ryan & Deci, 2000). The effort to ensure the developmental appropriateness of play experienced in the EPM serves to meet the competency needs of players. Relatedness was also established in the group by selecting participants not on the basis of their skill level, but rather on the suitability of their personality. Finally, autonomy was fostered by the EPM's apparent level of informality, where participants have some freedom to engage in the play within comfortable parameters. Although the level of informality also seems to be the source of some of the model's weaknesses, it was perhaps not as appreciated as it should have been by players for ensuring a sense of autonomy.

The results of this study indicate that the EPM can effectively facilitate experiences playing sport which are enjoyable and promote opportunities for

socialization. In a review of qualitative studies examining the motivations of participants in physical activity, Allender et al. (2006) determined that the same qualities (fun, enjoyment, and socialization) evident in the sessions employing the EPM are shown to encourage engagement in physical activity. Suitably, findings concur with those of Allender et al. (2006) which also identified competition as a barrier to participation in physical activity among adults. Although many participants identified competition as an important part of their sport experiences, the friendly nature of play or the de-emphasized focus on competitiveness were regularly cited as important. The findings of this study are not only congruent with Allender et al. (2006), but they also support complexity theory, the central theoretical framework able to explain participants' behaviours in play.

Complexity theory provided an explanation to rationalize why play experiences in the EPM had such an appeal to participants. Davis et al. (2008) view learning as a complex process which required the autonomous capacity of the learner in influencing their experience. This entailed that the learner is actively engaged in the directions in which they explore and evolve, further allowing them to challenge themselves. Bateson (2011) recognized playing as an activity which allows this type of exploration, positioning the act or play as an advantageous environment to learn. The EPM capitalizes on play's inherent advantage in both facilitating a learning environment and allowing participants to explore and evolve in this environment. The informal organization, promotion of a social interaction, and absence of officiating in the EPM's framework also situates it as a valuable approach to ensuring its participants are provided the type of autonomy which complexity theory suggests must be afforded to evolve and learn. This study demonstrates that the EPM provides the environment to promote play; however,

since there was not a direct attempt to demonstrate the EPM's aptitude for teaching and learning, its capacity to ensure an optimal learning environment according to complexity theory cannot be firmly claimed. Some participants alluded to the improvement of other players' skills. Future studies directly investigating the EPM's appropriateness as a teaching and learning model of sports skills, tactics, or strategy may consider complexity theory as a valuable theoretical lens. Given the majority of sports are taught during childhood and adolescence, a future study of the EPM in physical education classes may help to further understand its application to teaching and learning.

Implications for Practice

The participants' recommendations did not identify the need to make fundamental changes to the structure of the model. Players seemed generally pleased with the type of play they experienced. The few recommendations from participants identified simpler logistical changes to improve the implementation of the model in its current environment. Some participants felt that they would enjoy the soccer sessions if they were facilitated more than once a week, while others identified that a collective effort to begin on time would ensure the most is made of each session. Many participants were also hesitant to endorse the inclusion of younger players during the weekly soccer sessions. However, the results of this study suggest how the EPM may effectively be applied to engage an exclusive group of younger participants both in a community and physical education setting.

De-emphasizing competitiveness is the overarching characteristic which facilitated the players' experiences in this study. While participants are all adults and the specific findings cannot be generalized to younger age groups, recent media publications

in Canada hint to a trend where a de-emphasized competitive approach is growing in popularity (Allemang, 2012). Allemang (2012) identifies that up to 56 national sport bodies associated with Sport Canada will be implementing Long Term Athlete Development initiatives to assure that fun and players' development are at the centre of the youth sport experience. Specifically, the Ontario Soccer Association's Long Term Player Development (LTPD) features an explicit focus on deemphasized competitiveness for all competition involving players less than eight years of age (Ontario Soccer Association, 2011).

