

Beyond the problem & the intervention: Understanding
contextual factors influencing adoption of a
comprehensive school health program

A Qualitative Inquiry

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Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

ABSTRACT

The focus of this qualitative research was to explore the factors that influence schools' decisions to adopt a comprehensive school health program – Go Girls! in Thunder Bay, Ontario. I interviewed administrators and teachers in four different schools who had been involved with having the Go Girls! program delivered in their schools and key informants involved in program delivery in various ways. Go Girls! is a healthy active living program delivered by a community organization for Grades seven and eight female students. A multiple case study approach was used to provide an in-depth understanding of the decision-making process for adopting the program within the specific schools' contexts. My analysis reinforces the idea that evidence-based interventions do not guarantee that such interventions fit in all settings. Findings from this study suggest that compatibility of the program to existing school values and its ability to address the needs of students were foremost in the schools' decision to adopt the program – a driver to adoption was the interplay of students' needs, often connected to several social determinants of health and the schools' resources. The fact that the school had little to no responsibility in program delivery contributed to the ease of adopting the program. Results from this study highlight the ways in which the composition of a school's student body affects the need for and usefulness of programs offered by external organizations within the school setting and school time. This information can be used as a resource for those who design school health programs. In addition, schools that are considering adopting similar programs can draw on lessons learnt by administrators from participating schools and the ways in which they incorporated Go Girls! within the schedule of their school day.

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Chapter One

Setting the Stage

Background

Adolescence¹ – the transition period between childhood and adulthood (Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario, 2010) - is a critical stage in an individual's life course. Opportunities for and patterns of adult health are established at this stage (Sawyer et al., 2012). Thus, a strategic focus on adolescence is crucial for the success of many public health agendas (Sawyer et al., 2012). Addressing active living for Canadian children is of increasing priority (Canadian Institute for Health Information [CIHI] & Public Health Agency of Canada [PHAC], 2011). Nationally and provincially that priority is generally linked to increases in obesity, inactivity and sedentary behaviours among children (CIHI & PHAC, 2013; Public Health Ontario, 2013), all of which are reported to be public health concerns in Ontario and across the nation (CIHI & PHAC, 2011). This is also the case in Thunder Bay. The SHAPES (School Health Action, Planning and Evaluation System) survey conducted by the Thunder Bay District Health Unit [TBDHU] (2011) reported that 75% of adolescent girls and 69% of adolescent boys were not meeting the recommended guidelines for daily physical activity, and that about 50% of students spend more than three hours per day on sedentary activities - specifically screen time (TBDHU, 2011). While this may suggest a continued need to build on knowledge and research about how to best support the health of school-aged children, several factors need to be considered when reading these reports. This includes that measures of obesity have changed from the late 70s to today; that different measurements are used by different organizations

¹ The period of transition from childhood to adulthood and can be divided into early (ages 11 to 14), mid (ages 15 to 17), and late (ages 18 to 21) adolescence (Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario, 2010, p.12).

providing differing results; and that direct measurements compared to self-reported measurements yield different results. In addition, as noted by Raine and repeated by CIHI and PHAC (2011, p.17) “obesity is a complex phenomenon that involves a wide and interactive range of biological, behavioural and societal factor”. While inactivity, sedentarism and obesity and the effects of these may be an issue for children across socio economic strata, they are inextricably tied to social determinants of health (Raphael, 2011; CIHI & PHAC, 2011; Stegeman & Costongs, 2012). Hence, while there is a need to ensure that Canadian children have a healthy active life, the fact that living conditions perpetuate the burden of many ailments and impede on children’s cognitive development should not be disregarded (Raphael, 2011; Stegeman & Costongs, 2012).

The concern about the increase in obesity, inactivity and increasing sedentary time among children is their associations to poor childhood development, cognitive abilities, psychosocial functioning and chronic conditions (Active Healthy Kids Canada, 2014); especially as children today are being diagnosed with health conditions that normally occur during adulthood (PHAC, 2011; Public Health Ontario, 2013).

The need for healthy active living among school-aged children has fuelled much of the attention that is currently placed on the school environment as a primary domain for active living (Public Health Ontario, 2013; Salis et al., 2006). The school environment, which I discuss in detail in Chapter two, is an important place of intervention for school-aged children (Naylor, Macdonald, Reed & Mckay, 2006; Naylor, Macdonald, Zebedee, Reed & McKay, 2006). It allows for the use of comprehensive school health approaches that have been praised for their synergistic effects on the health and well-being of school-aged children (Farrington, 2002; Naylor et al., 2006a; Naylor et al., 2006b). Child health and the maintenance of healthy schools –

parts of the comprehensive school health - also discussed in detail in Chapter two - are priorities for the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health Promotion; this is reflected in their outlines of healthy school components and the Ontario Foundations for Healthy School framework by the Ontario Healthy School Coalition ([OHSC], 2009; OPHEA, 2012).

Overall, the need for and benefits of school health programs like Go Girls! have been demonstrated (OPHEA, n.d.; Zwald, 2010). However, factors may exist that affect the feasibility of and interest in running such programs for individual schools, and this has received little attention. Thus, while the severity and framing of the obesity and physical inactivity crisis has been debated and received criticism (see for example: Boero, 2013; Gard, 2011; Mansfield & Rich, 2012; O'hara & Gregg, 2012) the aim of this thesis is not to add to this discussion, rather I examine the contextual factors surrounding the feasibility of using the school environment as an intervention setting and explore whether the attention that obesity, physical inactivity and the need for active living have garnered across the nation and beyond, may influence actions and priorities at the school level in a local context. In other words, what factors in an individual school setting contribute to a school adopting a program that is neither part of the overall curriculum nor the school's responsibility to deliver?

The Purpose

Following an exploratory framework, the purpose of this qualitative inquiry (Creswell, 2012; Thomas, 2011) was to retroactively describe and understand the decision-making process behind adoption of the Go Girls! program in a school and what implications this may have for the program delivery. In this work, the "decision-making process" is defined as the consideration of varied factors resulting in a decision to accept or decline delivery of the program. With a focus on participants' (administrators, teachers and facilitators) perspectives, this study seeks to

understand the complexity of the specific context that shapes this process by inductively identifying a pattern of meaning (Creswell, 2012). This approach necessitated that I situate myself within the research and acknowledge how my experiences and background can influence the study and my interpretation of the findings (Creswell, 2012). I will discuss this further in the methodology section (Chapter 3).

The Research Question

The main research question was: what factors influenced the decision of schools (within the Thunder Bay area) to adopt the Go Girls! program? Answering this question helps illuminate areas in the school settings that are in need of increased support in order to embrace healthy school approaches recommended by the Ontario Healthy Schools Coalition (OHSC). The OHSC pioneered the Ontario Foundations for Healthy School framework, which provides guidance on comprehensively addressing a number of topics that are important for optimal health and illness prevention in order to create “conditions that are conducive to health (through policies, services, physical/social conditions)” and to provide “school health education, and ...opportunities for physical education and recreation, and programmes for counselling, social support and mental health promotion” (OHSC, 2009, p. 4). Guidance provided within this framework is based on the Comprehensive School Health approach.

Definition of Terms

Special education facilitator: Based on participants’ descriptions, a special education facilitator in the school works with small groups of students on varied subjects or general literacy and social skills. In this work I use the term facilitator rather than special education facilitator. The facilitator provides special education services to the students and assists teachers in developing individual education programs for students, who require specific accommodations to

their learning style. The facilitator also coordinates referrals (e.g.: speech therapy, physiotherapy etc.) with external agencies based on the needs of their students. Please note that this description provides an overview of the facilitator's role and does not cover the breadth of their duties, which can vary from one school to the other.

School liaison: A school liaison - or Go Girls! Champion, the terms are used interchangeably - is a designated person within the school, who is the contact person between the agency and the school. The agency also asks that the liaison be available in the school during the time when the sessions are in progress, in case the Go Girls! mentors need any assistance.

Chapter Two

This chapter reviews the literature needed to provide a comprehensive overview of the need for an increase in healthy active living opportunities among school-aged children, and provides the background information required to contextualize and understand the relevance of this study. Within the literature review, I describe the need to focus on active living as a response to the increasing obesity and inactivity ‘crisis’ among children; the role of the school environment as an important setting for initiatives that will enhance children’s learning while providing them with active living opportunities; the comprehensive school health framework and studies that focus on implementation or adoption of school health programs.

Literature Review

As mentioned above, there is an increasing focus on the need to ensure that children have a healthy active start to life and are provided with healthy active opportunities that may serve as a protective factor against a host of adverse health conditions (Public Health Ontario, 2013). One of the drivers to this increased focus is the reported increase in childhood obesity, sedentary lifestyles, and the implications these have for the development of chronic diseases (Public Health Ontario, 2013). Given this focus, I briefly point to some of the literature on childhood obesity and physical inactivity. Acknowledging that these issues are complex I touch on the ways in which they are connected to the social determinants of health (SDoH), in the sections that follow, while I cannot explore this complexity in its entirety in this thesis.

The emphasis on the need for healthy active living beyond physical activity, nutrition and mental health provides evidence of the acknowledgement that a multilevel approach is needed as well as a shift to embrace this in order to address obesity and inactivity (CIHI & PHAC, 2011; Public Health Ontario, 2013; Salis et al, 2006; Yousefian, Ziller, Swartz & Hartley, 2009). The

use of the term *active living* takes into consideration the broader domains of active living beyond exercise where changes could be targeted for sustained and better health outcomes (Salis et al, 2006). Those domains include: recreational, household, and occupational activities and active transportation (Salis et al., 2006; Yousefian et al., 2009). The logic behind consideration in these varied domains is the need for a socio-ecological approach with multilevel interventions in order to achieve population change (Institute of Medicine, as cited in Public Health Ontario, 2013). Generally, ecological models focus on “people’s interaction with their physical and sociocultural surroundings” (Salis et al., 2006, p. 3). Ecological models are considered more productive for addressing physical inactivity or other issues requiring change at a population level (Public Health Ontario, 2013; Salis et al., 2006). Ecological models encompass the idea that change cannot be effectively achieved by solely focusing on individual behavior, energy balance or the built environment; it must target multiple variables and levels including intrapersonal, interpersonal/cultural, organizational, physical environment and policy levels (Salis et al., 2006, Public Health Ontario, 2013, WHO, 2012). However, the individual behavioral level is still a significant component within the ecological model for active living as it is the outcome of interest that needs to be changed (Salis et al., 2006). The increased attention to the need for healthy active opportunities for school-aged children has consequently lead to changes across the country in adjustments to and provisions of relevant infrastructure within the built environment; such changes include increase in programs offering physical activity opportunities, arenas, leagues and outdoor spaces to name a few (Active Healthy Kids Canada, 2014). However, examinations of whether those changes have led to the desired health outcomes suggest that while the infrastructures are there, the children are not using them (Active Healthy Kids Canada, 2014). This re-emphasizes the need for a more balanced consideration of the variables mentioned

above when addressing health issues. Similarly, that the Go Girls! program follows a multi-variable approach and an active living ideology, does not guarantee that it will be suitable for or adopted in all school settings. This is why the aim of my study is to understand the factors at the school level that are critical for its adoption.

While a thorough discussion of physical activity, inactivity and obesity in the context of the SDoH is beyond the scope of this thesis, it is important to note that these issues are complex and impacted by many factors including but not limited to income levels, housing and access to services (Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO), 2014; Heath & Coleman, 2003; Stegeman & Costongs, 2012; WHO, 2013). The implementation of initiatives that aim to address behavioural factors or the built environment do not diminish the need to also address important living conditions that continue to perpetuate inequity in health outcomes (Baum & Fisher, 2014; Raphael, 2011). The structural factors that contribute to poverty and disadvantaged socio-economic status, which are the most important determinants of health, and the "redistributive mechanisms in education, housing, employment, income and wealth" (Baum & Fisher, 2014, p.8; ETFO, 2014), must be taken into consideration if we want to get to the roots of inequities in health and illness and work towards optimal population health outcomes (Baum & Fisher, 2014). Among many marginalized groups, there are enormous and increasing structural barriers including racism, history of colonization, sub-standard and crowded housing, low education, high rates of incarceration, poverty and inadequate access to services (Baum & Fisher, 2014; Stegeman & Costongs, 2012). The accumulation of exposure to adverse living conditions or SDoH especially in early life impedes children's cognitive, mental and physical development and well-being (Baum & Fisher, 2014; Stegeman & Costongs, 2012).

Determinants and Implications of Childhood Obesity

The prevalence of obese and overweight children in Canada has been reported to have increased steadily in recent decades (PHAC, 2011). According to recent estimates based on the International Obesity Task Force classifications, one in four Canadian children and youth are considered overweight or obese. Using another body weight classification developed by the World Health Organization (WHO), the prevalence of overweight and obesity among children in Canada may even be as high as one in three children (PHAC, 2011). Obesity is highly connected with physical inactivity, sedentary lifestyles, the consumption of a diet rich in calories from fats and sugar (WHO, 2013), and with the social determinants of health, as mentioned above (Public Health Ontario, 2013). The determinants include children living in poverty. Poverty affects where people live. Some socioeconomically poorer neighborhoods are referred to as “food deserts” where energy dense food may be the only available and, or affordable option for low income families (Daniel, Kestens & Paquet, 2009). In addition, more often than not socioeconomically poorer neighborhoods may also be unsafe and not walk-able, bicycle-able or conducive for outdoor play and, enrolling children in afterschool activities that would increase their physical activity is likely beyond financial reach for many poor families (Davidson, Simen-Kapeu & Veugelers, 2010).

Comparisons of fitness level and aerobic fitness - which have been linked to obesity measures - from the 1981 Canadian Fitness Survey and the 2007-2009 Canadian Health Measures Survey (CHMS) show that the fitness levels of Canadian children have declined and consequently calls for closer examination (Tremblay et al., 2010). The measures used for the surveys were similar, allowing for comparison. However, although the CHMS is considered the most comprehensive national representative survey on health measures of Canadians, it does not

include data for residents of First Nations communities and certain remote regions (Tremblay et al., 2010). This is important for several reasons; many First Nations children live in poor conditions (Macdonald & Wilson, 2013) and First Nations families and individuals may have different ideas about what constitutes appropriate or desirable physical activities (Finlay, 2006). This, again, suggests that diversity is needed when addressing the health and well-being of Canadian children (Findlay, 2011).

Canadian children are now being diagnosed with health conditions that previously only occurred in adults. For instance, Type 2 diabetes, which is on the rise among school-aged children and has been linked to excess weight, is associated with the premature development of other chronic diseases (Roberts et al., 2012). While an accurate prevalence of Type 2 diabetes among Canadian children is yet to be established (PHAC, 2011; Public Health Ontario, 2013), its steady rise and the myriad of health complications associated with it, make it a public health concern, especially as children's health status lays the foundation for immediate and long-term health outcomes (PHAC, 2011; Public Health Ontario, 2013; Sawyer et al., 2012). Similar to Type 2 diabetes, obesity in the early stages of life is reported to be linked to chronic conditions later in life including: hypertension, heart disease, gallbladder disease, stroke and some types of cancer, including breast and colon cancer (Shields, Gorber & Tremblay, 2008; Shields & Tremblay, 2011; Ministry of Health Promotion, 2010; PHAC, 2011; Public Health Ontario, 2013).

Early life is a critical time when health practices and behaviours that promote good health and those that do not are learned and adopted (Ministry of Health Promotion [MHP], 2010). Obese children tend to become obese adults (Whitaker et al. & Nader et al. as cited in Roberts et al, 2012; Public Health Ontario, 2013), and most chronic disease indicators carry over

from childhood into adulthood, including; blood pressure, cardiovascular fitness, skinfold thickness, waist circumference, serum cholesterol, insulin sensitivity and several serum levels (Reed, Warburton, Macdonald, Naylor & McKay, 2008; Knox et al., 2009). Intervention at an early stage increases the likelihood of success and of curbing associated complications (PHAC, 2011; Schumacher & Queen, 2007).

As well as being a burden on the physical and mental well-being of individuals and families, the health outcomes of obesity place a significant economic burden on the health care system. Health care expenditures to Canada's health care system associated with obesity are estimated to be \$4.3 billion in direct and indirect costs (MHP, 2010).

Childhood Physical Inactivity and its Implications

Physical inactivity has also been reported to pose a significant financial burden on the health care system as well as on the individual. The annual cost of physical inactivity in Canada is reported to be US \$6.8 billion (Janssen, 2012). The 2012 Active Healthy Kids Report Card [AHKC] on physical activity for children and youth in Canada indicated that the grade for physical activity was an F for the 6th consecutive year (AHKC, 2012). While this grade has improved to a D minus in 2014, it still indicates that not enough Canadian children are meeting the physical activity guideline (AHKC, 2014).

The intensity of most Canadian children's physical activity is not adequate to reach optimal health benefits (Knox et al., 2009; Reed et al., 2008). This is particularly apparent in regards to organized sports and, perhaps more concerning, in defined contexts such as Physical Education class time (Reed et al., 2008). This is especially concerning because schools are settings where children may be well supported to be physically active independent of their family situations and socio-economic status (Knox et al., 2009; Reed et al., 2008). An evaluation of

daily physical activity (DPA) in Ontario indicates that a majority of schools are not meeting the DPA policy in Ontario despite its potential effectiveness in keeping children active if properly implemented (AHKC, 2012; Office of the Auditor General of Ontario, 2013). Many schools are unable to meet the requirements of the DPA policy because the policy is not backed with adequate resources (i.e., staff, time, expertise and infrastructure) for its implementation (Office of the Auditor General of Ontario, 2013). The inadequate number of Physical Education (PE) classes and the quality or lack of quality of PE contributes to children living an increasingly sedentary lifestyle (Naylor et al., 2006a).

Protecting the health of school-aged children is critical to any public health plan and comprehensive education strategy (Jones, 2008). Thus, it is no surprise that addressing active living and childhood obesity among Canadian children is a national priority and that Canada's Health Ministers' have endorsed a national framework to promote this work (PHAC, 2011). These initiatives indicate a national commitment to promote healthy living and to ensure that our children and youth have the healthiest start to life (PHAC, 2011). Without concrete decisive action, today's children are likely to be the first generation of children whose lifespan is shorter than their parents (AHKC, 2012; MHP, 2010). The issues of inactivity and increased sedentary time in early life have the potential to undermine the advances of modern medicine. The medical problems associated with a non-healthy active lifestyle occurring early in life, increase in complexity in later stages of life (Public Health Ontario, 2013; Roberts et al., 2012; Schumacher & Queen, 2007). This means that health problems which are typically controllable in adulthood, become more difficult to regulate with childhood or adolescence onset resulting in the need for multiple drugs and treatments (PHAC, 2011; Schumacher & Queen, 2007).

Although many well-developed initiatives across the country attempt to address childhood inactivity, it continues to be a major public health concern (PHAC, 2011; Public Health Ontario, 2013). The complexity of the issue suggests that there must be continued and sustained multi-sectoral and multifaceted responses (PHAC, 2011). As noted by the WHO:

Actions to prevent childhood obesity need to be taken in multiple settings and incorporate a variety of approaches and involve a wide range of stakeholders. Sustained interventions are likely to be required at several levels – at an individual level in schools and community settings to effect behavioural change, and in sector changes within agriculture, food manufacturing, education, transportation, and urban planning. (Butland et al as cited in WHO, 2012, p. 16)

In the analysis of the context specific cases involved in this study the need for multifaceted approaches when dealing with this issue will be clearly illustrated.

Schools as the Intervention Setting

Policy-makers and researchers alike (Naylor et al, 2006a; Naylor et al, 2006b) recognize schools as critical settings for promoting healthy behaviour in a comprehensive manner (MHP, 2010; PHAC, 2011). This is because schools exert the most influence on children and youth second only to the family unit (MHP, 2010), and because students spend the most active portion of their days in the school environment (Samdal, Nutbeam, Wold & Kannas, 1998). Schools provide a fixed setting with frequent contact where prevention measures can focus on important health factors like diet and physical activity (Schumacher & Queen, 2007). In addition, schools have the capacity to reach a wide range of children from varied ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds (Heath & Coleman, 2003; Naylor et al., 2006a; Reed et al., 2008). This makes schools an opportune setting for promoting active living, particularly when considering that

physical inactivity and obesity disproportionately affect minority groups and children living in disadvantaged circumstances, who may be more difficult to reach beyond the school setting. Due to limited finances and not owning a vehicle parents may rely on school busses for transportation to and from home. Thus children may have limited or no access to the opportunities available outside of class time that the school can provide (Heath & Coleman, 2003; Schumacher & Queen, 2007). As mentioned, levels of inactivity and obesity are shown to be higher in disadvantaged socio-economic areas (CIHI & PHAC, 2011); this is in part related to the restricted availability of and accessibility to facilities and programs dedicated to active living (CIHI & PHAC, 2011) as well as to green spaces and safe outdoor environments (Davidson et al., 2010). It is in this light that WHO notes that: “Studies suggest that children of higher socioeconomic backgrounds, rather than more disadvantaged backgrounds, benefit more from interventions. Therefore, policy-makers and practitioners must consider the potential impact of interventions to ensure that obesity prevention does not deepen existing inequalities” (WHO 2009 as cited in WHO 2012, p. 16). The effects of using schools as intervention settings are dependent on many different factors. One of these, obviously, is the intervention itself as well as the way in which the intervention has been implemented.

The following subsections provide a description of some of the intervention strategies and approaches which emulate the comprehensive school health model.

The social development model. There are several different ways that schools may be used as intervention settings. One is the social development model. This model suggests that bonding to a school can serve as a protective factor for children’s development (Hawkins, Catalano, Kosterman, Abbott, & Hill, 1999). The social elements that characterize strong bonds to school are: “*attachment* (i.e., positive emotional link) and *commitment* (i.e., a personal

investment in the group)” (Hawkins et al., 1999, p.228). According to the social development model, “when these social groups produce strong bonds among its members, they promote clear standards for behaviours” which are consistently reinforced (Hawkins et al., 1999, p.228). Essentially, bonding to a school can alter a child’s developmental trajectory as the bond can mediate risk and reduce the prevalence of health compromising behaviours (Hawkins et al., 1999). This approach has been used particularly in order to address delinquency, violence and drinking, smoking, drug use, and sexual activity (Hawkins, 1999; McBride et al, 1995). However more recent work has suggested the model be used to address obesity or understand obesity risk in adolescence particularly in the areas of dietary and physical activity habits (Pentz, 2009).

The life skills approach. Another strategy often used within the school environment is a life skills approach. This approach could include training teachers in proactive classroom management, engaging the parents to support their child’s educational development and providing the children with social skills training (Farrington, 2002). Equipping children with “social skills (e.g. effective communication)” and “intra-personal skills (e.g. self-awareness)”, both of which are part of the life skills approach, shows success in dealing with internalizing and externalizing behaviours, which are antecedents of risk taking behaviour among adolescents (Maruska, Morgenstern, Isensee & Hanewinkel, 2010, p.1021). The Seattle Social Development Project (SSDP) showed that multi-level intervention during the elementary schools years provided sustained benefits into early adulthood (Farrington, 2002). The multi-level dimension embedded in life skills approach considers that a variety of factors may influence children’s risk behaviours including the home environment and parent-child relations (Samdal et al., 1998). The advantage of multi-level interventions is their ability to produce an additive or synergistic effect which is greater than that provided by a single intervention aimed at isolated issues (Farrington,

2002). As noted by the WHO, an “effective school health program can be one of the most cost-effective investments a nation can make to simultaneously improve education and health” (WHO as cited in MHP, 2010, p.9). The following sub section discusses the ways in which not only strategies and approaches but also a school’s financial situation affects the value and ability of a school to be an intervention setting.

The impact of economic strength on value of the school as an intervention setting.

While the school has this ability to positively influence students, some schools may not be able to optimally provide their students with opportunities that would enhance their learning. There still exist variations in availability of resources and infrastructure depending on school size and location (AHKC, 2014). In some instances, smaller schools and rural schools report having less availability of and access to resources that would enhance active living opportunities for their students (AHKC, 2014; Stegeman & Costongs, 2012). Many urban schools have greater access to resources and or infrastructure than rural schools (AHKC, 2014), and schools in higher socio-economic communities are generally better equipped to provide their students with environments and opportunities that enhance their academic learning compared to disadvantaged schools or schools in lower socio-economic status areas (Lee H., Harris & Lee J., 2013; Saab, Klinger & Shulla, 2009; Stegeman & Costongs, 2012). The schools in high income neighbourhoods often have access to private funding that is not within the reach of schools in lower income neighbourhood (Shaker, 2014). Thus a school’s size, location and socio-economic positioning can influence a range of factors including but not limited to quality physical education programs, access to quality recreation facilities, multi-purpose facilities, quality of playgrounds, active transportation opportunities and school architecture (AHKC, 2014; Huang et al, 2013; Saab et

al., 2009). These factors all contribute to a schools' ability to provide an enhanced academic experience and optimal influence on a child's health and development (AHKC, 2014).

Health Promoting Schools/Comprehensive School Health

An intervention that may successfully help to address the need for a healthy active start to life is the WHO's Health Promoting School (HPS) Initiative. The idea of HPS was first mentioned at a WHO conference over two decades ago (Lee, St-Leger & Moon, 2005). Due to its holistic approach, with health education within the school being supported by the school's environment and the school's culture (Lee, St-Leger & Moon, 2005), it has since been endorsed internationally as a valuable means to promote health in schools. Research over the past two decades has demonstrated that comprehensive school health approaches are effective in addressing health issues (Lee, 2009, Stewart- Brown, 2006). A 2006 meta-analysis of school-based health promotion by Stewart-Brown, showed that interventions were more effective if their approach were holistic and comprehensive (See also MHP, 2010). This means that while focusing on healthy eating, physical activity and mental health, the interventions that worked best were developed to involve the whole school, the school's psychosocial environment, personal skill development, parents and the community (Stewart- Brown, 2006). The premise of HPS is that educational institutions incorporate the initiative into their organizational strategy (if it is not already there), in order to support health enhancing behaviours and address health risk behaviours in school-aged children and young people (Lee, 2009; Stewart- Brown, 2006).

The Health Promoting Schools has been positively evaluated for addressing child health, when dealing with unhealthy behaviours in school-aged children and adolescents (Blake et al., 2005; Naylor et al., 2006b, Reed et al., 2008). For example, an evaluation of a HPS initiative in Canada (Annapolis Valley schools, Nova Scotia) focusing on obesity prevention proved effective

in supporting grade five students to be more likely to make healthy and active living choices (MHP, 2010; Veugelers & Fitzgerald, 2005). An evaluation of the ‘Active School’ model that provided increased opportunities for being active within the school day in British Columbia, proved the model efficient in promoting physical activity in elementary schools (Naylor et al, 2006b). It also proved effective for improving cardiovascular fitness of school-aged children in British Columbia (Naylor et al, 2006a).

Comprehensive School Health (CSH) is the term mostly used in Canada to describe health promoting schools (CSH, HPS & Coordinated School Action are used interchangeably) and it has been gaining momentum across Canada since 2004 with the federal-provincial commitment to promote healthy school communities and subsequent creation of the pan-Canadian Joint Consortium for School Health (JCSH) (MHP, 2010). Their focus is on knowledge development, leadership, and capacity building required for the advancement of comprehensive school health approaches. The JCSH defines CSH as an: “internationally recognized framework for supporting improvements in students’ educational outcomes while addressing school health in a planned, integrated and holistic way” (MHP, 2010, p.10). This definition overlaps with other descriptions of this approach that are used by different jurisdictions and organizations (MPH, 2010). Regardless of how it is described, they all touch on four interrelated pillars that provide a firm foundation for comprehensive school health (MHP, 2010, p.11):

- Social and physical environment
- Teaching and learning
- Healthy school policy
- Partnerships and services

It is important to note that Ontario Public Health Standard (OPHS) Requirements indicate that boards of health must use a comprehensive health promotion approach when working with school boards to influence the development and implementation of healthy policies needed for a supportive environment (MHP, 2010). The introduction of the Foundations for Healthy Schools framework by the Ministries of Education and Health Promotion in 2006 has led to the adoption of Healthy Schools by many Ontario public health units (MHP, 2010). The OPHS requirement for school settings includes the delivery of chronic disease prevention encompassing topics such as: healthy weight, physical activity, and healthy eating. With these guidelines, there is an expectation that most schools in most jurisdictions have an appreciation for CSH and are working towards this goal (MHP, 2010). Regardless of such expectations, boards of health supporting school health in Ontario are still guided by the principles of *need, impact, capacity* and *partnership/ collaboration* (MHP, 2010). There is an understanding that the support required for Healthy Schools within a jurisdiction may not always be available. In addition, the readiness among boards of education and schools varies when it comes to engaging in healthy school approaches (MHP, 2010). Thus, an examination of the factors influencing adoption or rejection of a free school-based health program, which could include perceived availability of space and time, ideology, patterns of communication, staff continuity or turnover, and much more, sheds light on the interplay of these and their impact on program uptake and delivery.

Adoption & Implementation of School Health Programs

Successful implementation of CSH initiatives is the bedrock to achieving the associated positive results (MHP, 2010); it is not surprising, then, that many studies focus on implementation. However, expected positive outcomes of CSH approaches are not always enough to guarantee the adoption of such programs (Cleland, 2010). This may be due to the

existence of several competing interests in most schools (Jenkinson, Naughton & Benson, 2012). While many studies have focused on varied aspects of implementing school health programs (see for example: Belansky et al., 2013, Cleland, 2010; Deschenes et al., 2009; Higgins et al., 2013; Mortensen, 2011; Noonan et al., 2009; Patton, 2012; Paularine, 2006; Storey, Spitters, Cunningham, Schwartz & Veugeler, 2011), the processes involved in adoption or rejection have received minimal attention. Despite the conventional wisdom surrounding the use of evidence-based innovations, understanding the barriers and facilitators to adoption of innovations is critical for their advancement and effective implementation (Bradley et al., 2004; Noonan et al., 2009). Diffusion of innovation studies dealing with school health programs seem to focus on adoption rates and implementation with minimal to no emphasis on institutional and contextual factors behind adoption (see for example Deschesnes, Trudeau & Kebe, 2009; Mortensen 2011, Cleland, 2010; Downey, Wages, Jackson & Estabrooks 2012). Mortensen (2011) mostly explored factors influencing effective implementation of new school health policies in a midwestern state aimed at reducing the prevalence of childhood obesity, with a slight emphasis on adoption factors. The role or presence of a school health team was critical to the successful implementation (Mortensen, 2011). This was similarly evident in Cleland's (2010) examination of the role of the school health committee in a school in the Thunder Bay district. Cleland also placed much emphasis on understanding implementation factors.

Although Deschesnes et al. (2009) highlight the importance of contextual school factors when assessing adoption of healthy school initiatives, their study was mostly focused on assessing diffusion of innovation attributes that are relevant to implementation. Downey et al. (2012) place more emphasis on examining intervention attributes that impede or facilitate adoption of physical activity interventions. The focus here was on how adoption considerations

translate into effective implementation. Noonan et al. (2009) support that there is little research that looks at the organizational dynamic and contextual factors that influence the adoption of evidence-based programs. The authors also focus on the feasibility of implementation once users adopt a new evidence-based program and not solely on adoption. Their findings indicate that the fit of a program within a specific local setting is important in influencing an organization's decision to adopt a program (Noonan et al., 2009).

While the scope of understanding provided in many survey studies for example Cox et al. (2011), Paularinne (2006), Deschesnes et al. (2009), Blake et al. (2005), Lounsbury, Mckenzie, Trost & McKenzie (2011), and Rohrbach, Ringwalt, Ennett & Vincus (2005) is not enough to paint a complete picture of the contextual factors that contribute to the adoption of CSH initiatives, they provide significant insight to adoption and implementation. Cox et al. (2011) and Lounsbury et al. (2011) examined the barriers and facilitators that influenced the integration of school-based physical activity and the adoption of evidence-based policies. Their studies showed that budgetary concern, time and competing priorities were some of the top barriers; they also emphasized the need to address the teachers' perception of and the principal's knowledge of physical education in order to facilitate adoption of physical activity and physical education opportunities (Cox et al. 2011 & Lounsbury et al. 2011). Along similar lines, Ronhrbrach et al. (2005) examined the process of adopting evidence-based prevention curricula among a national sample of US school districts. Their results suggest that evidence, use of local needs assessment and a coordinator who was dedicated to the program were important for its adoption (Ronhrbrach et al. 2005). Paularinne (2006) also used surveys to determine how innovation attributes affected the implementation of the Heart Healthy Kids™ Toolkit in elementary schools in Thunder Bay. His study showed that the perceived relative advantage and perceived complexity (i.e. ease of

use and understanding (Rogers, 2003) were some of the principle factors for implementation (Paularinne, 2006). In opposition to many other studies Deschesnes et al. (2009) found that contextual school barriers were significantly associated with adoption rather than relative advantage of the health promoting school initiative; that is, the degree to which the initiative is better than a previous innovation (Rogers, 2003). They had expanded their psychometric scale with two additional contextual attributes (barriers in school context and collective efficacy), in order to add more flexibility in their examination of perceived attributes that influenced adoption and implementation of the Healthy School approach in Quebec. Blake et al. (2005) surveyed Massachusetts's school district health coordinators and high school teachers to determine the factors behind the adoption of HIV education policies. Their study affirmed the importance of training and adequate expertise required for teachers to be more susceptible to provide more HIV related lessons to their students (Blake et al., 2005). Summerlin-Long & Goldstein (2008) focused on the statewide (North Carolina) adoption of comprehensive tobacco-free school policies. Their study demonstrates the added value of examining contextual factors leading to adoption. Although factors may differ from one state or province/territory to another, such studies provide relevant information on factors including client benefit, effective leadership and improved communication for advocacy, which are useful in considering the adoption of programs in school settings whether they revolve around tobacco-free schools, HIV education, heart health, physical activity or overall school health (Beets, Webster, Saunders & Huberty, 2012; Bessems, Assema, Paulussen & Vries, 2011; Cunningham et al., 2012; Downey et al., 2012; Hughes et al., 2011; Summerlin-Long & Goldstein, 2008). My study provides a greater scope of understanding that is solely focused on adoption attributes and not necessarily implementation and adoption attributes as seen in many of the studies described above.

Background Information and Study Relevance

Go Girls! Program

As mentioned in the introduction, the Go Girls! program aims to provide girls and young women with much of the information and support required to make informed choices about healthy/active living (OPHEA, 2005). The program also takes into consideration the sensitivity of emotional, social and cultural issues faced by girls during this time. The specific targets of the program are physical activity, balanced eating and positive self-image. The program is geared to girls between 12 and 14 years of age, and is delivered through seven sessions chaired by 18 to 25 year old female mentors. The program is based on research indicating that levels of physical activity among girls decline significantly during adolescence and that girls in this age group often struggle with issues of eating and body image (OPHEA, 2005).

Adolescent girls are insufficiently active to gain the health benefits of physical activity (Pfaeffli & Gibbons, 2010) with only 17% of girls in Canada reporting that they accumulate at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous-intensity physical activity in a week. For boys it is 28% (Active Healthy Kids Canada, 2012). The limited literature investigating the motivation of girls to participate in physical activity opportunities or not, attributes the low levels to girls' limited ability to have meaningful interactions with their peers in traditional PA activities and a limited variety of non-competitive active living opportunities (Paechter, 2013; Pfaeffli & Gibbons, 2010). In addition, girls' exposure to physical education in their environments (home, school, community and among peers) does not encourage them explore the extent of active play as restrictions are placed on what their bodies can and cannot do (Paechter, 2013). Instead, much of their exposure to physical education implies a problematic view of their bodies and the need to modify it (Paechter, 2013). Thus, there are self-compassion and self-esteem issues associated

with physical inactivity, which is more pronounced among girls (Paechter, 2013; Public Health Ontario, 2013).

The seven-session, mentor-lead Go Girls! program encompasses educational games and activities in a fun atmosphere with the goal of stimulating self-reflection and group discussion (OPHEA, 2005; OPHEA, n.d.). All seven sessions are delivered in one term with each session addressing topics of *active living*, *balanced eating* and *feeling good* (OPHEA, 2005). An atmosphere that leads to the enjoyment of activities, such as that created by the Go Girls! Program, is important for motivation and participation (Pfaeffli & Gibbons, 2010). The program was initially developed by OPHEA in 2001 in partnership with the Nutrition Resources Center and the Center for Studies in Health and Physical Activity for Girls and Women with the Faculty of Physical Education and Health at the University of Toronto (OPHEA, n.d.). The program is unique in its delivery as it touches on several CSH components; for example, the program is designed for delivery through a dynamic community partnership involving:

- Post-secondary institutions which serve as a pool for recruiting volunteers who become Go Girls! mentors for program delivery
- Public health staff, who are trained to support and prepare the mentors for program delivery
- Schools, which recruit their students and provide the facility and space for program delivery (OPHEA, n.d., p. 1).

Thus, the Go Girls! program embodies the use of strong and skilled community partnerships which aligns with the CSH framework. In addition, the program design responds to varied healthy school policy needs, a social and physical atmosphere where students are more engaged with their peers and in their school environment. This consequently creates an

environment that again aligns with the CSH model. The Go Girls! program is different from general health education and physical activity initiatives in that it has a holistic approach to what it means to be healthy and experience well-being going beyond having a healthy weight, being physically active and eating healthy. It also goes beyond an individualistic approach and focuses on relationship and community and how these contribute to health and well-being.

Key findings and feedback to the program suggest that it makes an important contribution to the lives of girls who participate in it (OPHEA, n.d.). Participation is linked to increased knowledge and commitment to healthy active living. Some areas of greatest influence include: physical activity and dangers of physical inactivity, gender issues related to self-esteem and body image, changes in girls' bodies and the mentor relationship (OPHEA, n.d.; Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), n.d.). Participants are also more socially engaged as a result of being in the program and experience a boost in confidence (YWCA, n.d.). In addition, contrary to most Physical Education programs, the Go Girls! program resembles what Fairclough, Stratton, & Baldwin call lifetime activities, which has a "greater likelihood of carrying over into adulthood" than the team focused sports that are more commonly offered (as cited in Pfaeffli & Gibbons, 2010, para. 5).

The Go Girls! program has been delivered in Thunder Bay to several elementary schools (during the school day) within the Lakehead District School Board since 2004 in varying capacity (C. Renner, personal communication, December, 2012). In the 2011/2012 school year, the program was delivered in four elementary schools during the Fall and Winter terms by Thunder Bay Big Brothers Big Sisters (T. Alani, personal communication, March 21st, 2012). The local agency proposes the program to the schools and the schools decide whether or not they

can accommodate the program and have it delivered to Grade seven and eight girls (T. Alani, personal communication, March 21st, 2012).

Study Relevance

My study provides a unique opportunity to explore and understand contextual factors that influenced the adoption of a CSH program within a real life context. With the state and nature of the issues described, it is easy to get lost in the high level discussions of interventions and federal/provincial recommendations without a concrete idea of what this means for program adoption in specific contexts. This multiple case study is illustrative of concrete examples of varied factors that influenced the decision-making process surrounding adoption. The findings that emerged from this study are insightful since for instance, it was safe to assume that most Canadian schools are familiar with CSH given that comprehensive school approaches have been gaining momentum across the country and that the OPHS requires the use of this approach for school health. The reality in varied contexts such as those in the cases examined in this study clarifies such assumptions (as exemplified by findings described in chapter four). This study also serves to bridge the gap in the literature in regards to decision-making processes surrounding adoption of CSH programs.

Future research that captures the scope of decision-making processes for schools that do not adopt the Go Girls! program would add value to this study's findings, as this can provide a more complete picture of the adoption and rejection processes in school settings.

Public health relevance. The early life and adolescence years represent a key stage in life where important opportunities for health are established (MHP, 2010; Sawyer et al., 2012). Health outcomes in adolescence have significant effects on future health status (Sawyer et al., 2012). For instance, health-related behaviours like physical inactivity that are established in this

stage are significant contributors to the very high and continuously increasing number of adults living with chronic, non-communicable diseases and mental disorders (Sawyer et al., 2012). Coupled with an increasing number of children who live with chronic medical conditions due to a shift in the epidemiology of children's health and disease (Brown et al., 2010; Halfon, Larson & Russ 2010), it has become even more critical to pay attention to adolescents and school-aged children (Sawyer et al., 2012). Successful public health interventions at this stage will improve not just the health of the children when they participate in the interventions but also their health in adolescence and in the later stages of their lives. The use of comprehensive life-course approaches is crucial (Sawyer et al., 2012). The complexity of this issue requires multi-sectoral approaches and collaboration (which is key in public health) (MHP, 2010; PHAC, 2011). This study takes that into consideration, as it was designed to understand context specific factors that are important for the adoption and implementation of healthy school interventions (Bassett-Gunter, Yessis, Manske & Stockton, 2012). In addition, study findings provide useful insight within an intervention scene that is critical for reaching children of varied and particularly lower socio-economic background where a disproportionate burden of obesity and physical inactivity among children is experienced (Heath & Coleman, 2003; Naylor et al., 2006a; Reed et al., 2008; Schumacher & Queen, 2007). In addition findings from this study will inform school health policies and provide insight for community action (Creswell, 2012; Thomas, 2011) and thus support one of the key public health areas of the Ministry of Health Promotion, namely School Health (MHP, 2010).

Chapter Three

This chapter provides an in-depth overview of the methodology I have used for this study. It starts with a brief overview of the qualitative approach I used, followed by a section where I situate myself as the researcher of the study, then I provide an in-depth description of the methods used. This includes the research design (multiple case study), the data generating strategies (interviews and document review) and the analytical framework which was guided by Rogers's diffusion of innovation theory. This review will allow the reader to understand the flow of the study and logic behind the approaches used.

Methodology

Qualitative Research

Using a case study approach (embedded within a constructivist paradigm, which is discussed further below), this qualitative inquiry was designed to explore and understand factors that CSH approaches. Qualitative research approaches allow for a deeper and richer exploration of contextual factors that contributes to the adoption of CSH initiatives. Interviews encourage the exploration of statements and opinions, allow interviewees to think aloud, and allow the interviewer to add expanding questions and comments. Semi-structured interviews also allow the interviewer to take cue from the interviewee and from information gleaned from other interviews and document review (Creswell, 2012; Saldana, 2013). An inductive analysis of participants' opinions, perspectives and experiences as expressed through interviews and document review were used to provide a holistic understanding of the decision-making process behind adoption (Creswell, 2012). Although Roger's Diffusion of Innovation Theory (Rogers, 2003), discussed further below, provides some guidelines and assumptions on factors that influence adoption,

staying true to the constructivist paradigm means that, such assumptions cannot replace the construction of the reality of the decision-making process that is specific to a local context (Lauckner, Paterson & Terry Krupa, 2012). According to Lauckner et al. (2012), in a constructivist paradigm “reality is local and specifically constructed” (p.5), thus my description and understanding of the decision-making process behind the adoption of the Go Girls! program in the schools is based on multiple perspectives, of which mine is one. This necessitates that I situate myself within the research and acknowledge how my experiences and background influenced this study and my interpretation of the findings (Creswell, 2012).