The Ontario Soccer Association (2011) will implement the LTPD initiative gradually over the next 6 years beginning in 2012 with players aged 4 to 8. The under-8 LTPD initiative emphasizes an environment fostering freedom and fun where scores, standings, and trophies are not a part of the experience (Ontario Soccer Association, 2012). Festivals are designed in lieu of tournaments for players under the age of 8. These festivals are structured to include stations where players rotate to experience skill development activities, game-like activities, and mini games involving three to five players per side (Ontario Soccer Association, 2012). The director of the Ontario Soccer Association hopes that these initiatives will result in a mentality shift and parents will recognize that an overemphasis on winning does not facilitate the best environment (Allemang, 2012). Details outlining the Ontario Soccer Association's LTPD initiative for under-8 festivity play represent a shift resembling many EPM characteristics. These shared characteristics include de-emphasized competitiveness, modification of the traditional game structure, and a focus on achieving developmentally appropriate play. Given the success of a de-emphasized competitive approach among the adult sample in

this study, and the Ontario Soccer Association's initiative to promote a similar approach, it would be valuable to consider the EPM's efficacy in facilitating the sport participant in an environment engaging younger aged players.

Öhman and Quennerstedt (2008) described the value of a constructive competitive environment where students' attainment of developmental goals is effectively facilitated. In physical education, teachers believe it is important that students learn the value of cooperation and teamwork in a competitive environment (Öhman & Quennerstedt, 2008). The optimal environment can be achieved when the element of competition has been minimized in order to assure winning is not emphasized over more appropriate developmental goals (Öhman & Quennerstedt, 2008). The de-emphasized competition in the EPM may position is as one potentially valuable approach for teachers to consider in achieving the ideal competitive environment in physical education as described by Öhman and Quennerstedt. One of the participants in this study specifically identified how the model has influenced his professional practice as a teacher. Gregory has decreased his focus on the results of outcomes during physical education (who won, who scored) and paid more attention toward players' attainment of specific skills. The EPM's de-emphasized approach to competitiveness in play should also be explored in physical education for its capacity to meet some of the competitive goals Öhman and Quennerstedt identified for teachers to promote to establish a positive classroom. Certainly this study has provided evidence to support the idea that the EPM fosters a developmentally appropriate, safe, and supportive environment to attain physical activity in sport. Although it cannot be assumed that the application of the model to physical

education will induce the same results, it is worthwhile to explicitly test its potential and to further evaluate the EPM's potential.

Implications for Future Research

There are many challenges to engage people in physical activity through sports given the decline in sports participation (Statistics Canada, 2011). A focus on elite athletics and the administration of sports through a pyramid model are both centered on high-performing athletes (Green, 2005; Grey, 2004). However, elite or high-performing athletes typically have a tendency to seek out sporting opportunities and are intrinsically motivated to engage in sport. In designing a sports program to retain a more diverse group of participants, Green (2005) identifies that it is necessary to appeal to participants' task motivation and provide an atmosphere conducive to positive social interactions. Interviews conducted in this study were certainly able to reveal that the EPM provides ample social interactions, but there are some questions as to whether the model consistently satisfies task motivations. Participants did reference that the informality would at times make games monotonous and some players were disengaged by the approach which de-emphasized competitiveness. While participants identified that the EPM met their task motivations in satisfying exercise needs and providing an opportunity to improve their skills through play, the model did not seem to satisfy this need all the time for every player. Further investigations may specifically address the EPM's capacity to meet task motivations such as skill development, tactical awareness, and strategic play. Green argued that for a sport program to be best situated to maximize its retention of players, it should attempt to meet both the task and social motivations of those who participate.