Situating the Researcher

Background & genesis of study. In addition to my knowledge of the issues as described in the literature review section, this study was not void of personal interest. As a critical part of this qualitative inquiry, I describe my background and position as the researcher; which in addition to serving as an important reflection for my personal awareness (Sword, 1999) will allow my readers to understand how these may have affected my study approach and interpretation of study findings (Creswell, 2012).

I have completed a Graduate Certificate in Population Health Risk Assessment and Management. Prior to this, I obtained an Honours Bachelor of Science in Biomedical Sciences with a minor in Public Administration and a College Diploma in Health Sciences. Being aware of the increasing need for multilevel analysis of healthcare and health outcomes I have, through my education, maintained a multi-disciplinary portfolio. And, the necessity of trans-disciplinary evidence in evaluating health outcomes involving non-linear pathways spiked my interest in the population/public health approach. Beyond acquiring knowledge within academia, community involvement has been a defining factor in enriching my experiences. It has allowed and

continues to allow me to give back to the communities that have nurtured me while contributing to the viability of the communities needed for multi-level support of its citizens. A few of the ways I have been involved include that I was a health promotion volunteer with the nutrition and global health team with the University of Ottawa Health Services. Prior to that, I completed an internship with the same office. I was a peer educator with the international health events team and our focus was on education, promotion and advocacy of international health issues among peers and the university community.

My experiences have spiked my passion for addressing core systematic/systemic problems underlying global public health issues that jeopardize the health of many developing nations and disadvantaged communities and led to my interest in health policy. Within public health, my experiences also led to a particular interest for early life/child/adolescent health and an interest in tackling public health issues from an early life perspective, which is evident in the study that I have chosen to conduct

Continued learning and the pursuit of knowledge are critical for me. I moved to Thunder Bay September 2011 to complete the MPH program full-time. Still, I was questioning myself for the first time in 2012 when I was contemplating switching from the course stream to the thesis stream of the program. Part of my dilemma and frustration were based on my exposure thus far to what seems like an abundance of literature that describes numerous public health issues, many of which still have not been effectively addressed. I was wondering whether my thesis would just add to that literature.

I feel that many of these issues remain effectively unaddressed because of competing factors within the health care system, for example, acute care, which makes it difficult to make the case for investing in preventive measures from a policy standpoint. This means that I

constantly have to remind myself why I am in this field. Having grown up in a developing nation, it has been and is distressing to know that much potential will never be unlocked or explored to maximum because of poverty and inequality. Thus, my studies so far have sparked my passion for addressing core systematic/systemic problems underlying global public health issues. This implies a shift from dealing primarily with individual acute care to dealing with the underlying lag in effective health policies, which perpetuate the scale and cycle of poor health outcomes.

I started asking myself exactly how my thesis would contribute to these issues. How do I make sure that my thesis would not be an addition to the pile of similar literature that I have been exposed to? Literature that has mostly left me feeling frustrated about the lack of commitment to effective change while simultaneously speaking to the commitment to fund evidence-based research. I think about the ethical implications of exploring issues and awakening emotions within participants who may either hope for or suspect that an exploration will not necessarily bring forth any solutions that will be implemented and effectively address the issues. Even though I have not fully reconciled these feelings, I chose to complete the thesis requirements by embarking on this study. My readings suggest that this study will contribute to the much-needed discussion of this issue. In addition, my meetings with the staff at Thunder Bay Big Brothers Big Sisters also suggested that this study could provide useful insights for the agency's continuous engagement with the schools. With that, I hope that the cases illustrated in my study will provide a concrete, context specific outlook to this issue.

Positioning myself. Given that I spoke with individuals within a professional setting, I carefully considered how I presented myself in order to have the most enriched interaction during the interviews (Sword, 1999). The fact that I have experience as a Go Girls! mentor in

facilitating the program delivery within some schools may have influenced how some of the participants interacted with me during the interviews. In this sense, I did not consider myself a complete outsider to the program and the context (Sword, 1999). However, it was not enough for me to fully be an insider in the setting either. That I had been part of two Go Girls! groups does not mean that I have a full understanding of the experiences and or context specific factors that influence decision making. Hence, it was critical that I present and position myself as “learner”, as someone who seeks “expert knowledge” from the participants (Sword, 1999, p.273). During the interview process, I considered “reciprocity of disclosure” when I felt that it would enrich data quality (Sword, 1999, p.274). Although I positioned myself as a learner, I acknowledge that I still held an inescapable position of power, or authority, as a researcher, since I have chosen the issue of the study and set the parameters of the study design and the extent of the exploration. While the literature supports and legitimizes the study, my choices were influenced by personal interest; as Lincoln (1997) notes texts are formulated from partial perspectives and “yet we cling to the fiction of its completeness which is preserved by the academic style” (p. 48). I have also expressed this authority in my interpretation of the study findings. Although my focus is to bring to light a detailed description of participants’ perspectives, that I have assigned meaning to the data collected (Sword, 1999) cannot be negated. As much as possible, I have maintained my intention to be transparent with the process to minimize the misuse of such authority (Holland, 2007).

Although I could not say this with absolute certainty, prior to my interaction with the participants, I assumed that the key informants would be mostly upper or middle class Caucasian men and women. I thought of the perceived credibility of my research and how this might affect participants’ interaction and disclosure of information (Sword, 1999). As a middle class woman

of color, I could not control possible participant perceptions that may have caused them to devalue the legitimacy of my research although I would hope that my gender and race did not influence the interaction or depth of information the participants shared with me. Still I am cognisant of the fact that “*master narratives* permeate our conception of the social world and thus influence how we interpret our lived experiences” (McCorkel & Myers, 2003, p.202). The dominant ways we use to make sense of our world are largely influenced by “*master narratives* in which differences in power and privilege are regarded as inevitable, natural and desirable” (McCorkel & Myers, 2003, p.202). Master narratives originate from dominant groups and have extended broadly throughout society to the extent that members of both dominant and marginalised groups interpret their experiences and that of others through this lens (McCorkel & Myers, 2003).

I must acknowledge that my interpretation of data collected throughout this study may not sufficiently or appropriately represent the perspectives of participants. The challenge of adequately representing participants’ perspectives is an inescapable reality that I have dealt with as best I could. Despite my knowledge about the literature relating to this study and my public health background that gives me a firm sensitivity to this issue, I consciously reminded myself that I could not allow any prior theoretical sensitivity (i.e. exposure and knowledge of theoretical frameworks and existing literature) to cloud my judgement during my interpretation of the data (Sword, 1999).

Research Design

A case study approach is useful to describe and understand a specific procedure that is unique to a specific program within a bounded real-life setting (Coronna, 2010; Creswell, 2012; Thomas, 2011). The case study approach stimulates a critical approach to problem solving

(Thomas, 2011), since it allows the investigator to go back to the small questions within broad issues. In this case, it can mean taking a creative step backwards to inquire about school readiness for innovative CSH initiatives and to go beyond the national high-level discussions surrounding obesity and active living that are mostly focused on the interventions themselves. Exploring and understanding ignored small questions can provide unique insight for addressing the problem (Thomas, 2011). When looking at the state and trends of childhood obesity and affiliated chronic diseases in Canada, it is possible to see how the small questions can be ignored when there is so much emphasis on interventions and their implementation.

Using multiple cases, the focus of this study was an in-depth exploration of perspectives and uniqueness of the decision-making process surrounding adoption of the Go Girls! program within the schools that adopted this program (Merriam, 1998, Thomas, 2011). The goal was to generate detailed knowledge of the schools' adoption process, which can be useful in informing policy development, practice and community action (Creswell, 2012; Thomas, 2011). Of particular importance in using this approach was the need to understand the particularity and complexity surrounding the program in the real-life context of the selected cases (Creswell, 2012; Thomas, 2011). Hence, the cases chosen in this study provide multiple perspectives from different schools, from those working in the schools (administrators, teachers, and facilitators) and with the program on the decision-making process. In addition multiple sources of data collection (interviews and document review) were used to generate an in-depth understanding within individual cases and across the cases (Creswell, 2012; Thomas, 2011).

Overall, this multiple case study was designed for the purposes of being exploratory and explanatory; the approach within this design was descriptive and illustrative. This was done following a retrospective process (since adoption had already happened) (Thomas, 2011). The

descriptive and illustrative nature of this study was useful in elucidating plausible unfamiliar factors (Thomas, 2011) that were important for the decision-making process that lead to the adoption of the school health program. Case studies designed with the intent of being mostly descriptive are appropriate when exploring innovative programs in education; this can form the basis for further theory building and interpretive analysis (Merriam, 1998).

Data Collection

Ethical considerations. Data collection took place between mid-April and Mid-May of 2013. Prior to data collection, ethics approval in adherence with the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans, was received from the Lakehead University Research Ethics Board. Participants were provided with an information letter that specified the purpose and parameters of the study; this also ensured that the information presented was not deceptive. In addition, any potential risks emerging from their participation were outlined. Pseudonyms were assigned to interview participants in order to secure participants' anonymity. Consent forms were also provided and signed before the interview process. Participants had the liberty to provide as much or as little detail to questions posed during the interview process. Participants were also able to contact me, my supervisor, or the Lakehead University Research Ethics Board for clarity on any aspect of the study and its implications. Transcribed Interviews and preliminary analysis of findings has been shared with participants; a final version of this thesis will also be made available to the participants and/or an individual school report can be provided.

Interviews. The main data collection tool for this study was in-depth individual interviews with key informants (administrators, teachers and facilitators) in the school, who had adequate knowledge of the decision-making process behind the adoption of the Go Girls!

program; I conducted all interviews. Interviews were semi-structured and an interview guide (see Appendix A) was used to direct the flow of the interview. The semi-structured nature of the interviews allowed for additional questions to be posed for clarity and or the exploration of other emerging issues highlighted by the participants. This was done by using follow-up questions or verbal and non-verbal probes (Thomas, 2011). Additional individual semi-structured interviews (see Appendix A) were conducted with three other key informants outside the schools who provided information that was useful in informing the study and contextualizing the findings that emerged from the core interviews. This was also a way of capturing multiple perspectives in the data collection. In total, I conducted 15 interviews with the 15 participants who took part in the study. The average length of the interviews was just under 26 minutes, with a range from 13 and a half minutes to 51 minutes. With the permission of interviewees, interviews were audio recorded. All audio-taped interviews were transcribed verbatim by me and reviewed after transcription for any errors or omissions. Even though perspectives that emerged from the data was that of participants, credibility of qualitative findings is critical since the researcher needs to ensure that accurate account (Creswell, 2012) of those perspectives is not entirely diluted by their interpretation and reporting. Hence, I asked the participants to review my transcription of interviews, preliminary analysis and my presentation of the participants in my write-up, in order to ensure that it best represents their perspectives. This is reflective of member checking where the “researcher solicits participants’ views of the credibility of the findings” (Creswell, 2012, p. 252). It is critical to note that the idea behind member checking is not necessarily to determine if the researcher’s interpretation is *correct or wrong* but rather it provides an opportunity to examine possible tensions within the researcher’s interpretations (Lauckner et al., 2012). Determining the correctness of findings that emerged from my analysis is likely impossible since

the findings represent multiple perspectives (Lauckner et al., 2012). All interviews were conducted at a time and place agreed upon by the participants and myself. The school interviews took place on the school grounds; the timing of the interviews was during or shortly after school hours depending on the participant's preferences. One interview was a phone interview because the participant was on maternity leave. External interviews (participants outside the school) were conducted at the respective participants' place of work.

Document review. In addition to interviews, document review was used as a data collection tool to inform the parameters of the study. Documents reviewed included policy documents and guidance documents for school health (Ontario School Health Guidance document & Ontario Foundations for Healthy School framework), which provided information of guidelines and/or frameworks for healthy schools that may influence a school's decision about adopting a comprehensive school health program. For instance, the Government of Ontario recently established some policies and programs aimed at improving the well-being of children (OPHEA, 2012b). Documents reviewed also included: press releases from a school that adopted the program initially, news articles, emails, Go Girls! introduction package, planning form and memorandum of understanding (MOU). These documents were mostly used to contextualize the findings from the interviews whereas the policy documents were used to inform the study as a whole and the findings. In general, the document review was useful to provide further understanding for the study and study findings.

Analytical Framework

Data organization. I used Microsoft Word to process most of my data. Interviews were transcribed into word documents. I organized transcripts from each school into separate folders and saved each file with a coded initial I could recognize. I created two main folders: Transcripts

Original, which I did not alter once the transcription and initial revisions were done and Transcripts Working, from where I did all my analysis with embedded folders for each case and other general files for all the cases. I used the comment feature in WORD to make margin notes. While reading and taking memos, I highlighted and underlined throughout the documents to organized my thoughts. After coding, I migrated the codes and constructs into a different smaller document and used tables to aggregate codes and emerging themes. I also used Word Cloud to help me visualize recurring constructs from the cases and the cross-case theme analysis (See appendix B). Throughout my analysis process and during data collection, I also made hand written notes to map my thoughts and ideas of recurring constructs from the interviews and documents reviewed.

Data analysis. Data analysis focused on describing the cases and the contexts that were specific to them (Creswell, 2013). Review of documents was concentrated on content analysis, which is appropriate for reviewing documents within case studies as it allows for content description of relevant parts of documents (Merriam, 1998; Saldana, 2013). The content review was used to contextualize data analysis and interpretation (Merriam, 1998; Saldana, 2013); this is mostly evident in the cross-case analysis in chapter four. Attribute coding was also relevant for the document review as it allows for basic descriptive information and or setting/context specific information to be retrieved (Saldana, 2013).

Before the coding process for the interviews, I reviewed all transcripts carefully and made notes and memos on the sides where possible. This process allowed me to immerse myself in the data and to get a complete sense of the entire story before dissecting it into smaller parts (Creswell, 2013). Memos and notes were based on concepts, categories of information and thoughts (Creswell, 2013) that occurred to me as I reviewed documents and read the transcripts

over and over while reminding myself of my initial research question and study purpose. Themes were identified for specific cases after coding and categorical aggregation. I used a line-by-line coding strategy and coded either sections or lines of the transcripts, as a way of reducing the data into categories of information carrying similar or varying meaning (Creswell, 2013). I then used categorical aggregation to organize the codes according to varying grouped thematics. Next I developed themes for the different groups of codes aggregated. For the coding process, I used *In Vivo Codes*² wherever possible. This ensured that my codes were closer to the perspectives and language used by the participants during the interviews (Creswell, 2013 & Saldana, 2013). Through the analysis, emerging connections and patterns, which explained factors that influenced the innovation decision-making process were ascertained and highlighted. Emerging themes were then analyzed across all cases for similarities and differences. Overall, data analysis started with within-case analysis, followed by cross-case analysis and assertions based on emerging themes (Creswell, 2008, Thomas, 2011). Emerging themes were then interpreted within the innovation-decision process framework (chapter five) of the diffusion of innovation theory, which is described below.

Roger's diffusion of innovation. Roger's diffusion of innovation theory (Roger, 2003) was used to guide the design and analysis of data collected in this study, while making sure that the framework was not imposed on the data collected. This means that my analysis of factors that influenced adoption was not solely focused on the innovation attributes of the framework. Within this framework, diffusion refers to the communication of an innovation through varied channels within a social system (Roger, 2003). In most cases, the goal is to change something within the social system by altering structure and function. The main component of diffusion of innovation

² In vivo codes are codes that represent exact words or phrases used by the participants within data collected (Creswell, 2013; Saldana, 2013)

theory includes: innovation, communication channels, time and the social system. In this study, the innovation is the CSH program that aims to address active and healthy living among adolescent girls. In this study, I focused on the adoption component of the theory, which is the innovation-decision process. The latter entails the processes through which a unit goes from knowing about the innovation to developing an attitude about the innovation, making a decision to adopt or reject the innovation, and ultimately (when that is the case) the implementation of the new idea and a confirmation of the unit's decision (Roger, 2003). This process is summarized by five main steps: knowledge, persuasion, decision, implementation and confirmation. The focus within this study was to understand the factors that influenced the adoption of the innovation (Go Girls! program). Scholars who have looked into the analysis of adoption rates of innovation have done this by focusing on specific attributes outlined within this theoretical framework.

Innovation characteristics and/or attributes used to assess adoption rates include: relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, trialability, and observability (Roger, 2003). These are the most important attributes in explaining the adoption rate of an innovation.

Innovation Attributes.

- *Relative advantage*: the degree to which an innovation is perceived as better than the idea it supersedes.
- *Compatibility*: the degree to which an innovation is perceived as being consistent with existing values, past experiences and need of potential adopters.
- *Complexity*: the degree to which an innovation is perceived as difficult to understand and use.
- *Trialability*: the degree to which an innovation may be experimented with on a limited basis.

- *Observability*: the degree to which the results of an innovation are visible to others.
(Roger, 2003, pp.15-16)

The assessment of factors that influence adoption of the program was not limited to attributes of the diffusion of innovation theory given the need to assess possible unfamiliar contextual factors that may not be captured within this framework. The open-ended nature of the study design ensured that data collection was only guided and not bound by this theoretical framework. This is especially important since some validity findings have shown that relative advantage was not significantly associated with adoption although previous studies highlight it as an important attribute in predicting adoption (Deschesnes et al., 2009). School contextual barriers have been found to be an important factor in the prediction of adoption of school health approaches (Deschesnes et al., 2009).

Study Setting

Thunder Bay is located on the north shore of Lake Superior “under the watch of the Sleeping Giant” (City of Thunder Bay, 2012). It is the largest municipality in Northwestern Ontario with a population of 109,140 based on the most recent census from 2011. The median age in the district is 48.3 years, and children between the ages of 5 – 19 years account for about 16 % of the district’s (Thunder Bay) population (Lakehead District School Board, 2012; Statistics Canada, 2012). Despite being deeply rooted in European and Aboriginal culture, its growing diversity ranks it the “sixth most culturally diverse community of its size in North America” (City of Thunder Bay, 2012). With 25 elementary schools, 4 secondary schools and 1 Adult Education Centre, the Lakehead District School Board is the largest in Northwestern Ontario (Community Economic Development Commission, n.d.; Lakehead District School Board, 2012). The Lakehead Public Schools houses 9795 students. Its focus is on enhancing

student learning and achievement. Lakehead Public Schools is sensitive to the changing demographics in Thunder Bay as it supports equity and inclusive education through varied campaigns that encourage and support diversity. They are also devoted to health and safety, with Lakehead Public Schools' Health and Safety Department working in collaboration with community agencies such as the Health Unit to implement appropriate programs where needs are identified (Lakehead Public Schools, n.d.).

Participant Selection/Setting

The schools within the Lakehead Public School Board, where the Go Girls! program had been offered and adopted as part of the package of school-based programs offered by Big Brothers Big Sisters Thunder Bay, were invited to participate in this study. Consent to Big Brother Big Sister (BBBS) Thunder Bay programs generally includes evaluations that are relevant to specific programs offered to school. The schools were informed that while this study was not part of the formal evaluation it supported the evaluation of the program. The program is usually delivered to four schools in the district per term. The schools where the program was delivered in Fall 2012 and Winter 2013 were the focus of this study. Schools who were invited to participate in the study were those that agreed to me contacting them based on an initial contact and information exchanged by the School Case Manager at BBBS Thunder Bay.

Key informants within the schools were chosen based on their knowledge and involvement with the program and with the aim to capture the perspectives from various hierarchical levels in the schools. As mentioned above, these were administrators, teachers, and facilitators. Participants from the individual schools who were invited to partake included: the school principal, the Go Girls! school champion³, teachers, and other relevant key informants

³ A school liaison (Go Girls Champion, both terms are used interchangeably) is a designated person within the school who can be the contact person between the agency and the school. The agency also asks that the liaison be

(that I was directed to by the principal or facilitator in some cases). In concert, these informants provided multiple perspectives to the dynamic of the innovation decision-making process. All together I interviewed 12 participants from four different schools⁴. Outside of the school, I also sought the perspectives of key informants who could provide relevant information to deepen my understanding of the decision-making process. Thus, I completed three additional interviews outside the school with: the Case Manager of the program at BBBS, the Director at BBBS and the Coordinator of a community organisation.

In line with purposeful maximal sampling strategy where multiple cases show different perspectives on the issue (Creswell, 2012), selection of cases for this study was done purposefully, as units who had adopted the Go Girls! program were specifically invited to participate. Including several schools allows for different perspectives on the decision-making process since the different schools did not necessarily have the same decision-making process leading to adoption of the program. The study of four cases represents an adequate amount of cases to highlight multiple perspectives but not too much to undermine the analysis and depth of individual cases (Creswell, 2012).

Participant Recruitment

An information letter (see Appendix D) was sent to individual schools where the program had been offered to advise key informants about the study. The information letter clarified that while this study was not an internal evaluation by and for Big Brother Big Sister [BBBS] Thunder Bay, this study can inform their program delivery and interaction with schools in general. As such, the agency agreed to support and facilitated this study. Consent was requested

available in the school during the time when the sessions are in progress in case the Go Girls mentors need any assistance.

⁴ See appendix C for more details

for this study; consent for schools to participate and individual consent for all participants (see Appendix E). The local Agency expressed interest in this inquiry and agreed to support the study by providing me with relevant information and support.

Chapter Four – Findings

Findings that emerged from my analysis are presented in this chapter. One of the main focuses of the case study approach is to provide a rich description of the cases and its context. While there is no standardized format for presenting a case study, Merriam (1998) and Creswell (2012) provide several suggestions. I have followed some of their suggestions and made some changes based on my interpretation and my analysis. In the following I present the findings from each case individually. Then I delve into the cross-case analysis where I discuss and make connections between findings emerging from all of the cases and highlight similarities and or differences (Merriam 1998; Creswell, 2012). This is followed by a general discussion where I include discussion from other literature findings (chapter five). Presenting a rich description of each case and the findings that emerged from my analysis allows for a deep understanding of the cases before the cross-case theme analysis and is a key aspect of case study (Creswell, 2012; Lauckner et al., 2012 & Merriam, 1998). Certain themes resurface across the cases and are described in detail in all applicable cases. The purpose of the descriptions is to maintain the uniqueness of what those themes mean for the individual case analysis, which may not be highlighted in a cross-case analysis (Creswell, 2012; Merriam 1998). Thick description is also one of the strategies used to ensure the trustworthiness of the case study approach (Lauckner et al., 2012). Each case begins and ends with vignettes that give the reader a vicarious look at and understanding of the cases (Merriam, 1998). The presentation of themes for each case is preceded by some contextual description (See Appendix F for an overview of the themes). I have also preceded the cross-case analysis with a contextual narrative that provides a rich context for all the cases. Most of that information is derived from my analysis of contextual interviews and

documents reviewed. The cases below are not described in any particular order of importance; I have ordered them this way as a result of the order of my analysis and data management. The depth of description that is provided for each case is based on the level of information that the participants provided and not a deliberate attempt to provide more or less information for any of the cases. Rather I have provided as much description as possible; this also allows the uniqueness of each case to be highlighted, which is evident in the content and or length of each case's description⁵.

Case 1

Opening Vignettes

It is a large school with students of varying need. Hence, any environment that allows for a different dynamic that would cater to the mixture of girls while taking them out of that usual 300 minutes per day classroom setting is gold.

Findings: Contextual Description

The school is a French immersion school situated in a location that allows it to draw a mix of children from a “larger geographic area” (John: Principal)⁶, with the result that the children attending the school come from varied socio-economic backgrounds and have very diverse needs. Thus, while some students in the school have access to other opportunities outside of school and or their homes other students do not, highlighting the need for the Go Girls! program. As mentioned, the Go Girls! program provides an opportunity for girls to learn about active living , healthy eating and positive self-image. Across different schools, one or all of these components had a pull for why the program appealed to the school. In this school, although this may not be true for all of the girls who participated in the program, there was a greater need to tackle positive self-image (than the active component) even in the case where the girls were

⁵ See Appendix C for length of interviews

⁶ See Appendix C for an overview of interviewees and their roles

exposed to opportunities for healthy active living. This school was drawn to the idea of having “opportunities for girls to be more comfortable with body image and especially with eating habits” (John) because the school “still ha[s] a lot of girls that just refuse to eat food at school, and it’s not that don’t bring their lunch and it’s not for socio-economic reasons” (John).

Although this is a French immersion school, there is both a French immersion and an English stream and there tends to be a “divide” (Sheila: VP) between the French immersion kids and the English kids. In this school there was a need to merge/resolve “discomfort between the girls” (John) and provide the opportunity for girls of different personalities to be together in a positive space where dialogue could happen and where they could play together, which appeared to not usually happen.

In this school, decision-making about program adoption and delivery was made mostly by the principal and the VP (vice-principal) who was also the program champion or liaison. When a decision had been made, information was shared and consultations were made with the affected teacher(s). Teachers seemed to struggle with the challenge of balancing schedules and ensuring that students did not miss out on critical curriculum components. Still they were generally open to the program and to their students being pulled out of class for the duration of the program. Till now they have not said no. Although some initially ‘panicked’ with the idea of reduced time to deliver curriculum requirements they came to understand how the program complements their curriculum in terms of health requirements. In this school it made sense for the program to be scheduled in the language block⁷ of the day where it fits more appropriately, in terms of links to the curriculum.

⁷ The afternoon portion of the school schedule is where most of the social skills and health programs are slotted; this is considered the language block. So the logic as explained by the VP is to schedule the Go Girls! program within the language block since this is where it best matches the curriculum.

Taking advantage of the lunchtime to run the program worked best. It allowed for minimal interruption to instructional time; it also seemed to be a feasible time for availability of designated spaces where the program could take place. Generally, program organizers request two hours or a minimum of an hour and half for the program to run successfully. In this case, the school was able to give an hour and half once a week for the seven weeks required for the program.

Another critical reason to ensure that the program can run within the school schedule is that it allows the children that may need the program the most to not miss out. The extra arrangements that would be required to get the girls home if the program took place after school hours might not be possible for the parents in the lower socioeconomic bracket. Most students usually take the school bus to and from school. As John explained, "... the kids that struggle [mostly] come from a lower socio-economic background". Thus, ensuring that the program run during the school hours, "... [is] the only way to make sure it happens for them".

John was "quite familiar" with the CSH framework; it forms the basis of their interaction with the district health unit. He expressed that there is value placed on the framework, and an attempt to use it to guide and to address school priorities; but mostly as a guide to focus on the school's needs, all of which is embedded within the value to teach the *whole child*. This is also where taking advantage of this external resource was imperative for the school. Overall, the school leader had confidence in the program. In the next section I describe specific themes that influenced the school's decision.

Themes

The themes that emerged after coding for this case were need, fit and leadership as discussed below and supported by participants' quotes.

Need. One of the most significant themes that came out in the interviews was the appeal of the program due to its ability and potential to address existing needs in the school. The school saw the program as an additional opportunity or actual opportunity to address particular issues. Some issues related to self-esteem concerns and to power struggles among the girls and between the girls and their teachers. John expressed that “some of the girls... sort of butt heads with authority”.

Sheila felt that the program provided a good environment where the “varying needs” of the girls could be met. According to John, It was not just about targeting girls with special needs and poor self-esteem but “making sure that there was a mixture of girls in the program”. He further noted, “we didn’t want it to become a dysfunctional kind of group where all the girls are sitting around going ‘Ohh God!’ So we really wanted it to be seen as a positive program for everyone”.

Sheila described that it was a “mixed bowl” of girls, some who were “shy or have self-esteem issues”, some who were “confident leaders” and/or “true leaders”, some “who experienced some bullying” and some “who were just quieter or didn’t feel as secure”. She emphasized that the program was a good opportunity to provide a platform and space that would allow students with varying needs as well as from varying streams who “normally wouldn’t be together on the playground”, to be together in positive space. In this way, the program could help merge the divide that tended to exist between the French immersion and English students; in addition to other clicks, and help to generally promote a sense of community in the school.

John also expressed that the program was appealing because it provided a mentorship opportunity with “young adult women whom they [the girls] could hopefully make some good connections”, with and “open up to a little bit more” to. As John noted, “a lot of our kids both

boys and girls I think struggle sometimes to have really positive role models in their life”. It was really critical for the interviewees that the program provided a “non-academic setting”. That is, a “sisterhood kind of environment” where the “social time” was in a controlled environment that might promote team building and dialogue among the girls. That also tied into the need to have a space where positive discussion could happen. The sisterhood or “club” type environment seemed vital. Derrick (Teacher) said that the “separation of boys from girls [was] really help[ful]”; he explained, “... I’m now doing a self-esteem unit in my classroom and I’m not sure how well it’s going for both groups”.

The ability to use community partnerships to address the needs was perceived to be vital. Resource strain was a reality in the school; Derrick noted that the school leadership “can’t champion everything”. He added that “right now there’s no one that ever seems to want to take on that role of championing”. Thus, it was easier for the school to work with community partners, such as those offering this program, and the health unit, who also provide most of the resources. Otherwise the school would have to rely on the personal interest of individual staff to provide the push required for someone to take on an additional role.

Fit. In addition to meeting the needs mentioned above, another theme was how well the program weaved into the school values and also the ease of having the program delivered in the school; in other words the ‘fit’ of the program to the school.

A key aspect was that the program was perceived as complimenting and reinforcing the goals the school aims at achieving with their students and with the school as a whole. One of which is character education. Character education focuses on character development as a life

skill for the students by promoting: self-awareness, acceptance and self-discipline to mention a few⁸ (Lakehead Public Schools, n.d.). Sheila emphasized:

The education is very strength-based, so when we think about student's strength to help them out with everyday life, that's exactly what I felt the program was able to do. It was able to draw-in on things that they were already strong in and were able to use those strengths in their everyday life to help them.

Thus the need for strengths reinforcement fits well with the Go Girls program as it allows most, if not all of those components to be touched upon throughout the sessions.

The flexibility of both the school and the agency offering the program was necessary, given the challenge surrounding negotiating space and timing within the school schedule.

Derrick explained:

That's one of the things that is very good about them [the local agency: BBBS Thunder Bay]... [a] bulk of the activities happen at lunch time...as a teacher, the fact that it happens at lunch time, means it's not cutting into my time but the fact that it extends into my time and it's not everybody in the classroom, that means...I somehow have to figure out a way to catch those students up on whatever they've missed.

Clearly, it was not only about the flexibility of the outside agency but also that of the staff who needed to work around their schedules and lesson plans to ensure that everything went well. The teachers already have to take absenteeism from class into consideration, so the challenge is not new although this does not make it easier. John noted that although the teachers at the school are "fantastic...a lot of them are [particular about their] teaching time...they take their teaching very, very seriously and anything that oversteps into their area, they get a little concerned about". Thus having flexible staff was determinant to the fit of the program in this setting.

⁸ For more detail on Character Education, see : http://www.lakeheadschoools.ca/secondary/character_education

Another component of the fit was the link to the curriculum. To a certain extent the program complements the health curriculum. Sheila described that

it fit[s] very well...because we have a lot of social and emotional development that is part of our curriculum. So it fits with a lot of the health curriculum. So it was actually quite easy to incorporate into our learning and the teachers were very accepting of that.

This makes it easier for the school to be flexible given that it can be challenging to withdraw students from so much instructional time. Due to the school's focus of teaching the whole child, Sheila felt that the school

staff is very in-tuned with what students need, and because we do address multiple issues of our students and their needs ... at staff meetings and day-to-day conversations, I think it's just a no-brainer that something like Go Girls! would be an automatic part of our programming.

Overall, this understanding across the school is likely linked to the school's leadership buy-in for the program. This is discussed below.

Leadership. Without the buy-in of the school's leadership, it is almost impossible, for the program to be delivered. For this school, buy-in was not just saying yes to the program. Rather, as the quote below exemplifies, the leadership had complete confidence in the program.

I believe in this program so much and believe in the impact that it's had on kids. And it's such a great partnership. I think the more community partnerships that we can make [the better off we are]. Schools have to be a place where the whole community is involved not just isolated. And it's great for organizations ... like Big Brother, to learn about school culture ... as well...I think it benefits both sides (John).

As described by John, the leadership belief in the program was connected to its potential. Fully believing in the program also points to how well the program goals were understood and that the administration clearly saw where and how it served the needs of the children and the school. This was vital as the administrators needed to literally “vouch” for the program, not just in regards to having staff buy-in, but also student buy-in. Students could be hesitant about the program. Sheila indicated that “... there was a bit of hesitation ... they [the girls] were just a little bit unsure how the program was going to be and what it meant for them, was it segregating them or something positive”. As part of the buy-in John describes the intricacies and challenge of the leadership to negotiate time:

We were going to run it during our lunch hour so we have that 45 minutes and a little bit before and a little bit after...that’s always been a bit of a challenge for a couple of the teachers. Maybe they don’t see the benefits as much as we [the administrators] did here in the office, and what positive it is for the kids. It’s the time-tabling we’ve struggled with a bit and I know they’ve [the agency] asked for a two-hour window, and that’s why we’ve always kind of negotiated an hour and a half. So we’re only taking away about 45mins of classroom time. And really over the course of seven weeks, I think it’s well, well, well worth it; [although] I’ve struggled to put a couple of teachers on that.

It was critical for everyone, especially the school liaison to have a good understanding of the program goals. This meant that the school liaison would not have difficulty encouraging kids when they felt hesitant. An important part of such clear understanding among all parties is communication. How the program is communicated to the teachers involved can influence their perception and understanding of the program goals. Derrick expressed that when his

understanding of the program is not clear his reaction would be: “I have a job that I have to do so the very first thing I’m going to do is: a panic is going to hit!” However,

once I get a chance to think about it, then ... I can try to weave things in and figure out how it’s going to work. So having taught for a very long time now, I’m pretty well used to that and I’m just gonna say ‘ok no problem, let’s see how we can get this to weave in’ and that’s pretty well what I’ve been doing. (Derrick)

Thus it is clear that effective communication in all aspects make the difference. Overall, the program appealed to the school since school employees felt it would address certain needs in the school and it was a good fit with the school philosophy of providing the girls with opportunities for character development. After the closing vignette I describe case two which is also a French immersion school.

Closing Vignette

The challenges of incorporating the program into the school schedule become easier when the school values and vision are apparent in the program.

Case 2

Opening Vignette

The program adds to the toolkit that the school uses to ensure that their school environment gets that extra edge which enhances the learning experience.

Findings: Contextual Description

This “large school body” is comprised of a diverse group of children because the school is more centrally located. There are about 600 students in the building. This is also a French immersion school with an English stream. Joseph (Teacher) described the school and some of the dynamics in the school including that there is a “real split” between the

English and the French and as much as we hate to admit it... Part of it is they're always in different grades or classes; you've got French immersion Grade one and English Grade one... part of it is also a socio-economic thing, by and large the kids in the French immersion class are upper-middle class and many of the other kids aren't and there's a real [split] and it's to the point where kids will say, French immersion kids will say, I don't want to go in that class; I'm afraid of them! Well, what are you afraid of?... so we try to work hard giving them the tools just to deal with people, figure out how they can deal with life so I think it [Go Girls!] works well with our goals.

Based on the dual track dynamic described, the program had a niche. Joseph further noted that “part of the problem” with the split is that “it's hard it's hard to come up with things that are going to work with both sides”. Thus, Go Girls! was one of the programs in the school where that separation did not have to happen and it allowed the girls to work together.

The decision to have the program delivered in the school was made by the administration and presented to the teachers. At the time of the interviews, the program had been delivered for the 3rd year in this school. The decision-making process was not something that teachers were particularly familiar with or involved in; although they seemed to support the program and have an understanding of what the program was about and how valuable it can be for the girls. Communication about the program, outside the discussions about adopting it or not, was critical as it facilitated the teachers' planning. Joseph explained, “once we knew, for eight weeks on Thursday afternoons that the girls are gonna be gone, so I just rearrange things so that I wasn't covering anything absolutely vital that they were gonna have to catch up on”. Hence, ensuring that everyone was in the loop was necessary since teachers were not directly involved in the decision-making process. They could have easily felt that the program was *forced* on them

regardless of the fact that they had a very positive attitude towards the program and were more than happy to give up their teaching time as long as the students were benefitting from the program. Negotiating how much instructional time that can be allocated to the program is something that involves the school administrators, the teachers and the outside agency.

The program was particularly appealing to the girls in the English stream and less so to the girls in the French immersion stream, most of whom did not follow through with the program. Joseph offered some explanation for the difference in interest saying:

In the English stream, most of the girls started and most of the girls finished. And what I attribute that to is, ... all the French immersion girls have lots of opportunity to do things... outside of school...they have opportunities that a lot of the English kids don't so they just saw this as something maybe that wasn't all that interesting to them, compared to the opportunity they have outside of school so, they just [say]: I don't wanna go, do I have to go? I don't wanna go! It was the response by probably half way through. ...

They're very clicky..., so once a few of them decided I don't want to go, it sort of started a snowball effect.

Joseph's explanation provides insight into why the French immersion girls did not follow through with program. Karen (Principal) also touched on the difference in enthusiasm for the program among the girls from the different streams.

The kids that are really, really engaged the most, are often the kids that this is all they have, they don't have competitive whatever level sports happening after school or music lessons and this and that, you know all of those things that some of our more privileged students have because their families make the time to do that. But, the kids that school is it for them, this is a big highlight of their time because they get some time just to focus on

how they feel good about themselves and why they feel good about themselves and why they should and why they're valued and important. So I would say for our kids, it is the ones that might be classed under the literature as high needs, this program in general but this program in particular is really valuable for our girls cause they do leave walking and standing taller and that translates then when they become leaders in other areas of the school.

It is apparent, then, that the appeal for the English stream girls was based on socioeconomics, which lead to fewer choices generally. Thus while acknowledging that the French immersion girls were less enthusiastic about the program, it was still a critical aspect of the school's strategy to equip students with life skills beyond academia, especially with the school's diverse group of children. Karen added to this when she explained that "lots of kids have some pretty tough situations [that] they come from and for most of them, school is the one place they can go and feel supported and feel valued and confident". Hence the school's strategy is vital for many children for whom the school environment is the main stabilizing force in their lives. This is a sentiment that Joseph also emphasized as he explained the need for such a strategy in the school:

For the school as a whole, it's a good program. Lots of kids here who come from very tough home lives, very tough backgrounds. Anything that we can bring in here to help them sort of deal better with things in general, benefits them. So I think it's worth doing, worth having, even if many of the kids say I don't want to. I mean even if in the end we only help say 6 or 8 kids, I think for those 6 or 8 kids, it's definitely worth it.

It is clear that in this school, school is more than just a place for academics and focusing on the curriculum requirements. The school places emphasises on caring for other aspects of the

children's lives that might help ensure that they can learn or are in a state that is conducive for learning. In Karen's description it is part of the schools goals for culture or climate as well as the academic goals and goals for learning.

We have a school climate goal and we also have academic goals and then layered within that are the involvement that we want to see, kids involved in their place of learning. If kids are more involved in a positive way, they tend to buy into the academic piece and they feel like they're part of the larger community, which actually keeps it as a safer place for kids, when kids become dis-enfranchised from their place of learning, that's typically when you have those outliers and you have issues. Either kids target them directly or they target other kids directly. So overall I think it's really reduced the level of bullying in our school. (Karen)

It is evident how the Go Girls! program as part of this contributes to a school environment where the students feel engaged and consequently can have an enhanced learning experience.

Although when asked, the participants said they were not familiar with the term CSH, the ideology behind CSH; including that students have a supportive emotional, social and physical environment, and feel engaged and involved in their learning and that the school is focused on partnerships and services in order to provide healthy environments, was embedded in the way the school operated and was "everything that [they] hold dear" (Karen). As stressed by Karen, we need to be looking at a student's social-emotional health ...you know what for kids who are healthy in all those other areas, it's great! School is about the teaching and learning but I would say a large percentage of our students, it's about all these other things that need to be supported so that they can learn.

Thus, while the term CSH is not prominent in this school, it is embedded in their school philosophy. Karen explained that overall, a lot of the responsibility for the school being able to function according to this ideology “rest[s] squarely on the shoulders of the school leader” because

at the end of the day, it’s the school principal that’s the holder of the key. You let people in or you kick people out ... we have a very open stance at working with partnerships and [perhaps] we having an open school and having lots of partners working with us to support kids; It does take a little bit of work to keep all coordinated, but certainly it’s what’s good for kids but I think honestly it’s all about the principal’s willingness to reach out ...

This speaks to the fact that it was vital for the school to have a leader who valued and was able to take advantage of opportunities to form community partnerships and had the willingness and energy to maintain an open door policy and welcome being contacted by external agencies. The school seemed to be able to maintain so many partnerships exactly because the principal understood the art of networking and delegating. As Karen explained,

I don’t do all the work, I do a lot of facilitating and I’d rather have the people that are directly involved be the ones involved than me trying to be in charge of everything. I mean there are 700 people in the building; I can’t be in charge of everything.

This shows that while leadership is key, collaborations and team work is what completes the feasibility of partnering with community members. As seen above, the structure of this school and its values guided their approach and reception of the program. This is also reflected in the in the themes that emerged in the analysis of the data from this case, which I describe next.

Themes

The themes that emerged were positive experience, empowerment and need and seamless integration, credibility and resource. These are discussed and exemplified with participants' perspectives below.

Positive experience, empowerment and need. The guidance and learning of important life skills that happens in what is described as the friendly and mentoring environment of the program appeared to be imperative for some of the girls. Such guidance is even more important given, as was noted by some interviewees, that many of the girls may not be able to get that from home and may not have other opportunities outside of the school. Overall, there appeared to be a need to empower the girls to be at a place where they could take care of themselves, find the resources they needed to do so or ask for help if necessary. Empowerment for this school meant that the girls were able to express themselves in a positive environment that promoted dialogue and that they learned how to build relationships. In some instances, the program provided the only space where it was possible to express and discuss issues and have a dialogue about where and how the child needed help. Joseph explained this as seen in the quote below.

In the school we need that because we have lots of kids who don't get it at home for whatever reason and they need help, just with what we consider basics things, but they still need some guidance. So I think it's important that somebody help them provide, and I think having people come in from outside is perfect, because we probably have people in the school who can deliver a similar program but they [students] ... can say things in that situation that they might not say to me or other teachers because ... we have to deal with each other every day.

Thus, the program was perceived to provide a platform for “preventive work” (Karen); a space where “kids are then able to better articulate what’s happening to them, which has allowed us [the school] to get additional outside support” (Karen). Joseph gave an example that characterizes the difference in interaction among peers and mentors versus a student’s interaction with a school staff:

I know a couple of the people who were here delivering it [the program] and they were former students ... one of them said to me: ‘I could say those things to you now but I couldn’t back then’ ... so I think it’s good that they come in from the outside to be able to give those girls some of the freedom to express themselves and say things that they probably wouldn’t.

It is evident that the dynamics of interaction is different when the adults involved have no authority in the girls’ daily lives. Karen provided a different scenario that also speaks to this: Last year we had some kids who self-identified through Go Girls! and we end[ed] up working with their families and got them into treatment programs for a number of months because they had a safe place and it gave them language to talk about those challenges they were having so I mean those are the factors and the benefits that we see as being really valuable to us.