This initial study of the soccer sessions facilitated using the EPM was conducted in a community sport setting, not in an educational context. However, descriptions of participants' experiences in the model reveal how it may be conducive to physical education. McCaughtry et al. (2004) indicate that physical educators did not value characteristics of the SEM which are not directly related to physical activity. Characteristic of the EPM such as the de-emphasized approach to competitiveness, opportunity for social interaction, and engineering of play to foster a safe environment all focus on inclusively engaging diverse participants in sport—these characteristics may appeal directly the goals of physical educators. Additionally, the relatively informal structure of the EPM position it as a more suitable option compared to the SEM in meeting logistical time constraints, which have been identified by some teachers as a limitation of other physical education models (Spittle & Byrne, 2009). The focus on competitive goals, which Sinelnikov and Hastie (2010) found to occupy half of the time in the SEM and Wallhead and Ntoumanis (2004) found to diminish positive student experiences, would also not be as apparent in a physical education class implementing the EPM. While the SEM does provide a much more complete sport education concerning the formality, administration, and spectacle of sport, the EPM may appeal for its ability to provide a more simple and enjoyable experience in sport for students in physical education. Future studies may examine the effectiveness of the EPM in the physical education context to empirically demonstrate its suitability in this environment.

The position of competition in physical education is well defined by Öhman and Quennerstedt (2008), who identified that while it is an important part of sport, it must also accommodate developmental goals in physical education. Participants of this study

also identified competition as a valuable component of their previous experiences in sport and expressed discouragement when the level of competition diminished to the point where players became disengaged. However, participants overwhelmingly acknowledged that their experiences in the EPM facilitated balanced competition to create an environment where they could attain exercise and develop their skills. The concerns of Torres and Hager (2007) regarding the withdrawal of competitive approaches to youth sport are also valuable to consider in comparison to results of this study. Torres and Hager strongly assert it is of paramount importance to maintain a competitive environment in youth sport as long as a win-oriented mentality is not emphasized. The competitive environment Torres and Hager propose diminishes the value of equal playing time and encourages score keeping, qualities which the EPM reject as important. While the participants of this study acknowledged the necessity to have some level of competition to maximize their enjoyment in the EPM, the conditions which Torres and Hager suggest would be challenging to implement without moving toward a win-orientation. Although the goals of the EPM are akin to those of Torres and Hager (to establish developmentally appropriate play) the EPM proposes a more realistic and comprehensive framework for achieving optimally competitive sports. Future research studies using the EPM may directly attempt to evaluate its potential to establish developmentally appropriate play to achieve a positive competitive environment. Such studies should consider the effect of leadership in the implementation of the EPM. Results from this research indicated that the success of the model is dependent on its leader or a core group of players which understand what is necessary to achieve an optimally competitive environment. Future studies may evaluate how transferable the

EPM is in promoting physical activity through sports amongst a diverse group of participants with or without a knowledgeable and capable leader or core group of players. A future study may also attempt to implement the EPM by employing the use of leadership from the group currently practicing the model.

Findlay and Bowker (2009) also warn that the focus on winning in competitive sports may diminish players' self-concept and self-esteem. Although a competitive environment may help to enhance self-esteem, a focus on winning diminishes those benefits (Findlay & Bowker, 2009). Participants in the EPM indicate that their enjoyment of sport is highest when a competitive environment is established, and that play is most enjoyable when it is friendly and there is a minimal focus on winning. With consideration to Findlay and Bowker, the EPM's framework may also have implications in enhancing player self-esteem. Many participants' descriptions of how players interacted with opponents in the EPM provide evidence that opponents and teammates alike support each other in achieving success. Whether it is the support of Nick's ability to score, an opponent's celebration of the other teams' goal or a congratulatory high-five from a teammate, the EPM certainly strives to enhance player self-esteem. More investigations concerning the capacity of the EPM to enhance player self-esteem may also be valuable. A future study may employ a measurement tool to validly attain specific data on players' self-esteem or self-concept.

Coakley and Donnelly's (2009) identification of strategies to improve the quality of sporting experiences in youth athletics concur with many of the qualities identified by participants in the EPM. These qualities include the use of smaller playing fields, the value of balanced competition, and a focus on supportive interactions with opponents.