While the ambiance of the Go Girls setting promotes dialogue, it does not mean that the school felt that the program could resolve all issues that the girls were facing. The important thing was that the girls, through the program, were equipped with some life skills that they could apply in any situation. During the sessions of the program, the girls got a chance to work together and relationships were built as a result of that interaction. The team building that

happened taught them about positive conflict resolution. Karen described the ongoing interactions that are aimed at bridging gaps in their school.

In this school in particular we put the English and the French immersion children together and that really involves some team building, so the girls know that it's not us and you, it's us together, it's we! So you know the fact that kids know who each are, it layers into our partnering when we have jobs around the school, we always have one kid from English and one kid from French immersion as partners so we're constantly building those bridges of understanding, and for the most part our culture is more diverse on the English side of the school where we have kids from all over the world and so it's richer for kids from both stream if they could interact more, then they learn about each other and all of the pieces of anti-bullying really are: if you know me as a person, and you value me as a person, then you're not going to hurt me as a person. So we really do work to build that understanding between kids.

The Go Girls program provided an extension of what the school always aimed to do; a way to resolve the divide between the girls in the two streams and it helped facilitate other team work that the girls were assigned to. Overall, the Go Girls! environment was described as being positive and able to promote dialogue and team building among the girls. It was able to meet the needs of the school by supporting their goal of providing these opportunities in a positive environment. The fit between school and program goals provided what appeared to be a seamless integration. This is discussed further below.

Seamless Integration. It appeared that the program matched the school's vision on several points and that the program touches on or complements curriculum requirements. Joseph said: it "addresses some of the general expectation about healthy living". Karen also felt the

program “layers nicely within OPHEA which ... is the provincial body that oversees that but also within all of those other pieces in the social emotional part of the curriculum”. Along similar lines, George (VP) explained below why the program is an easy blend.

Mentoring is very much a part of the school curriculum here. Teachers mentor literacy, they mentor math, the character education - and this is really an extension of character education and positive healthy living - so I think it was very easy to implement this program.

Despite this link to the curriculum, statements from the interviewees’ indicated that there was value placed on the program above and beyond its relation to specific curriculum components. Joseph stressed that “sometimes the curriculum is the least important thing. I think it would be a shame to say this program now has to have this and this focus cause it’s in the curriculum”. If the girls are learning and benefit from the program, it adds value to their learning experience. Joseph expressed that this meant that teachers were,

quite happy to give up the time, if [they] could see that there is some benefit to it and [they] know the girls who stuck to it ... come out at the end of the day, [and] they were smiling, they were happy, and they were positive. So obviously something good was going on there.

This shows that teachers are willing to be flexible with their classroom time. The program takes a holistic approach to healthy active living, this is an approach valued and used in the school. Below, George explained how this plays out in their school.

If we look at our character education values: integrity, acceptance, empathy, respect and responsibility. I mean, those are all character values that the Go Girls! really tries to model and instil in the kids. The healthy active living is there and we model that through

the DPA that they teachers do on regular basis, the healthy schools nutrition program that we run here, where we run a breakfast program and a lunch program funded by outside organizations as well as community partners and parent groups, so all those tie in to really strengthen the whole school program that we have ... Go Girls! message really has a seamless sort of integration into our system, so it makes it a nice fit.

Thus, it is not surprising that the participant felt that maintaining the community partnerships required to have the program delivered added vitality and richness to the school and the school environment. It gave the school that extra edge required to keep things exciting and illustrated how schools are an integral part of the larger community and not a stand-alone entity. Karen expressed that their school culture is rooted in the “philosophy that schools cannot raise children on their own, it involves community”. George added; that “extra programs are what really makes the school a great environment like those partnerships between community organizations and the school makes it a community school”.

Overall, the program fits very well with how the school ‘sees itself’. Joseph emphasized that the program is particularly valuable where “it’s hard to come up with things that are going to work with both” the French immersion stream and the English stream. Although the school felt that the program provides such opportunities for their girls, their trust in the program and perhaps more important the program organizers was just as important; this is discussed below.

Credibility. Prior exposure to the program at a different school was one factor that made buy-in to the program easy for the administrators. The teachers and the administrators were already exposed to anecdotal evidence of the program benefits. Joseph noted that, “every year, there seems to be one or two girls who come out of that program and whether it’s consciously or unconsciously, you can see they’re thinking about things”. Karen expressed the general feeling

that within their school “Go Girls! has been one of those programs that [has] always been held in high esteem [for] having a really positive impact on girls’ self-esteem”.. George also touched on his previous exposure to the program, he expressed that:

I had been part of the Go Girls! program through another school and saw how effective it was and how the girls loved going to it and the positives that [were] brought forth from their participation in the program. So, it’s a no brainer when I was approached by the administrator of the program to be a part of it here and I said ‘absolutely come on in’.

This prior exposure as George explained and how well they felt the program was running in terms of results and positive impacts was very evident; therefore it is no surprise that the program has been offered multiple times in this school. He indicated that the program “was run here at the school before and the successes are here” and he felt that was “definitely key in the process signing the paper”

The presentation of the program by the agency added to its perceived credibility. It helped the administrators and actually facilitated their decision to take up the program when the program’s vision and goals were clearly articulated. George described how such clarity added to the feasibility of taking up the program.

The program goals, they’re quite clearly articulated when you sign the contract this is what we want to do; this is what our plans are. I think that makes all the success in the program because with those clear goals and if you come to an administration of a school and you want to start this kind of program, they need to see that you have a clear vision and clear goal set out and what the program is looking at achieving... it was well articulated to the kids, it was well articulated to the school administration so it added credibility to the program.

In addition to this clarity that George described, the organization's ability to be consistent in their interaction with the school and maintain the liaison was an added bonus. Karen spoke to how this helped them in sticking with the program.

... That's always a big one for us, to be easy! If it's too complicated, we'll go somewhere else cause there's always something else that we can access. So I think if we go back to the Go Girls! piece, that's a piece that's made us keep coming back. People that run it are engaging students, organizers are organized, you know they're good about following through and following up on things and so all of those things really make us keep going back to that program because it's well run and well organized and it's easy to access. So I think *easibility*, is that even a word ... If things are too complicated or, I mean we're busy in our job, it's an extremely busy job and I don't have time to sort out someone else's job and do it for them to make something work, I just assume ... make up something on my own and run it.

This explanation confirms the busy nature of their school environment; it is easier to maintain contact with the administrators when the outside agency keeps on top of the follow-up. That is: they show up, call, and maintain the personal contact; the school trusts that this is a reliable group of organized people. Consequently, they felt at ease entrusting the girls into the hands of the program leaders, mentors and facilitators. As expressed by Karen, "it's not a complicated thing, it's fairly easy because they make it easy to run ok, so there's not a lot of paper work or leg work that you have to do other than getting the kids". The organization's consistency and the clarity of the local agency about what they have to offer is summarized in the following quote by Karen:

They're giving me at a glance like this boom, boom, boom, boom, boom! This is what we have to offer, this is the need we feel it will fill. This is the demonstrated research to back that up, and then I can then make an informed decision quickly without having to go to the library or do online research, all those things that I don't have time to do anymore. So that is helpful in decision making for us. So I would say that that's one more thing that they do well and that would be something to keep doing. ... They're good about coming, calling, setting up an appointment, following up with an email. Giving me a verbal run down in 30 minutes and then we get the ball rolling. So personal contact is also really important in that decision making process.

Karen thoughts are telling in terms of the school's trust in the program and the schools perception of the program as credible. It supports the already appealing status of the program based on the anecdotal evidence that the participants were exposed to and the relationship the school had with the organizers. This adds to the ease with which they tap into this program as one of their resources; this is discussed in more detail below.

Resource. Resource strain is a daunting and imminent reality in the school. This strain makes it difficult to maximize the full potential of the school environment. The school is a great environment to launch initiatives that would allow every child to have a healthy active start to life. However, the school's capacity is limited when their resources are not sufficient or when the available resources are predominantly geared towards teaching and/or curriculum requirements. This resource strain is not only in the form of financial but also human resources; this means that the school may not always have adequate staff who can devote time to other activities outside of the usual curricular demand. George explained the appeal of having little to no responsibility for the program:

Well I mean, one thing it's free!! So that's a key factor. I mean schools are obviously financially strapped to run all sorts of variety of programs. So when a program is free like that run through a community partnership...that [is] a great benefit to the school, again, also just the fact that they're coming to us with the program, them coming here and saying we have the Go Girls! program.

Evidently, having no financial responsibility for the program is just as important as ensuring its addition does not increase the staff's workload. George provided further explanation for this part of the equation:

They come in here! Because a lot of times you know it's very hard for administrators to get out of the building. We run a school, and this school there is 600 students, so it's very busy in a day. As you see when you came in, there are notes from students to go see them quickly often times it makes it easy for an administrator to be part of a program if somebody comes in, they show it's well organized, they show here's the form, here's the contract, here's what we want to do and they present in that fashion.

This shows that when things are clearly displayed, it increases the ease of signing on to the program. A key aspect of this resource is its flexibility and ease of delivery. That is, the flexibility of the outside agency in negotiating time and space for the program. Finding an appropriate space in the school can be challenging. The agency's openness and flexibility to what the school had to offer even if "it wasn't the best space" (George) added to the ease of adopting and delivering the program. The consistency of the program was also appealing. The school can trust that for seven weeks consistently, during a specified time, the girls are attending the Go Girls! session.

Teachers' perception of the quality of the program also added to the ease of program delivery. Joseph explained that teachers were re-assured when they felt the program was "valuable enough" for them "to adapt on days" when the sessions took place. He emphasized, "it's a small price to pay for those kids to actually get some benefit". Karen noted that the teachers could also benefit from and take advantage of the opportunity since, "the teacher has half the amount of kids and can do some small group and one on one instructional time".

Further, the program was seen as a tool that could support the school as the staff works to reach the goals and vision that they have for their students. George referred to it several times as a "tool" in their "school tool-box". Karen expressed this sentiment particularly well when she said:

[We] look at it as building the tool box, if I could use that analogy to a carpenter. But really this program helps girls learn how to use those tools and know what they are and if they could take that with them, then they just continue to build upon it as they go to other kinds of leadership opportunities throughout the school

Based on the interviewees' description, these goals and visions ranged from providing the girls with life skills or empowering them to teaching them how to work together and understanding the dynamics of building relationships. Joseph also noted that "it's a tool that ... can help a lot of those kids" since "one of the things we try hard at here is to give people tools to deal with life". Thus the program was both a tool for the school, and a set of tools – or resources for the girls attending it, which they could draw on as needed and also continue to build on after the program ended.

It is not a one-time event; there was an understanding that using this as a tool or building on that tool-box is ongoing and consistent. According to Karen, there was a general feel that

“[the school] don’t ever say we’ve done it once and it’s done. We layer upon layers upon layers for the grades so that kids are revisiting all that social piece...Kids need that practice”.

In this school, the major themes that emerged were the need for the positive space that promoted empowerment and an ability to build teams across social and cultural divides, the match of the program to the school’s goals of providing a positive learning and social community environment, the credibility of the program and the agency providing it and the resourcefulness of the program to the school in times of strain. After the closing Vignette I describe case three, which is a much smaller school than the schools described thus far.

Closing vignette

For the students who are healthy in all other areas, school is about teaching and learning. However, the other areas need to be supported for a majority of the students to learn at an optimal level.

Case 3

Opening Vignette

Community tightness and not just partnerships is what defines this school. Addressing the needs of the students doesn’t end in the school; community organizations get involved with the administrators to ensure that they can collectively help one another to guide the children.

Findings: Contextual Description

In this school, the program was first brought to the attention of the facilitator as the liaison with BBBS for other school-based programs and also due to the nature of his position, most liaising with outside partnerships is coordinated through the facilitator. Jacob (Facilitator) indicated that as well as queries about interest in programs, “if referrals need to be made for services [e.g.: speech pathologist, occupational therapists and health clinics] that kids need; facilitators would be involved with that”. The facilitator then brings the program to the

principal's attention for the final decision. As a teacher Caroline (Teacher) was asked "if [she] was accepting of this program happening because it was pulling out [the] girls once a week for a duration of seven weeks". Caroline described how consultations for the program was made; "I just had to speak to the facilitator about [it]. He came to me and asked, and so I gave the times that I thought was, you know, that would work best. So that's what we went with".

From Caroline's perspective, the line of communication or information sharing originates with the principal – then it is transferred to the facilitator, and lastly it reaches the teacher. As she noted, information "goes from the principal to the facilitator to me. That is how the information transfers down". There was not any value, neither positive nor negative, added to the teacher's description of the information flow.

The characteristic of the school community and the demographics of the children who attend the school was a major deciding factor to take on the program. Judy (Principal) felt the decision was based on the "needs of the school and what the students needed". Jacob also touched on the driving force for taking on the program:

In some schools it might have been more of a decision-making process because maybe there wouldn't have been as big of a need. I think here there wasn't a decision to be made, it was really like: if BBBS are willing to do this here, we would absolutely love to take part in it.

This shows that the decision was not really based on having evidence of the program benefits but mostly "about what we felt it could do for the kids" (Jacob). Judy expressed that the program "made sense based on what they [BBBS] were telling us the program entailed". Other participants expressed how and why the program was appropriate for their school as quoted below. Jacob's description brings understanding to why the staff felt the school needed it.

It's a wonderful fit for all schools. I in particular was thinking of this school because ... we're in a pretty difficult...socio-economic area. We have a lot of children who don't have a lot in their lives; by way of material things...we happen to have a lot of family, who are impoverished, might be too strong of a word, but, that's the situation. We happen to have a lot of single parent families or kids who have been affected by things like last year's flooding. There's just a lot. There's a lot that these kids don't have, and, so any relationships that help to develop social skills, help to provide something where there isn't a lot. I think it really benefits the kids in this neighborhood and this community.

Jacobs's description is telling in regards to the nature of disadvantage that many of the students come from. Judy also touched on the interplay of issues affecting the children's family situations:

Their families are in crisis...they may have been taken from their families, so they're in foster care. They may have been living with other family members other than their father or mother; so they may have a lot of things going on in their lives that aren't positive things, and, so to add to that a lot of the students will sit and play video games all day. We ask them; 'so do you go outside?' and they say; 'no, no I don't go outside'. So they are not active at all, and we have students that I've watch grown, gained weight overtime. You can tell that they're not being active, so based on those things and listening to how the program meets the need of being active and being positive; the lifestyle building - some of that resilience that they need to move on in their lives as opposed to being stuck in a bad cycle.

These situations are the driver behind Judy's emphasis on the program being accessible to the students; "they come to us, which is the most important thing". She clarified that when she

said: “the children in this area don’t go to a lot of extracurricular activities, because they can’t afford it, or it’s not accessible because they don’t drive so having something that’s already built into their day is very important”. This accessibility drew the school to the program.

The principal was very familiar with the CSH framework. It was evident that there was much value placed on this framework based on the school’s approach and resolve to not solely focus on the children’s academic needs. This was also seen in the degree of community partnership that the school was engaged in. It was not surprising, then, to find this, another school where there is a strong partnership with the local public health unit. The relationship with the health unit may vary depending on the year and person assigned to the school. Judy explained, “some years I hear from them once and I don’t hear from them again. This year I happen to have someone who is very involved and who wants to work with us to do lots of good things”. From Judy’s perspective, the CSH framework has gained more momentum with the school board’s emphasis on healthy eating and healthy school policies. Caroline pointed to the fact that “there’s definitely a focus on their emotional well-being at this school, just because there are so many of those needs that aren’t being met outside like in the family”.

It is evident that the school “focus[es] on strengths-based strategies” (Judy) for their students. Overall, this school “could see the value in this [the program] immediately” (Jacob), so there was not much of a decision to be made about whether or not the program could or should be delivered in the school. It was more about how the teachers felt about “juggl[ing] their schedule” (Jacob) in order not to miss out on the opportunity to have the program delivered to their students and being able to provide some unstructured positive space. The latter is one of the themes that emerged in my data analysis of this case, as I describe in the next section.

Themes

In addition to unstructured positive space and need the themes that emerged were, credibility, fit, and supportive leadership & staff.

Unstructured positive space and need. Among the interviewees there was consensus about the fact that the girls were faced with a variety of stressors and pressure and that there was a need for them to learn how to deal with this in a positive way. Caroline touched on this when she said:

Given the climate, there are lots of social issues that are happening within their lives.

Given the opportunity to talk about [issues they face] . . . , given the positive climate as opposed to them trying to work out issues on Facebook or, you know, social media is not a good scenario, we've had experiences with that already. So maybe this is a good format for allowing some of those conversations to happen.

This description shows that Go Girls! was seen as that positive platform that could create a constructive environment for learning and dialogue. The administrators felt that the girls would benefit from the structure of the program with peer mentorship and mentors who did not have any authoritative role in the children's lives. In the following statement, Jacob speaks to this: We

felt they would benefit by the structure of a group that work towards helping them build social skills with their peers, but also with mentors who aren't necessarily teachers or parents, but mentors that they can maybe relate to because they're a little bit closer in age, and they could think of as more of a fun unstructured type of activity that they would be fortunate to be in. So, I think this school has a group of kids who could really benefit from that, because they don't get it in a lot of other places.

This shows that the lack of direct authority was valuable, and it helped the girls build social skills in a way that they could relate to. A key aspect to this environment is that a lot of learning happens despite it being a fun, unstructured, and non-competitive environment. Judy explains why a competitive environment is not always the best for the girls.

When we do intramurals with basketball and those type things that are more structured a little bit than Go Girls!, they feel intimidated because it's competitive and they have to go and do the tournaments and those things. Whereas with Go Girls! it was very fun based and active based and there wasn't a competition, and they got to express themselves in a positive way. So I think that's a big plus.

This interaction described by Judy provides a basis for the children to bond and build relationships, both of which are reflective of a connected community within as well as outside the school environment. The participants felt that there is a constant attempt in the school "to create a community that is built on relationships" (Jacob). Judy concurred, "it's a wonderful program for our older girls because they struggled a lot with relationships, relationships with friends and parents and all of those things that are going on in adolescence, and they really, really enjoyed the program".

Overall, the participants here felt that the unstructured positive space that the program provided was appropriate to meet the learning needs of the girls in addition to the general need described above. But, in addition, the perceived credibility of the program influenced the perception of the program in this school.

Credibility. Similar to Case two, the staff collaboration that is required to have the program delivered is easier to obtain when there is a clear perception of the program as credible. It helped that the school already had a trusted on-going relationship and partnership with BBBS.

Such acquaintance with the organization added to its credibility. Caroline conveyed this in the following way:

Knowing that it's happened before; because I don't have that experience, so just knowing that it was trusted by the school community beyond the principal; that it is done through reputable institutions; that there's a screening process for the volunteers. So I think that all those things make it that I'm ok with [it].

Even when not directly familiar with the program herself, knowing that other staff trust the program added to Caroline's openness to it. The program's credibility increased because it was known in the community, and because there were occasions where school administrators had already been exposed to the program directly or indirectly. Because of having been exposed to the program, the principal expected the program to be valuable for the students. Judy indicated that she "knew about the program before and heard about it in other schools and my own children attended it at another school; so I knew that it was a good program for the kids".

As highlighted by the participants, the prior exposure to the program or knowledge of past exposures gives the program credibility and adds to the ease with which the school adopted the program. In addition to this, the program's perceived fit with the goals of the school were important, as I describe next.

Fit. The program fits the school's mission and goals as a community school. Due to the composition of students in the school, schooling was not just about meeting academic requirements. Judy conveyed that there was value in teaching and caring for the whole child especially when, "the children are in such crisis, as a school we need to meet the physical needs of the students, the spiritual, the emotional and the academic needs". As she noted, this program is an extension of the need "to teach the whole child".

There was an indication by Caroline that the program also “fits in with their health” [curriculum] and “that ties in with media literacy as well”. These curricular topics were addressed in discussions (during the program sessions) that touch on positive self-image and varying factors that influence the girls’ perception of themselves.

The suitability of timing during instructional hours when the sessions took place was also important. Running the sessions towards the end or second half of the day ensured that it did not interrupt the literacy block⁹. In this case the teacher was able to benefit from having more time to focus on the boys. The flexibility of the external agency in terms of the space and time required facilitates the ability to fit the program into the school’s schedule. Logistics can be tricky given that many items in the school schedule are fixed ahead of time. Judy explained, “it did have to get cancelled a few times and that was unfortunate because of things that were already scheduled before they had started”. According to Judy, there is always a careful consideration of what the school has fixed in their schedule. Issues surrounding logistics was further described by Jacob.

There are always factors like the logistics of it but you have to find the time, dedicate that block of time, which is going to come from somewhere else. You have to find a space. It will be ideal just to say they had use of the gym all the time they were here, but they don’t quite frankly because it’s booked for other things; so that might depend on the particular school, how much room they have... it might be very difficult to find space. So we did a little bit of juggling with space and the organization was very flexible in terms of where they could meet, and I can’t think of any other factors that would have

⁹ As explained by the principal, the literacy block falls into the first half of the day which is the instructional time for literacy and math. The literacy block of the day should not be interrupted since literacy and math are the first priorities. This is why the Go Girls program would fall into the second half of the day, usually in the afternoon, where there is more flexibility for disrupting instructional time.

influenced the decision because the deciding factor again was staring us in the face. This could be a good thing for our kids and that pretty much made the decision for us.