Specifically, Gregory's description of the EPM experience, where you are actually interacting with others to create a community, closely resembles Coakley and Donnelly's recommendation advocating for supportive interactions between opponents to foster friendships through sport. The accounts of participants' experiences in the EPM indicate that the EPM framework has the capacity to address Coakley and Donnelly's recommendations to improve youth sport. However, given that all players included in this study were adults, evidence from this study cannot truly corroborate Coakley and Donnelly's recommendations. A study investigating youth experiences in the EPM may be advantageous given how the model incorporates some of Coakley and Donnelly's recommendations.

Demonstrating the ability of the EPM to engage participants in physical activity through sport and to foster a friendly playing environment supports the model's efficacy among this adult population. While the qualities of EPM seem to be well situated to promote positive playing environments and to satisfy the needs of diverse participants, future studies could be designed to specifically investigate the model's effectiveness in eliciting similar positive outcomes among younger players. Future studies of youth or adult populations could also investigate more directly the model's capacity to increase self-esteem using more controlled pre-test and post-test measurements. Studies situated specifically in the physical education environment may also be advantageous in determining the suitability of the model to meet the demands of curriculum. A pilot study attempting to facilitate soccer using the EPM with youth-aged participants in a community sport setting may be the next logical step to further investigate the effectiveness of the model to promote positive experiences in sport. A potential study

might provide points of comparison to the adults' experiences in this study and would allow researchers to more easily ascertain the model's suitability for youth-aged participants in a similar community sport setting. Future studies involving an adult population could engage participants in other sports using the EPM to determine if the same positive outcomes can be achieved while playing lacrosse, basketball or hockey.

Conclusions

The participants of this study recounted many positive experiences that encouraged their continued participation in soccer sessions facilitated using the EPM. Friendly and social interactions during play were among the most frequently noted positive experiences, while brief intermittent disengagement and tardiness attributed to informality were among the most frequently noted negative experiences. Most players were reluctant to describe their feelings or emotions felt during the interview, and instead opted to objectively describe the experiences which they found frustrating. Throughout the interviews participants regularly acknowledged that exercising in a friendly sporting environment is what made their experiences so satisfying. Due to the objective nature of participants' responses, nothing decisive can be determined regarding the effect of the EPM on players' feelings. Future studies may consider attempting to measure this using a written pre- and post-Likert scale survey. Nearly all participants described vast differences between their previous experiences in sport and those they have had during sessions facilitated using the EPM. Most of their distinctions framed the EPM experience as one which ensured safety and fostered a sense of community or friendships between players while allowing them to be physically active in sport. Most of the EPM characteristics were also evident in participants' described experiences. Some of the more

frequently referenced characteristics included self-operated play in the absence of a referee, de-emphasized competitiveness ensuring an inclusive playing environment, and an easy play approach to minimize pressure and the chance of injury.

Participation in sport is usually a leisure activity (except for professional athletes), one which is engaged in not as a vocation, but for a pleasurable experience. The experience of sport is enjoyed and not enjoyed by many different people for a variety of reasons. Those who seem to engage in sports for the thrill of a competitive atmosphere have been well served by a culture of sport in North America which has entrenched this characteristic (Kerr, 1991). While competition is and will always be an irreplaceable quality of the sport experience, it should perhaps not be valued above the social benefits which play facilitates through sport (Allender et al., 2006; Green, 2005). The EPM's capacity to facilitate play in team sport satisfied participants' desire for a positive social environment, a safe play space with a minimal risk of injury, and an opportunity to be physically active. Although the model provides an easy playing experience, it requires an engaged leader capable of assuring its characteristics and ethics are observed. The EPM's qualities may also be easy to enjoy, but without a level of maturity they may be difficult to be appreciated or keenly observed. As a preliminary study of the EPM, this research determined other worthwhile investigations to understand the efficacy of play and the potential of the EPM to provide enjoyable opportunities to be physically active.

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Appendix A

Interview Guide

PREAMBLE

Thank you for your involvement in our research study on the weekly soccer sessions with our soccer group. Below is a short list of questions we will be asking you as a participant in the study. These questions are provided to you before the interview so you have a good idea what we hope to learn from you about your participation in weekly soccer sessions. Feel free to read them before we begin.

As we go through these interview questions feel free to stop me at anytime if you need my help or need me to clarify anything. I may ask you some additional questions too if they are relevant. The interview shouldn't take any longer than around 45 minutes. OK?

A. DEMOGRAPHICS

1. What year were you born? / Are you between the ages of 40-45, 45-50, etc.?
(Consider rephrasing the first question if it is expected that the individual will be uncomfortable its direct wording.)
2. Can you briefly tell me about what kind of work you currently do?

PROBE:

- a. Where did you go to school to help prepare (or qualify) you for this type of work? / Did you attend school prior to working in this position? Where?
- b. Is this also where you grew up? Did you have to move away from home to attend school?

B. SHORT HISTORY OF SPORTS EXPERIENCES (e.g., soccer)

1. Can you briefly tell me about your general experiences playing team sports?

PROBE:

- a.
 - i. Many people began playing soccer before they joined our weekly sessions with our soccer group. Can you tell me about any of your experiences playing soccer in other community groups or leagues?
 - ii. Which experiences did you enjoy the most? What made that particular group or league enjoyable?
 - iii. Which experiences did you least enjoy? What made that particular group or league less enjoyable?
- b. Were there any championships, playoffs, or awards for how well you or your team played in leagues you mentioned?
 - i. Were these types of things important to you when playing in these leagues?
 - Why weren't those aspects of the sport league something you valued?

- What did you enjoy about having a championship or playoff round in the sport league you mentioned?

C. EXPERIENCES PLAYING IN OUR SOCCER GROUP

2. How long have you been playing soccer in this program?
3. Can you describe any differences between sports leagues you have previously participated in and your experiences playing soccer at with our soccer group?
4. Are there any experiences, stories, or instances playing soccer with our soccer group which you would describe as unique?

PROBE:

- a. Can you elaborate to describe [this experience] further?
 - b. Would you consider [this experience] as one which encourages or discourages you as a soccer player?
5. Can you describe any (other) negative or frustrating experiences, stories or instances playing soccer with our soccer group?

PROBE:

- a. Can you elaborate to describe [this experience] further?
 - b. What, if anything, do you think could be changed about how games are organized at with our soccer group to improve your playing experience with our soccer group?
6. What stories or instances can you identify which have provided positive experiences playing soccer with our soccer group?

PROBE

- a. Can you elaborate to describe [this experience] further?

D. APPLICATION TO OTHER POPULATIONS

7. The players in our soccer group are adults. Do you think other populations, for example: younger players or co-ed groups would have some of the same positive experiences if soccer games were organized as we have them set-up in our soccer group?

PROBE

- a.
 - i. What do you think other groups may find challenging about playing soccer the way we have it set-up in our soccer group?
 - Can you explain why you think they may find this challenging?
 - Do you experience any negative feelings or emotions while playing?
 - When you experience the feeling of (anxiety, frustration) during the game what do you think causes you to feel this way?

- ii. What do you think other groups might really enjoy about playing soccer the way we have it set-up in our soccer group?
 - Can you explain who might really enjoy this aspect of our soccer group? Why?
 - What types of positive feelings and emotions do you experience while playing?
 - When you experience the feeling of (joy, excitement) during the game what do you think causes you to feel this way?

E. Closing Questions

8. Is there anything you'd like to ask me?
9. Is there anything I missed that you feel you wanted to share but didn't get the chance to bring up during the interview?

CLOSING REMARKS

Thank you for taking your time to answer some questions about playing soccer with our soccer group. I look forward to sharing some of the results of our interviews with you in the future. If you have any further questions please feel free to contact at anytime. You will have the opportunity to review the transcript of the interview to provide feedback which may address any misinterpretations or clarify any responses you provided.

Appendix B

Certificate of Ethics Clearance for Human Participant Research

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