As seen in Jacob's description, while logistics is an issue, the benefit of the program for the students superseded such concerns. Community partnerships were also a very important factor. It seemed to define the 'personality' of the school. The school valued any partnership that could help the students. Jacob conveyed this when he said:

If we look at the big picture of what we're trying to give to kids, not just reading and writing and math [which are] very important but it's bigger than that. I think this ties in because BBBS is a very important part of that... and I think that outside of this program there are other relationships that we have, and other partnerships that we have with first nations organizations and with [the] community health clinic that's just around the corner. We could go on and on, and they are very, very important to the overall atmosphere of the school community.

As described by Jacob, the school's partnership with BBBS exemplified what the school was drawn to. In this school, the fit of the program is seen on varied levels, from how it addresses needs of the girls to the logistical ease of partnering with the local agency, which was possible in part due to the supportive leadership, which is the last theme that emerged and which I address next.

Supportive leadership and staff. Jacob asserted that the principal was "tremendously supportive" during the process of having the program delivered to the school. The principal really embraced the vision and ideology that the school is a part of the larger community and thus supported engagements that naturally build on that community. Caroline also voiced that

once you have “the willingness of the principal, then teachers are likely to be on board”. Judy explained that all of this requires

a lot of communication, it’s a lot of talk and staying on top of it; knowing what’s out there, which like in your first few years [as a principal] in a school, you don’t really know what’s available in your neighbourhood, but as time goes on and you learn these things and you reach out and just ask. And usually people say yes.

This is illustrative of the tedious background work the administrators were faced with. Having teachers who are supportive of this process adds to the ease of program delivery. Jacob stressed: “In our case at least, the teacher certainly had a voice in whether this was going to go forward or not. We wouldn’t go forward if the teacher had said no”. Once the teacher and the administration agreed, it was then easier to discuss and juggle the issue of the best timing for the sessions to take place. Jacob conveyed this below:

We need to have a teacher who is willing to allow that to happen... in our case our teacher not only allowed it but again agreed with me that it will be a wonderful use of time, but that teacher then needed to be flexible with her schedule and function with her own schedule in her classroom, and maybe math was moved from here to here or maybe a language block had to be moved from here to here.

This shows how flexibility and willingness at all levels made it possible to work with the program. Overall, this school benefited from “having an administrator ... who understands [the idea of a comprehensive approach to school] and supports the staff and the community in ways that ensures that these four pillars are a part of our community” (Jacob).

In this school the themes of: unstructured positive space combined with student need, fit, credibility and supportive leadership & staff emerged as factors that the participants felt were

essential for the way they received the program. The themes that emerged for Case four, which I present after the closing vignette, are a little different, although Case four was also a smaller school. One of the themes for the next school was strategies for life for example, rather than unstructured positive space, as discussed below.

Closing Vignette

The value of the program for the school was glaring, so figuring out the logistics to make it possible was secondary.

Case 4

Opening Vignettes

This is a high needs school, and as such the students are not necessarily engaged in much activities outside of the school that would give them space for positive interaction and unstructured learning needed to enhance their development. The school was absolutely welcoming of this since it fills in some of those gaps for the students.

Findings: Contextual description

This is a small school located in a particularly difficult socio-economic area. Resource strain was reported to be a fact. Hence, the school took full advantage of as much external help as was available. In this school, it was clear that academics, while important, were not the sole focus because of the backgrounds, living conditions and issues many of the students faced. There was particular emphasis on motivating the students, making them aware of, supporting, and building on their strengths and equipping them with life skills also in order to enhance their learning. Esther (Principal) described why this is needed:

Our school climate survey showed huge bullying, mostly grade six girls bullying. So their test scores were wonky and they weren't doing well in school because they were so worried about all the stuff going on outside. ... So the strengths [approach]¹⁰, it's all about

¹⁰ See Appendix G for school handout on the strengths approach.

giving kids hope and [making them] feel valued and understanding what kind of people they are; because often they come here and if they're from a difficult family situation, they feel crappy.

This reinforces the idea that you must focus on the whole child and not just on the responsibility of teaching the children what is required according to the curriculum. They will not learn if they are focused on what is happening in their life outside of school. As Janet (Facilitator) stressed, when "their basic needs are barely being met ... how do you think they're going to do on a test? Like really? Really?". She expanded,

it doesn't matter how much practice or what teaching methods you use. If you're not dealing with their basic needs of feeling safe...wanting to come to school? They're not going to learn, they're not going to learn!!!! And even if we feed them here, still if they're not at that level, it doesn't matter how many times you pound them with the same stuff... the first thing is; they have to enjoy being here, they have to enjoy coming to school, they have to feel safe.

As Janet explained, due to the needs of the students in this school and the school's awareness of the students' need to be stimulated and to feel safe at school, disrupting instructional time (for a program like Go Girls) was seen as being supportive of the students' ability to learn rather than a cause for concern about the possibility that they would miss out on curriculum components. This demonstrates the great value placed on the program. As long as the agency was willing to offer it to them, they would do everything possible to ensure they could allocate time to it. They also allocated sufficient time for the program to be properly delivered. It was felt that time allocated to the sessions is vital; it should be worth it. In the absence of sufficient time for the program to be delivered efficiently, it is not beneficial to pull students out

of class. Thomas¹¹ (VP and Teacher) felt that “If they [BBBS] came next year and say ‘we want to do it for 15 more minutes’... we would just figure it out because we want to make sure that it works”. The children in this school were unlikely to miss school for a bunch of extracurricular activities. Thus, the staff did not worry about the time the students get off class for Go Girls! since there did not seem to be much additional absenteeism to be accounted for. Esther confirmed that in their school, “the only time they miss class is if they’re sick or if they’re away or if we let them do stuff like this, so they’re not missing school for anything”.

Information about the program went from the facilitator to the teachers and then to the administrators for final approval. The facilitator role positioned her such that she was the most likely person that this kind of information would go to. Although the principal provides the final ‘ok’ to everything, the process was actually reversed in this school if compared with others, as the staff had given their approval for the program before it was presented to the administrator. This cut out the work that the administrators would have to do to get their staff on board. Esther affirmed that “the decision making process is easy” and that while she puts the “ok [on] everything... teachers never say no when it’s” good for the students.

Janet described the procedures of getting everyone on board:

I looked at it and went to talk to some teachers and said: what do you think about this?

They say; ‘that’s fantastic’... and then when I went to the admin, I said; ‘I have two teachers on board, what do you think about this’, and they said; hey, go run with it!

The size of the school was something that seemed to facilitate such a level of flexibility, in terms of rescheduling things and/or negotiating space. There was still some figuring out required in terms of the best place and time to fit the program in but that process, in Thomas’s words, was “not a big deal”. He further explained why:

¹¹ In this school the VP was a part time VP and also a Teacher.

Like most schools we have a balanced day, we have 100 minute blocks so ... when we scheduled Go Girls, it was just a matter of finding a block that we thought was the easiest to pull kids from and I think there was some direction from the program as well that afternoons were better or something.... But as I said we're not a very big school so it's not a big deal for us to move something 15 minutes or whatever just to have [the program].

This shows how the dynamics of this small school adds to their flexibility. According to the interviewees, this school appeared to benefit a lot from opportunities to have smaller classrooms, which gives the children more one on one time. Janet expressed that “instead of having 27 kids ... 18 would be ideal”. This is because the teachers “have classes, where over half of the class[es], have ten students that are several grades below”. This means that any opportunity for smaller groups can help ensure that the students are better engaged in the school environment. The average class size between grade four and eight in Ontario is 25; in many schools there are up to 30 students in a class¹² (Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO), 2014)). Janet further highlighted what this very mixed level of student ability in large class size could mean for an individual student.

Come deal with the children that have come home and their dad's been kicked out, and come sit in a classroom when you're in a Grade two level and you're in a Grade eight level classroom and you're surrounded by things on the walls that are Grade eight level, because that's where you're supposed to be... I mean how would you behave if you had things that were like: I'm stupid, I'm stupid I'm stupid all around you all day. And then they say to us, just modify their program or teach them at their level but there's 30 kids in

¹² See more discussion on this in chapter five

the room and there's one teacher.... So, would I act out and be a real shit head?

Absolutely I would be because I'm bored!

Janet's description provides a good explanation to why any opportunity to reduce class size was seen as favourable. Overall, there was a general feeling that such scenarios can be minimized when possibilities of support and change exist and "there is so much richness in the program for the children.... [The teachers] don't [say] 'oh I can't, they're missing history'. So the decision-making process is quiet simple, please get us the program and we will get the girls" (Esther).

This is a school where the decision to take up the program is mostly driven by the students' needs as evidenced in the themes that emerged which are described below.

Themes

Themes that illustrate the factors that influenced this school's decision to take up the program included strategies for life as mentioned above, as well as fit, leadership and staff buy-in and resources.

Strategies for life. With the issues that the children face, the school was drawn to programs that would provide the children with life skills that they could use in situations they might encounter on a daily basis. Esther felt,

this program ... empowers girls especially in our kind of school ... their safest most structured hours [are at school], not that structured is super good but it's important in these kids' lives. We work on their self-esteem every minute of every day. We give them strategies for life ... so the Go Girls program is perfect.

Janet further explained that "our students as they're approaching adolescence [really] need some positive influence in their life". It is great for them to see positive role models who

are external to the school. Janet touched on the fact that encouraging the girls to be active can get a “little trickier in the adolescence, because then they don’t want to move as much...their bodies are changing and they’re not feeling as comfortable with themselves as when they were primary students”. The Go Girls environment and content equips the girls with strategies that boost their interest for physical activity and active living.

Many of the girls may not be exposed to a lot of positive experiences; the program provides a good way for them to be in a positive space with positive role models. Esther indicated that the program helps “them develop a lifestyle that they maybe are not getting outside, other than the classroom”.

For many students, participating in the program gave them a chance to feel special due to the size and dynamic of the group. Janet explained,

with the Go Girls program because it’s such a small program... there’s a number of facilitators in the group to support them. It gives them one to one and a safe space where it’s just girls, and they can sit and talk about the issues they have as a result. The program started a lot of communication with these girls, between each girls and that spread throughout their class.

Thus, it allowed them to have a voice and to engage with their peers in a fun unstructured environment that still promotes growth, confidence, and team spirit. For some of the girls, going to Go Girls, was a special event and the highlight of their day. Esther noted, “it’s a huge thing for them.... For those girls to have anything special, it’s really, really huge. We really appreciate it and we need it!” She emphasized this further stating:

I tell you, last year we had two student EAs [educational assistants].... On Valentine’s Day, they did a girls day and they had all they girls grade seven and eight and they had

pink and red on and food and activities. It's all about strengths. The girls said to me this year, are we having that? No, I'm sorry. So you see how special this stuff is for them? Whereas if you were in a French immersion school... they do everything, their parents have them in everything. Another special day? Oh that's nice, they'll like it but they don't go: ohhhh can we do it?

From Esther's explanation, any opportunity for special events is welcomed and needed in this school. Overall, participants expressed the need for their students to be equipped with life skills that they can apply to tackle situations they may face. This theme in many ways also informed the theme I describe below namely: the fit of the program to the school.

Fit. The program was a natural fit due to the school's ongoing commitment to empower the girls by focusing on their strengths. The program's approach fits the school culture and philosophy. Janet indicated that it "completely sort of moulds or meshes/matches really well with our goals and our school. We really thought that it matched what we needed with our girls here at the school". Esther also concurred, "it's just a natural kind of program that fits in with all of that [strength-based approach], we work a lot on anti-bullying strategies and there's lots of girls involved in social bullying, with the girls it's not so much physical". Thomas expressed a similar sentiment:

It fits with what we do, it fits with our philosophy... we have a strength-based school so we do spend a lot of our time talking to kids about their strengths and what they're good at and helping them identify things they want to improve in... the philosophy of Go Girls, the active living and the positive role model or just the process of it was just a natural, just seamless; exactly what we do with all the kids. So it just seems almost like a little boost for the girls in those grades. Yea, we know that active living is important and we

want them to embrace a little bit more of that because, again, we have some kids that don't participate in a wide variety of sports or extra-curricular activities. So [anything] we can expose them to, is helpful.

The school is always looking for strategies to bring the girls together and to have them work together. Thomas conveyed this saying:

We bring those kids together as a group and have them be leaders in the school so I think that aligns pretty closely with what Go Girls does in that kind of mentor thing, we want them to be interacting with people that maybe they don't always gravitate towards or work with. That part of it fits as well.

This kind of team building and positive interaction was what the school saw in the Go Girls! program. Thomas stressed, "it just reinforces what we're trying to do as a school".

The participants felt that the program matched well their existing goals to expose the girls to opportunities that promote their strengths in a mentoring environment. Thus, it makes sense that the school will support this initiative. Below I elaborate on the theme of leadership and staff buy-in.

Leadership and staff buy-in. This is another case where the staff was incredibly supportive of having the program delivered in their school. Janet confirmed that "everyone [was] really very, very flexible". There was a very clear understanding of what the program was about and how it would benefit the girls. Part of this was due to the way that the program was communicated to the staff and administrators involved. Details about the program sessions were also clearly communicated. Consequently Thomas noted that, "the staff on a whole just really embrace[d] that program and recognize[d] its value". Thomas added: "Janet was pretty clear

when she talked about the approach that the mentors have, the sessions and the activity stuff. The way that she explained [it] ... there was never a debate”.

This level of understanding was facilitated by staff cooperation on many levels. Thomas explained, “if I said to a grade two teacher I need to use the gym space because we have this program running... Absolutely, they would understand because it fits what we’re doing as a school”. Clearly, the teachers were incredibly flexible and creative about moving schedules around in order to accommodate the program needs. Regardless of the fact that “space can be a limitation” (Esther), because the staff was so *willing*, they would find space. The flexibility of the entire staff provided an excellent environment to make the most of the program as a primary resource for the school. Esther conveyed that it was never a *problem*, they “would do anything... to make it work for [their] schedule and our schedule”. She further stressed;

you never seen flexible teachers like in this school....the seven, six, eight classes are very large and so, you should have seen when we had student teachers how they regrouped and removed kids, anything to get the kids working in smaller groups is fantastic because they learn better that way. There’s fewer distractions, there’s less disruptions, it’s all that. So the girls going out, is a super good thing for the girls but it’s also a bonus for the boys left behind. ... No one has ever complained about anything and I throw lots of stuff at them. They know these kids. Lots of them are in this school and they [teachers] stay here because they know, they understand the population.

Esther’s description affirms the flexibility of the teachers. Janet also provided an in-depth illustration of such flexibility.

The teachers typically will put something that’s not as crucial during that time or it maybe a catch-up period that they will give students that are remaining. Sometimes

because it was only the boys that were left, it gave the opportunity for the male teachers to do a little bit of sort of self-esteem stuff with them as well. You know...whatever male bonding stuff they do... it gave them time to just sit around and talk about some of the issues they had. I think too it gave them some time to catch up on work or to do work that maybe they felt they needed a little bit more work on. But it was never a problem; we made sure that they never missed any of their critical curriculum components.

This shows the teachers' creativity in being flexible as well as in ensuring that their students do not fall behind.

This section described how the staffs' understanding of the program value for their student influenced their reception of the program, and the high degree of flexibility they demonstrated in order to make embracing it possible. Last but not least and inherent to the other themes below I describe participants' views of how much of a resource the program is to them.

Resource. The resource strain this school was experiencing was compounded by the level of issues that the students experienced. Thus, the school uses any and all the resource they can access. Participant noted that it is a *win-win* situation when the outside agencies offer to come to the school and run a program without much responsibility falling on the school staff. Esther explained why external help is so appealing:

It's a small staff, small school. We try to provide opportunities for intramural sports, for inter school sports like all that stuff; so anything I can get and I'm super busy with all the stuff going on in a high needs school, so a lot of it falls on me. But I can't do more than I am doing right now; I run intramurals, I do dodge ball every day at lunch, every recess and lunchtime is taken up. So to take on another healthy living initiative, because the Health Unit has some really good stuff, but we just aren't there yet. So this was a super

good way to do that and with people coming in to do that... I'm stretched super thin...

[So] it's more of a community partnership that's important.

It is difficult for the school to fully engage with and benefit from school health resources stemming from the Health Unit, since there is some responsibility that falls on them. Esther felt that while their relationship with the Health Unit was *excellent*, it was not enough. She gave an example of why that is, "we used to run active playgrounds [introduced by the Health Unit] but an EA ran it and she moved, so, but I try to keep it up, but I can't". Esther's example is illustrative of a main dimension of resource strain because it is not just about someone coming in and offering a great program or initiative. The school may not have the capacity and human resources required to implement them. Esther also noted that while working with "the Health Unit is great" it does not make it easy. She expanded,

I have to reach out. Absolutely, it makes it really hard. Yea because if I don't ask for it, I mean they'll [the Health Unit] come and do stuff but I have to ask for it. They'll bring me stuff to do in the school, like the active school playgrounds program, they'll come in and train kids to be leaders in it. I know, because I did it at a school much different from this school and kids can't run the program without adult supervision.

This shows the difference with Go Girls!, the agency offering the program went to the school, followed-up with them and ensured that there was minimal if any responsibility for the school. The dynamic was different from the school's interaction with the Health Unit. Esther further described:

So they have super good stuff but again, it falls on the school to run it. We use the Health Unit a lot in individual class stuff but as a whole school thing, no. It falls on me then or

[another] teacher but like I said, we only have ten teachers. [We're] already coaching and doing all the extra stuff that teachers do in school.

In addition to getting a free resource, the school can trust the organization that runs the program; Janet explained,

so when we can have a reputable outside organization that we know is gonna do a great job at this, and has a great reputation for it, we're happy to have them come in and use that resource that's available. And I mean, we're also fortunate that it was free. It's free, it's a win-win all around...somebody brought [a program to our attention]...so we're looking at ... maybe incorporating that into our school, but again the problem is, that somebody has to take that on and in a school like this where we're all stretched thin.

Janet felt that this scenario and the lag in human resources warrants for a "healthy school coordinator, somebody who is going to lead" such initiatives.

To summarize, this school receptiveness to the program was driven by their need to equip their students with strategies for life beyond curriculum components. The program was a natural fit therefore the leadership and staff buy-in required to facilitate implementation was present. The ease of using the external agency as an indispensable resource as noted in other cases was also highlighted. However while there were similarities between cases there were also finds that were particularly for the individual cases as I will discuss in the section following the closing vignette, where I provide a cross-case theme analysis of all the cases.

Closing Vignettes

While the school staff was incredibly receptive of school health initiatives, having a dedicated school health coordinator will be ideal since the school staff's job description does not allow them the time required to be engaged in other activities.

Cross-case theme analysis

The cross-case theme analysis provides an overview of abstractions across all the cases (Merriam, 1998). Instead of merely being a summary of major themes, it provides a richer picture of the context that shapes the cases and consequently provides insights that justify the emerging themes seen across the cases (Merriam, 1998). The contextual narrative below serves to provide a rich description of similar and differing contextual factors that link the cases. Most of the content analysis from documents reviewed is used here to provide an in-depth contextual understanding for the cross-case theme analysis. In addition, ideas that emerged from the analysis of the three additional interviews (with employees from the BBBS Thunder Bay and a community member; i.e.: Mary, Sarah and Madeline – See Appendix C) which were conducted with the aim of providing context for the main interviews are drawn upon in this section to provide a richer understanding and description.

Contextual narrative

Cases one and two are French immersion schools that draw from large geographic areas. Both are larger schools, which suggest possibilities of similar dynamics in terms of how the school is structured and operates. Cases three and four are solely English schools; both schools are smaller community schools that draw from the same area.

In all cases, when the BBBS approaches the school, the organization provides the school with a welcome package that details the program in a clear and succinct manner. The package – one of the documents reviewed - includes promotional information about the program, an overview of the school's responsibilities, and an agreement of intent form¹³. The main responsibilities of the school include: providing appropriate multi-purpose physical space for the

¹³ Due to issues surrounding the sensitivity of ownership of the Go Girls! program and intellectual property and copy rights, I am unable to reference or add these reviewed documents to the appendices.

program and designating a school liaison who can be the contact person between the agency and the school. The agency also asks that the liaison be available in the school during the time when the sessions are in progress in case the Go Girls mentors need any assistance. An essential aspect of the school's responsibility is to complete evaluation forms for the program. While this is a challenging aspect for some cases, the evaluations are imperative for the agency since ministry funding is dependent on the timely completion and outcome of the evaluations. It is safe to assume that the program fits within the curriculum or complements curriculum requirements given the willingness of the ministry of education to fund it (Cassin, 2011).

Once the program is accepted and the school signs the intent agreement for their school, a memorandum of understanding (MOU) – and planning form is sent to the school¹⁴. The planning form is a guide that includes information such as dates of program sessions, preferred days and or time, participants to mentor ratio, physical space, storage for the program's box and dates by which participants and mentor selection should be complete. Once the planning process is finalized, the agency sends the school a letter confirming the details of the program. That is, when and where the sessions will take place and the names of all the mentors that will be delivering the program in the school. The agency also provides the school with an information letter and a consent form for parents or guardians. The MOU is a detailed yet brief document that outlines all the information about the program and the responsibilities of both the school and the agency before the program starts, during and after the program ends. Overall, contextual perspectives (given by Mary, Sarah and Madeline – see Appendix C) from outside the schools suggest that the program's branding certainly gives it a great appeal for the school. The program is able to address particular needs in the school. Sarah expressed that the schools trust that the

¹⁴ Due to issues surrounding ownership of the Go Girls! program and intellectual property and copyrights, I am unable to reference or add these reviewed documents to the appendices.

program is “quality based” and “verified” because of the links to OPHEA and BBBS (OPHEA, 2005). She further conveyed that an elemental aspect is that the program can meet their needs “where they [the schools] might not have the resources” within the school. Despite the school being a really positive environment for children, the school still requires a lot of support. The program continues to gain popularity in the community; this could be attributed to press releases from 2011 and 2012 about the program¹⁵. Some schools take pride in doing a press release about their grade seven and eight girls’ participation in the program. Some of the taglines from related newspaper articles were: Feelin’ good; Go Girls! Adolescents learn to have fun during challenging times; students having fun learning about happy and healthy lifestyle!¹⁶ Mary pointed out: “I think they’re really proud to be able to give the kids something extra and something fun like our programs and they want other schools to know how their kids have benefited”. This heightens the awareness about the program within the community and it shows how connected the agency was in the community as a result of their school-based programs. For instance, Mary noted, “I have had schools say ‘yea I saw that picture in the paper’”. Another newsletter in the community newspaper generally talked about BBBS Thunder Bay and the programs that they offer (“Big Brothers Big Sisters in Westfort”, 2013). Thus, it is no surprise that Mary felt that the “community is a big advocate for” them because they “are known in that community”.

The press releases and newspaper articles all serve as a venue for spreading anecdotal evidence of the program benefits across school communities. The press releases were also published on the Lakehead Public Schools’ website¹⁷. Although evidence is not the first thing that the schools look at when considering the program, in almost all the cases some kind of prior

¹⁵ Due to issues surrounding confidentiality, I have not provided a reference to the document reviewed here.

¹⁶ Due to issues surrounding confidentiality, I have not provided a reference to the document reviewed here.

¹⁷ Due to issues surrounding confidentiality, I have not provided a reference here.

exposure to the program impacted their receptiveness of the program. For Cases one, two and four, the schools allow the program to keep coming back because they see the positive effects of the program on their girls year after year.

Another big seller of the program is that it provides a fun, positive experience for the girls. It touches on positive self-image and self-esteem, which is critical for all girls from varying socio-economic background (OPHEA, 2005; OPHEA, n.d.). Mary explained,

I think the healthy relationship [component] is the biggest seller because most of the schools say: Can you really focus in on the self-esteem, self-image stuff. Whereas I have other schools, it was more eating habits - the kids don't eat that healthy they sit around at recess they don't run around, but it also lead to their lack of self-esteem too.

This shows that the healthy relationships component of the program is well rounded as it relates back to healthy eating and being active (OPHEA, 2005; OPHEA, n.d.). The schools maximize the positive opportunities that they can provide for the children. This seemed to be particularly critical for children who come from difficult family situations and or communities plagued with difficulties where many of the children are “looking for guidance and instructions” (Madeline). Consequently, Madeline asserted, “school and after school programs are critical stabilizing forces” (Madeline). She further explained:

This is one of the poorest neighbourhoods in Thunder Bay, the low income levels are astounding, most children are in a single family issue, many live in sub-standard housing. There's not enough money to feed or clothe their children, their siblings, people have a lot of inadequacies. [There are many children here] in foster care and [who] have multiple siblings who are in foster care elsewhere. We're talking very deep, deep trauma. Again, we have the highest rates of diabetes, heart disease, there's trafficking, there's

prostitution, any of the social ills that define a community we're facing them in this neighbourhood. There is a lot of stigma for children and youth who live here, that's it in a nutshell, it's pretty comprehensive. So the school is one of the positive places where the children can gather.

The above explanation shows why the schools especially in disadvantaged communities need as many fun, positive opportunities they can get. The school culture and leadership is also essential. Some schools have a very open door policy where community partnership is critical to everything they do. In other cases, Madeline noted that "school is about school, that's it!". She conveyed this further,

There's no after school program. There are not a lot of other things, it doesn't have the same open door philosophy to encouraging community partners to come and do programming there.... So, it's a different culture and a lot of that is based on the principal too.

Even in the cases where the schools have an open stance policy, the administrators have to ensure that they have staff buy-in. Mary expressed that "in [their] experiences they usually tell me, I have to talk to the teachers of the students to see if the teachers are willing to allow the kids time away from class to take part in the program". In other instances, it could just be a question of timing and space, when the program is offered to them. She expanded;

I have had a few schools that have had the program in the past that said we have no space, which is one. A lot of schools have had to find other ways to bring in income.... One school told me they now have a day care in the only available space they would have had to run the program. Some other traits might be just even the willingness... [for instance], the teachers making the decision for the kids. Whereas I think if the principal

went to the students directly and said what do you guys think. I had one school they actually went and they showed the girls the videos on our website that we have on our Big Brothers Big Sisters website... and the girls were just super excited about it... because the principal just said; 'the girls want it'.

Mary's explanation is illustrative of the interplay of things that can influence adoption. The contextual description above highlights several important drivers across all the cases that make the program appealing. The schools are drawn to opportunities that enhance and optimize students' academic experience, especially when they might not have the resources to do so themselves. In the next section, I describe the similarities and differences across all emerging themes from the four cases. A more general discussion with links to existing literature is provided in chapter five.

Similarities and Differences

Across all the cases, the emerging themes are mostly similar with few or almost negligible differences. What differs from one school to the other is what each of the emerging themes mean for the school and how much weight varying themes carry within each case.

The most resounding theme across all the cases was how the program fit into the school culture, school philosophy, school mission and/or school goals. In a majority of the cases, the schools agreed to participate in the program because either all or some of the components of the program matched what the school was already doing, and participating in the program would help them achieve desired outcomes with the girls. In Cases one and two, the fit of the program links to how well it represents or is an extension of character education or the strengths-based approach. In cases one to three, participants expressed that a key aspect of the *fit or seamless integration* of the program in their school was associated with how well it complemented or

touched on certain curriculum components. Case four was the one school, where links to the curriculum was not a priority when they embraced the program. Rather they were more concerned with equipping the children with basic skills that would enhance their ability to learn.

Although many schools fully embraced the program, the schools struggled with making time for the program during the school day. In a couple of cases (Case one and two particularly), there was a clear attempt to maximize the use of the lunch period so that only a smaller portion of the instructional time is interrupted. In Case four, participants' responses suggested that disrupting instructional time was not a major concern. Rather, they felt that their girls would benefit so much from it, that the payback would be larger than the loss of missing out on curriculum components would be.

In Case two, although this is the school where they are careful about interrupting too much instructional time, one of the participants strongly felt that the thought of linking the program to the curriculum is a *shame*. That participant felt that there are many life skills that are important for the girls to learn at this stage in order for them to even get to the curriculum components such as how to multiply fractions.

In both of the French immersion schools, the program provided a platform to bring children from the English and French streams together in a positive environment that allowed them to work together. The split that tends to happen in French immersion school is something that the schools are continuously striving to merge. They thus attempt to find ways to ensure that the girls from both streams have more opportunities to interact with girls that they would otherwise not interact with.

In all of the cases, the program greatly appealed to the schools because it was addressing an existing need within the school. In Cases one and two, the program may not always have been

appealing to all of the girls for varying reasons; however, it was beneficial and useful for a majority of the girls.

In Cases three and especially four the data suggests that a program like Go Girls! was extremely important for the overall learning and wellbeing of the students in the school as a whole. In both of those cases, it was clear that as long as the agency was willing to deliver the program in their school, they school would do everything possible to find the time and space required for the sessions. The demographic composition of the schools was one main factor. Both of the schools were relatively high needs schools, which meant that as much positive space and influence they could incorporate in the child's day was incredibly appealing to the school staff. Especially, faced with the fact that many of the children did not have access to external programs like the children in the French immersion programs. For many of the children in both of these cases (three and four), the school was reported to be the most stabilizing force in their lives making it easy to understand that the school staff would strive to provide the students with as many life skills as they could.

Generally, all of the schools saw the need to educate the whole child; which meant that curriculum components or strictly academics were not the only focus. In Cases three and four, there was particular emphasis on ensuring that the school could take care of other aspects of the child's life as a way of supporting them to be able to engage in school and able and prepared to learn.

Another resounding theme across the cases was the ease of having the program. For all of the cases the program is the ideal kind of resource that a school looks for, especially when resource strain is evident. A key appealing aspect of the program for all the cases was that there was little to no responsibility for the school. The program is free to them and the human

resources required to deliver the program is also free. Even in the larger schools, this was still crucial, since having such a large school makes for a very busy environment for the administrators. In the smaller schools, resource strain was still an issue due to the level of needs in the schools.

The leadership and/or staff buy-in was also significant in all of the cases. In almost all the cases, the program was absolutely embraced because they either have a leader that completely believed in the program or saw the need for it. Staff had a very clear understanding of the positive impact that the program can bring. The leadership buy-in was particularly important, since they put the final seal of approval on whether or not the program would be delivered in their school.

Process or approach of communication about the program seemed to be the distinguishing factor in the level of cooperation from the school staff. In cases one and two, information about program delivery is communicated to other staff once the administrators make the decision. Cases three and four had a different approach. Final principal approval was the last stage after teachers and other relevant staff had bought into the program and had agreed that they could make adopting it possible. In Case four particularly, there seemed to be an incredible amount of support from the staff. This is shown by everyone's flexibility and creativity to ensure that they can benefit from the opportunity of adopting and having the program in their school. So generally, although all the participants had a positive view of the program, there is reason to suggest that their attitude is further shaped by their understanding of the program and how the program is communicated to them.

Across all the cases the positive mentorship and a sisterhood kind of environment was certainly appealing for schools, for varying reasons. The fact that the program created a positive

space for the girls where they felt they had a voice was important. There was an overall need for the girls to be in a place that would encourage dialogue. The program offered an opening to discuss issues that they probably would not be able to discuss in any other setting within the school. This led to relationship building and conflict resolution. At the end of the day, the underlying factor for all the schools adopting the program was whether their girls would benefit from it.

Chapter Five

The purpose of this study was to examine the contextual factors that influenced the decisions of school staff and administrators to adopt a program that fits a CSH approach; the Go Girls! program. Analysis from semi-structured interviews and document reviews formed the basis for the findings that are described in the previous chapter. In this final chapter, I provide a general discussion of the findings across all the cases and make connections to existing literature. The discussion is followed by a brief examination of the strengths and limitations of this study. The chapter ends with some concluding remarks, possible practice implications and recommendations.

Discussion

In the following discussion, I will touch on the most prominent themes that emerged across all the cases examined, links to the innovation attributes within Roger's diffusion of innovation theory and consider existing literature related to this research area. The prominent themes include the fit of the program within the school- which is inherently tied to its ability to address existing needs in the school, the leadership and staff receptiveness of the program, and the ease of delivering the program in the school.

Fit – including Need

All of the cases show, in one way or another, that the compatibility of the program, which is how well the program matches the existing values or needs (Rogers, 2003) within the school, was a main determining factor for its adoption. As described within the elements of diffusion in Roger's diffusion of innovation theory, the values held within a social system are important to determine the compatibility of an idea/innovation to the system (Rogers, 2003). Thus, the value system within the organization or in this case the school makes a big difference in determining

whether a program/innovation would fit (Rogers, 2003). For the cases in this study, it was clear that the schools valued the idea that their school could provide the girls with opportunities that would enhance their academic experience. Thus, the Go Girls! program appeared as a particularly good fit in this regard. The principle elements of compatibility, that is, consistency to an existing value and a potential to address existing needs (Rogers, 2003) were evident in all the cases. Studies by Higgins et al. (2013) and Belansky et al. (2013) emphasize the need to consider each school's unique needs and context. Higgins et al. (2013) described how components across the usual four pillars of the CSH framework were adapted, to fit the population of the school they worked with. While the intervention model (Action Schools BC!) they based their approach on was previously found to be successful for elementary students, it was adapted for high school students in this study (Higgins et al., 2013). For instance, an 'action team' involving 50% participation from youth was used to determine which sort of school wide events would be more appropriate to enhance targeted positive health behaviours (Higgins et al., 2013). Thus, the goal was to ensure that the student body and teachers were actively involved and the intervention allowed for sufficient flexibility to fit the interests and needs of the school (Higgins et al., 2013). Such flexibility to fit the needs of the school and build upon the school's strengths was also identified by teachers in the APPLE (Alberta Project Promoting active living and healthy eating) schools as a factor that makes ownership and implementation of the intervention easier (Storey, Spitters, Cunningham, Schwartz & Veugeler, 2011). Belansky et al., (2013) described how the participation of an active school team allowed the school's needs assessment to be incorporated into the intervention strategies. This meant that interventions could be specifically tailored and aimed to address student needs identified by the school (Belansky et al., 2013). Particularly in case four, and to some degree in the other cases, the school saw exactly how the program could

address the school's need to build strengths and community among their students based on a previous school assessment survey showing bullying as an issue in the school. The review of literature by the Propel Center for Population Health Impact (2012) on facilitated approaches in school settings similarly emphasized the need to consider local context and the varying needs across school settings. And, lessons from primary care facilitation suggest that interventions and practices that are tailored to the context prove more effective (Propel Center for Population Health Impact, 2012). This is why there is not a standardized approach to implementing CSH given that school settings vary as do the curriculum requirements depending on the province/territory (Propel Center for Population Health Impact, 2012).

Overall, as demonstrated in the cases described in the study and resonant with the current literature, it is of utmost importance to consider specific contexts and varying needs across school settings for any school health initiative. What is equally necessary and important is leadership and staff buy-in, which I discuss next.

Leadership and Staff Buy-in

In addition to a strong need in some cases, the value within the schools as discussed above was reflective of the level of support that the program received both by the leadership and the staff. Although there is reason to believe that the leadership buy-in is of primary importance since they put the final seal of approval on anything that happens in the school, support from all levels is equally important. In all of the four cases studied, cooperation from teachers and even other staff was just as essential for effective delivery of the program. This was evident in the ways in which participants would work around their schedules to create time for the program and or negotiations for space as particularly seen in case four. This flexibility required more than just the seal of approval from administrators. In agreement with findings from other studies

(Belansky et al, 2013; Fung et al, 2013; Patton, 2012; Rickwood & Singleton, 2013, Storey et al., 2011), the school leadership and/or staff buy-in was critical to how the program was received. In all of the cases in this study, the administrators believed in the program's ability to address a need they had or a goal they wanted to achieve with the girls. A recent study by Rickwood and Singleton (2013) revealed that the school administrators' support for physical activity (PA) opportunities in the school was critical for maintaining existing or adding more school-based PA opportunities. In that study, the staff's positive perception and effort to increase physical activity opportunities was not sufficient without appropriate support from leadership or the administrators. Evaluations of the effectiveness of APPLE (Alberta Project Promoting active living and healthy eating) schools or projects testing the AIM's (adapted version of Intervention Mapping¹⁸) strategy showed that positive results associated with these strategies were linked to changes in the school environment (Belansky et al, 2013; Fung et al., 2012). Specifically, leadership involvement, strong participation of the principal and an active school taskforce were some of the predominant changes in the school environment (Belansky et al, 2013; Fung et al, 2013). Teachers from APPLE schools also felt that support from the schools' leadership was a main driving force behind the implementation of the intervention regardless of the presence of a full-time school health facilitator, which was a fairly major component of the implementation success (Storey et al., 2011).

The cases examined in this study and other studies in the literature (Belansky et al, 2013; Fung et al, 2013; Patton, 2012; Rickwood & Singleton, 2013 & Storey et al., 2011) highlight the need for an actively engaged school staff in order to effectively run any program within the school setting. It is not enough to have a school that is somewhat engaged. Most success cases of

¹⁸ AIM focuses on implementing changes in the school environment and school policies related to nutrition and physical activity; it's an evidence-based health promotion tool for school settings (Fung et al, 2012)

coordinated school health initiatives are seen in schools where there is more time dedicated to school health (Propel Center for Population Health Impact, 2012). This is further described below in the final part of this discussion.

Ease of Program Delivery and Resourcefulness

The complexity (or ease of understanding and use) of this program gave it a greater appeal. Within the attributes of innovation in Roger's diffusion of innovation theory, complexity involves the ease of understanding and the ease of use (Rogers, 2003). As most of the administrators described, the agency offering the program clearly stated what the program entailed and what the program aimed to achieve. The information provided to the administrators did not leave them confused or needing to do further research. Thus, the clarity of the program goals facilitated their decision-making process. For the participants in all of the cases, the program was easy to adopt for many reasons. The schools did not have to do much legwork before and during the program. The agency delivering the program made it easy for the schools to adopt the program. A pivotal aspect to this was the fact that the program was free to the schools; the schools did not need to provide financial nor human resources required to deliver the program. The school's responsibility was very minimal. Other studies show that the presence of externally trained personnel or providing additional human resource within the school whose focus are specifically geared toward whole school health makes an important difference in schools where school health interventions have been effective or shown positive changes (Belansky et al, 2013; DeWitt, Lohrmann, O'Neil & Clark, 2011; Fung et al, 2012 & Lucarelli et al, 2014 & Storey et al., 2011).

The issue that many school administrators have with the DPA (Daily Physical Activity) policy mandated by Ontario is the lack of resources such as space, time, personnel and training

and equipment (People for Education, 2013). Thus it is no surprise that the DPA is not a priority in many school settings where they already feel constrained by time and resources (Patton, 2012; People for Education, 2013). There is not a lack of policy in Ontario¹⁹ geared towards students' health and school health; the issue is that many of the existing policies are not backed with adequate funding or human resources required for their delivery (People for Education, 2013). Some of the most successful school health programs are those that involve some form of facilitation (Propel Center for Population Health Impact, 2012). Facilitation will vary depending on the program and resources allocated to them. A review of major facilitated approaches in the school setting indicates that programs with higher doses of facilitation are more likely to be effective (Propel Center for Population Health Impact, 2012). For instance, having a school health coordinator who is fully dedicated to school health initiatives will likely lead to better effectiveness than projects/programs where the staff dedicates only some of their time to school health (Propel Center for Population Health Impact, 2012). Nanney et al., 2007 looked at factors that influenced educators to order (i.e. adopt) a dietary curriculum training CD. Their findings showed that the time required to complete the training was one of the leading influencers (Nanney et al., 2007). Although the scenario in this study differs from the cases studied here, since adopters were directly responsible for delivering the training, their evaluation highlights that the ease of using the 'innovation' is important (Nanney et al., 2007). The quality and reliability of the program content were also shown to be top influencers for adoption in the study by Nanney and colleagues but still not as much as the time required for the training (Nanney et al., 2007).

¹⁹ Some of Ontario's health policy for school health that have been introduced over the last decade: Foundations for a Healthy School Framework, Daily Physical Activity, Food & Beverage Policy, Open Minds, Healthy Minds (provincial policy on mental health) (People for Education, 2013)

Issues with restrictive legislation that affect the schools and its teachers can also be an impediment to the ease of delivering school health initiatives, since many of the programs similar to the Go Girls! program would still fall under extracurricular activities. Recent controversies about *Bill 115* (earlier in 2013) in Ontario and the restrictions (legislated wage freeze and limited benefits) it intended to put on teachers created a hostile environment where teachers and their unions refused to participate in extracurricular activities (Bill 115, 2012; The Canadian Press, 2013). The examples of school health policies and legislation mentioned above indicate the need for better coordination across policies and mandates in the school environment. Because it creates pockets of tension and controversy when on one hand there are policies aimed at improving opportunities for healthy active living in schools and then on the other legislation that makes it impossible for the school staff to fully maximize the school's potential to be a healthy active environment that enhances academic experience.

Similarly, issues with policies and funding strategies linked to the education system diminishes the public school system's ability to truly provide *all* children with a public education that allows them to reach their full learning potential (ETFO, 2014; Shaker, 2014). As illustrated by case four, large class sizes with students of varying needs within a grade level that does not match their abilities, especially in a high needs school, demonstrate the flaws of the education funding system. Smaller class sizes allow for more attention to be paid to the individual learning needs and abilities of each student, in addition to experiential-based learning opportunities (ETFO, 2014). The current funding scheme allows for an average of 25 students in Grade four to Grade eight classes across Ontario; in many school settings, there are up to 30 students in a classroom (ETFO, 2014). These kinds of scenario show that the public education system is

indeed not able to provide an optimal learning environment for all children, especially those with special needs and from a lower socio-economic status background (ETFO, 2014).

While the need for healthy active living among school-aged children has resulted in the popularity of school health programs and initiatives, a closer examination as seen in this case study is telling in terms of the schools' priorities and differing ability to influence children's active living experience. The cases studies suggest that a program like Go Girls! is appealing for most schools; however, the need for it is heightened in schools where many of the children come from disadvantaged homes or communities. There is reason to suggest that in disadvantaged schools, the task of providing active living opportunities is undermined by issues beyond the school that the school may or may not be able to influence (Saab et al., 2009; Stegeman & Costongs, 2012). That is, the living conditions of the children who attend the school; the quality of their environments, and the families and communities in which they live (Davidson, Simen-Kapeu & Veuglers, 2010; Stegeman & Costongs, 2012). This places emphasis on enhancing schools' organizational capacity, which is linked to the school's location and neighbourhood (Saab et al., 2009). The study by Saab et al., (2009) speaks to the variance in health outcomes experienced by students depending on their school. Their study suggest that increased positive health outcome experienced by students is attributed to socio-demographic factors such as: two parent families, increased family wealth, quality of one's neighbourhood and heightened student achievement. School-level factors also contribute to students' health experience. For instance a school's academic and socio-economic standing can contribute to the students' health outcomes (Saab et al., 2009). Hence, schools in a socioeconomically disadvantaged area will often have more students reporting lower emotional well-being and life satisfaction. In contrast students in schools with a wealthier population not only often benefit from their personal family and

neighbourhood situations, they also often benefit from being in a school located in a socioeconomically advantaged area (Saab et al., 2009). This is telling of how school-based intervention can create a steeper health gradient (Stegeman & Costongs, 2012); while the interventions are effective in improving the health of students, they are more effective in improving the health of children in higher socio-economic groups than their peers in lower socio-economic groups (Stegeman & Costongs, 2012). A school's capacity to respond to the needs of children from lower socio-economic groups can determine their learning outcomes and cognitive development (Stegeman & Costongs, 2012). As seen in the cases studied, the ability of the schools to keep their students engaged and to provide opportunities that enhance their learning is associated with the students' interest in being and staying in school (Stegeman & Costongs, 2012). Schools serving disadvantaged area are more likely to be associated with early school leaving especially when they are unable to meet the needs of their disadvantaged learners (Stegeman & Costongs, 2012). Overall, the school environment presents an opportune setting to influence children's active living experience. However, there is variation in the school's ability to do that depending on their location and standing.

I have highlighted some of the factors that were central to the adoption of a CSH program in the cases studies. These factors were discussed in light of existing literature and attributes of innovation described in Roger's diffusion of innovation theory. I have demonstrated that for these cases the compatibility and complexity of a program or innovation play an important role in determining the schools' receptiveness to it and highlighted the importance of assessing context regardless of the nature of the evidence-based school health initiative. Thus the local context can and should reframe the application of evidence-based frameworks to the specific

settings. This means that evidence-based frameworks or interventions cannot be applied to different settings without flexibility to the specific needs of that setting.

Strengths and Limitations

One of the key strengths of this study is that the focus was to examine contextual factors that influenced the decision-making process before a program is implemented. Most studies (mentioned in the discussion and initial literature review) that shed light on contextual factors are usually aimed at evaluating the effectiveness of a program within the school environment. The latter typically means that study results are focused on looking for improvements on several PA indicators or healthy active living indicators in general. Focussing on adoption attributes allows for a deeper insight into the school context; it provides the insight that many program developers, community partners and policy makers need to effectively interact with schools. The use of a case study approach heightened the level of detail and understanding possible from examining the cases. The thick description that is provided in a case study (Creswell, 2012; Merriam, 1998) expands the scope of understanding into the details and procedures involved in the different contexts that influence the schools interaction with external agencies. This study also adds to the small pool of current literature around school health that is specific to a Canadian context.

Although this study is not generalizable to other settings, the study design allowed for a rich description about the context. This rich description provides insight into the intricacies of the school environment that can serve as important lessons for administrators in other school settings who are looking to improve healthy active living opportunities within their schools. The same applies for external agencies and relevant partners who are looking for opportunities to interact with and offer programs with schools across the province and country.

The range of data collection was slightly limited in this study. One of the key strengths of case studies is the use of multiple data collection tools, that is: interviews, document review and observations (Creswell, 2012, Lauckner et al., 2012 & Merriam, 1998). Conducting observations as part of this study was not feasible due to the timing of the study and the fact that the school environment is a very busy place. Scheduling interviews and attempting to amass relevant documents (for document review) was already a challenge for most of the participants. Some interviews were shorter than anticipated either because the participant was difficult to reach or the interviewee emphasized not being able to spend more than 15 or 20 minutes on an interview. In some cases, it meant that the extent of the information drawn from the interview was limited or more clarifications could have added to the first interview if there was a possibility for a follow-up. In light of the time frame allowed for the study, the setting and interviewees busy schedules, making request for additional interviews and for employing observation as a data collection tool with the logistics involved both practically and ethically was not possible at this time. Adding this to future research however would provide further insight and would be very valuable.

In addition, future research that looks at schools where the program have been offered but not adopted would provide a greater perspective on the feasibility of using the school setting for school health initiatives and would add value to the findings of this study.

Conclusion

Concluding remarks and implications for practice. The emerging themes in this study reinforce the need for a comprehensive approach to school health. That is, an environment that takes an integrated approach to teaching its students (People for Education, 2013). As seen in the cases in this study, the schools are not solely focused on meeting academic requirements but also

looking to provide their students with opportunities that promote positive health behaviours, meaningful social interactions, empowerment and leadership skills. Participants' responses suggest that the ultimate goal was to provide the girls with life skills that they can apply in any situation and the mastery of which also allow them to better focus on learning academically. This, again, aligns with the whole school approach which has been proven to be able to provide children with skills they need to lead a healthy active lifestyle not just during their childhood but for life (Higgins et al., 2013). As seen in the discussion above, these cases align with findings from other studies that show that it is not enough to implement and deliver a program if it is not being done effectively. For effectiveness, many aspects of the four pillars within the CSH framework need to be addressed. This is why many of the studies that evaluate the effectiveness of the whole school approach focus on adjusting varied factors across the four pillars with much emphasis on the school environment (Higgins et al., 2013) Due to the nature of this study, findings are not generalizable to other settings. However, lessons from these cases can be used to enhance program adoption, program development, program delivery, and interactions among schools and community partners. In a time where there is much work needed to enhance coordinated school health actions across the country and beyond, this study provides important additions to the literature surrounding comprehensive school health discourses.

Recommendations. Lessons from the cases examined in this study show the need for CSH initiatives to be designed to fit the needs and goals of specific school settings. Some programs and or frameworks may or may not be feasible in certain school settings regardless of evidence that supports their effectiveness.

School health programs that are backed with adequate resources and support to and from the school as a whole have significantly better chances to be successful. Lessons from the case

studies suggest that the school environment is a very busy environment, and until there are better policies and changes within the education system to alleviate the existing resource strain, school health initiatives should not place much responsibility on the school. The same applies for policies that are geared towards promoting comprehensive school approaches.

Improvements in policies and legislation that impact schools are pivotal to schools' abilities to be used as settings to promote healthy active living among school-aged children. Thus more attention should be paid to legislation both within and outside the Education Act that impact the ability of other school health policies to flourish (e.g., Foundations for a Healthy School Framework, Daily Physical Activity, Food & Beverage Policy, Open Minds, Healthy Minds [provincial policy on mental health]).

The cases examined in this study and the discussion highlighted thus far demonstrates the need for poverty reduction strategies in Ontario and across the country (ETFO, 2014). Ultimately, the current flaws of the public education system impedes on the full learning abilities of many children from lower socio-economic status and impoverished families (ETFO, 2014) compounding the effects of other important social determinants of health. In the absence of better strategies that provide adequate access to early interventions programs, address social housing needs and level income disparities – among other, an increasing number of families rely on the potential of the school setting to give their children an inclusive and optimal learning opportunity and a healthy active childhood (ETFO, 2014; Stegeman & Costongs, 2012).

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APPENDIX A

Interview Guides

Schools

- Tell me about the Go Girls! program and the journey to having the program delivered in school.
- Who is involved with the decision-making process before the program is adopted?
- What does the decision making process entail?
- What is it about the Go Girls! Program that appeals to your school?
- What is your understanding of the program goals and how does this affect your decision to adopt the program?
- How does this program match with the existing values of your school?
- How does the evidence of the program benefits affect the decision to adopt this school based program?
- What additional factors (beyond those discussed so far) influence the school's decision to adopt healthy schools initiatives like the Go Girls! program?
- What factors specific to your school, facilitate or limit the incorporation of the program into the set curriculum and schedule?
- Time allocated to the program is an important factor to successful delivery and uptake of the program. How are decisions of scheduling/time slots allocated to the program made?
- How familiar are you with comprehensive school health?
- What value is given to comprehensive school health approaches within your school?
- What role does the school health committee (if applicable) play in this process?
- What principles if any are their decisions and contributions guided by?

Local agency: BBBS Thunder Bay

Case Manager

- Tell me about the journey to getting the go girls program to the schools?
- Who is approached and who is involved in the decision-making process?
- Who is the proposal sent to?
- What information is shared with the school to get them on board for the program?
- Are there traits about the school that you think make them more susceptible to adopt the program?
- What consideration do the schools make before taking up the program?
- How seriously do you feel the schools take the program and why?
- What's different in the schools
- What's their teachers' involvement in the decision making process? i.e. what is the interaction with other staff like?
- What do you know about parents' involvement?

Note: the purpose of this interview is to capture, what the process to getting the school on board for the program is and how this perspective can provide more understanding to the research question.

Executive Director

Note: the purpose of this interview is to learn about the historical perspective of the Go Girls! journey and using this perspective to help draw a broader picture for the study.

- Can you tell me about the journey to having the Go Girls program delivered by BBBS Thunder Bay
- Who used to be involved in the planning & training process?
- Can you tell me about the health unit's involvement
- What factors or school traits make them (schools) more susceptible to adopting the program
- Tell me about the Ministry of Education Funding for the program; do you think this influences the program's appeal for the schools?

Community Organization

- Tell me what you know about the Go Girls! program
- What about the communities where the schools have adopted the program?
- What can you tell me about the school communities?
- How would you describe the children that attend these schools?
- What can you tell me about these schools?
- Are there attributes to the school communities you feel would make the program more or less appealing to them?
- What factors do you think would affect schools' decision to adopt the program?

Note: the purpose of this interview is to gain more knowledge about the school context and to draw on elements about the school communities that may be important in understanding why such a program is appealing to the schools.

APPENDIX C

Interviewee Roles & Length of Interview

	Interviewees Roles	Interview Duration (minutes)
Case 1	Principal : John	19
	VP: Sheila	22
	Teacher: Derrick	16
Case 2	Principal: Karen	41
	VP: George	24
	Teacher: Joseph	36
Case 3	Principal: Judy	21
	Teacher: Caroline	14
	Facilitator: Jacob	17
Case 4	Principal: Esther	24
	VP & Teacher: Thomas	23
	Facilitator: Janet	51
Big Brothers Big Sisters Thunder Bay	Case Manager: Mary	43
	Director: Sarah	18
Community Organization	Coordinator: Madeline	15

APPENDIX D

Information Letters

Schools

Dear Prospective Participant,

My name is Afekwo Mbonu; I am a Master of Public Health student at Lakehead University's Department of Health Sciences. I will be doing a research study on: understanding contextual factors influencing adoption of a comprehensive school health program.

Addressing active living among Canadian children is of increasing importance since more children are living a sedentary lifestyle and children are being diagnosed with health conditions that normally occur in adulthood due to complications associated with obesity. The school environment is a critical intervention scene for school-aged children since this setting allows for the use of comprehensive school health approaches that have been praised for their synergistic effects when dealing with behaviours affecting adolescent health. The Go Girls! program resembles a comprehensive school initiative. It has been demonstrated to have positive outcomes for the girls who have participated. Despite the need for and benefits of such programs, there may be factors that affect the feasibility of and interest in running them and this has received little attention. Hence, the purpose of this qualitative inquiry is to describe and understand the decision-making process behind whether or not the Go Girls! program can be delivered in a school.

Your school has adopted the Go Girls! program offered by the Big Brothers Big Sisters (BBBS) Thunder Bay, therefore you are invited to be part of this study. Although this study is not an internal evaluation by BBBS Thunder Bay, the agency has agreed to support its facilitation as it can shed light on their program evaluation.

Data collection for this study will happen between mid-April and mid-May. During this time, I'll interview key informants within your school. Key informants will be chosen based on their knowledge and involvement with the program. Key informants will also be selected in order to capture the perspectives from various hierarchical levels in the schools, i.e. administrators, teachers, school health committee members. Participants from your schools who will be interviewed include: the school principal, the Go Girls School champion, members of the school health committee (if applicable), physical education teachers, and other relevant key informants (that I may be directed to by the principal) who can provide multiple perspectives to the dynamic of the decision-making process. Interviews will be conducted in a private and secure space within the school or other location chosen by the participants; interviews may take up to 45-60 minutes depending on responses. The findings of this research will result in a written thesis, a report that will be made available for the participating schools and Big Brothers Big Sisters Thunder Bay, publications in academic journals and presentations at conferences.

This study is supervised by Dr. Helle Møller at the Department of Health Sciences, Lakehead University. You may contact Dr Møller (hmoeller@lakeheadu.ca) or myself with any questions you may have about this study. Feel free to email me (ambonu@lakeheadu.ca) or call me at 613-276-5587 to let me know if you would like a copy of the report when the study is completed. If

you consent to be part of this study, please complete the enclosed consent form. Thank you for taking the time to think about participating in this study.

This study is approved by the Lakehead University Research Ethics Board. REB #:127 12-13. Feel free to contact their office at 807-343-8934 for any questions or concerns regarding the ethical conduct of this study.

Sincerely,

Afekwo Mbonu

Individual participant information letter

Dear Prospective Participant:

My name is Afekwo Mbonu; I am a Master of Public Health student at Lakehead University's Department of Health Sciences. I will be doing a research study on: understanding contextual factors influencing adoption of a comprehensive school health program.

Addressing active living among Canadian children is of increasing importance since more children are living a sedentary lifestyle and children are being diagnosed with health conditions that normally occur in adulthood due to complications associated with obesity. The school environment is a critical intervention scene for school-aged children since this setting allows for the use of comprehensive school health approaches that have been praised for their synergistic effects when dealing with behaviours affecting adolescent health. The Go Girls! program resembles a comprehensive school initiative. It has been demonstrated to have positive outcomes for the girls who have participated. Despite the need for and benefits of such programs, there may be factors that affect the feasibility of and interest in running them and this has received little attention. Hence, the purpose of this qualitative inquiry is to describe and understand the decision making process behind whether or not the Go Girls! program can be delivered in a school.

Your school has adopted the Go Girls! program offered by the Big Brothers Big Sisters (BBBS) Thunder Bay, therefore you are invited to be part of this study. Although this study is not an internal evaluation by BBBS Thunder Bay, the agency has agreed to support its facilitation as it can shed light on their program evaluation.

If you do not wish to answer a question posed in the Interview, you are by no means required to and your identity will be kept strictly confidential in the data analysis, write up and report of the findings. There are no risks associated with your participation in the project neither are there any direct benefits to you and you can choose to withdraw from the project at any time with absolutely no repercussions. Data collected for this study will be securely stored for at least 5 years in a locked cabinet in Dr. Helle Møller's office at Lakehead University, after which it will be destroyed. The findings of this research will result in a written thesis, a report delivered to the

participating schools and Big Brothers Big Sisters Thunder Bay, publications in academic journals and presentations at conferences.

This study is supervised by Dr. Helle Møller at the Department of Health Sciences, Lakehead University. You may contact Dr Møller (hmoeller@lakeheadu.ca) or myself with any questions you may have about this study. Feel free to email me (ambonu@lakeheadu.ca) or call me at 613-276-5587 to let me know if you would like a copy of the report when the study is completed. If you consent to be part of this study, please complete the enclosed consent form. Thank you for taking the time to think about participating in this study. This study is approved by the Lakehead University Research Ethics Board. REB #:127 12-13. Feel free to contact their office at 807-343-8934 for any questions or concerns regarding the ethical conduct of this study.

Sincerely,
Afekwo Mbonu

Information letter for local agency participants

Dear Prospective Participant:

My name is Afekwo Mbonu; I am a Master of Public Health student at Lakehead University's Department of Health Sciences. I will be doing a research study on: understanding contextual factors influencing adoption of a comprehensive school health program.

Addressing active living among Canadian children is of increasing importance since more children are living a sedentary lifestyle and children are being diagnosed with health conditions that normally occur in adulthood due to complications associated with obesity. The school environment is a critical intervention scene for school-aged children since this setting allows for the use of comprehensive school health approaches that have been praised for their synergistic effects when dealing with behaviours affecting adolescent health. The Go Girls! program resembles a comprehensive school initiative. It has been demonstrated to have positive outcomes for the girls who have participated. Despite the need for and benefits of such programs, there may be factors that affect the feasibility of and interest in running them and this has received little attention. Hence, the purpose of this qualitative inquiry is to describe and understand the decision making process behind whether or not the Go Girls! program can be delivered in a school.

Given your involvement with the program delivery, you are invited to be part of this study. Although this study is not an internal evaluation by Big Brothers Big Sisters Thunder Bay, the agency has agreed to support its facilitation as it can shed light on the program evaluation.

If you do not wish to answer a question posed in the Interview, you are by no means required to and your identity will be kept strictly confidential in the data analysis, write up and report of the findings. There are no risks associated with your participation in the project neither are there any direct benefits to you and you can choose to withdraw from the project at any time with absolutely no repercussions. Data collected for this study will be securely stored for at least 5 years in a locked cabinet in Dr. Helle Møller's office at Lakehead University, after which it will

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Sincerely,
Afekwo Mbonu

Information letter for community organization

Dear Prospective Participant,

My name is Afekwo Mbonu; I am a Master of Public Health student at Lakehead University's Department of Health Sciences. I will be doing a research study on: understanding contextual factors influencing adoption of a comprehensive school health program.

Addressing active living among Canadian children is of increasing importance since more children are living a sedentary lifestyle and children are being diagnosed with health conditions that normally occur in adulthood due to complications associated with obesity. The school environment is a critical intervention scene for school-aged children since this setting allows for the use of comprehensive school health approaches that have been praised for their synergistic effects when dealing with behaviours affecting adolescent health. The Go Girls! program resembles a comprehensive school initiative. It has been demonstrated to have positive outcomes for the girls who have participated. Despite the need for and benefits of such programs, there may be factors that affect the feasibility of and interest in running them and this has received little attention. Hence, the purpose of this qualitative inquiry is to describe and understand the decision making process behind whether or not the Go Girls! program can be delivered in a school.

Given your involvement in the community (Thunder Bay), you are invited to be part of this study. Although this study is not an internal evaluation by Big Brothers Big Sisters Thunder Bay, the agency has agreed to support its facilitation as it can shed light on the program evaluation. If you do not wish to answer a question posed in the Interview, you are by no means required to and your identity will be kept strictly confidential in the data analysis, write up and report of the findings. There are no risks associated with your participation in the project neither are there any direct benefits to you and you can choose to withdraw from the project at any time with absolutely no repercussions. Data collected for this study will be securely stored for at least 5

years in a locked cabinet in Dr. Helle Møller's office at Lakehead University, after which it will be destroyed. The findings of this research will result in a written thesis, a report delivered to the participating schools and Big Brothers Big Sisters Thunder Bay, publications in academic journals and presentations at conferences.

This study is supervised by Dr. Helle Møller at the Department of Health Sciences, Lakehead University. You may contact Dr Møller (hmoeller@lakeheadu.ca) or myself with any questions you may have about this study. Feel free to email me (ambonu@lakeheadu.ca) or call me at 613-276-5587 to let me know if you would like a copy of the report when the study is completed. If you consent to be part of this study, please complete the enclosed consent form. Thank you for taking the time to think about participating in this study. This study is approved by the Lakehead University Research Ethics Board. REB #:127 12-13. Feel free to contact their office at 807-343-8934 for any questions or concerns regarding the ethical conduct of this study.

Sincerely,
Afekwo Mbonu

APPENDIX E

Consent Form

For Schools



The _____ agrees to participate in the study entitled: *BEYOND THE PROBLEM & THE INTERVENTION, UNDERSTANDING CONTEXTUAL FACTORS INFLUENCING ADOPTION OF A COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL HEALTH PROGRAM.*

By signing this form, it indicates that the cover letter outlining the nature of the study and procedures involved has been reviewed by your school and that parties involved understand the following:

1. Your school's participation is entirely voluntary
2. There are no risks or direct benefits associated with the participation in the study.
3. Your school can withdraw from the study without repercussions.
4. Data collected will be stripped of your school's identifying information and will be securely stored at Lakehead University for five years following study completion.
5. Interpretation of data will result in a written thesis and/or report for publications.
6. A copy of the research findings will be available for participating schools and made public.

Signature of Principal

Date

Title

Feel free to contact us for further questions:

Afekwo Mbonu, BSc, DESS
MPH Candidate, 2013
ambonu@lakeheadu.ca

Helle Moller, PhD
Faculty of Health and Behavioral Sciences
hmoeller@lakeheadu.ca

Individual Consent Form



Department of Health Sciences

Tel: (807) 766 7118
Fax: (807) 766 7225
healthsciences.lakeheadu.ca

I _____ agrees to participate in the study entitled: *BEYOND THE PROBLEM & THE INTERVENTION, UNDERSTANDING CONTEXTUAL FACTORS INFLUENCING ADOPTION OF A COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL HEALTH PROGRAM.*

By signing this form, it indicates that the cover letter outlining the nature of the study and procedures involved has been reviewed and you understand the following:

1. Participation is entirely voluntary
2. There are no risks or direct benefits associated with the participation in the study.
3. Participants are free to not answer questions and can provide as much or as little information to questions posed.
4. Participants can withdraw from the study without repercussions.
5. Interviews will be audio recorded and all audio-taped interviews will be transcribed verbatim.
6. Interviews will be conducted at participants' place of work or other location of their choice; interviews may take up to 45-60 minutes depending on responses.
7. Data collected will be stripped of any identifying information and will be securely stored at Lakehead University for five years following study completion.
8. Interpretation of data will result in a written thesis and/or report for publications.
9. A copy of the research findings will be available for participants and made public.

Signature

Date

Title

Feel free to contact us for further questions:

Afekwo Mbonu, BSc, DESS

Helle Moller, PhD

APPENDIX F

Themes

Case 1
French immersion
school

- Need
- Fit
- Leadership

Case 2
French immersion
school

- Positive experience & Empowerment
- Seamless integration
- Credibility
- Resource

Case 3
Community school

- Un-structured positive space
- Fit
- Credibility
- Supportive Leadership & Staff

Case 4
Small school

- Strategies for life
- Fit
- Resource
- Leadership & Staff buy-in

APPENDIX G

Strengths Approach



We are respectful, responsible and honest. Everyone in our school community is proud to help make our school strong and safe.

Using strength-based strategies, we focus on prevention, intervention and education of all aspects of bullying and through this approach help students achieve to their fullest potential.

Bullying Prevention & Intervention
Helping students live up to their fullest potential.

Strengths In Motion



Parents are our most important partners. We value parental input and strive to create a welcoming learning environment.