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TEACHING AND LEARNING RESEARCH EXCHANGE

Moving for a Change: Working to Make Physical Education Meaningful for Students and Teachers

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Project 174
May 2009

This research was partially funded through a grant from the McDowell Foundation. However, the points of view and opinions expressed in project documents are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Foundation.

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Acknowledgements

We would like to take this opportunity to offer our sincere thanks to the Dr. Stirling McDowell Foundation for Research into Teaching. The support we received from the Foundation made this work possible. We would also like to thank the staff and students of the Saskatoon Public School Division for giving us the opportunity to continue our journey as lifelong learners. The teachers involved with this study were the heart and soul of the project.

Executive Summary

Physical activity during youth is associated with a variety of well-documented positive health outcomes. Unfortunately, physical activity declines substantially during adolescence. Experts in education and public health have identified school physical education as having the potential to play an important role in positively impacting physical activity patterns in children and promoting lifelong involvement (Kahn, et al., 2002; Trudeau & Shephard, 2005). Clearly, students need to be more physically active, and physical education programs in schools have the potential to reach nearly all school-aged youth. However, designing meaningful physical education programs for high school students continues to be an intriguing challenge for both teachers and researchers. It is well documented that many students become disillusioned with physical education in their middle school and secondary school years. Unfortunately, few school-based studies have developed and tested the effects of a comprehensive physical education program that targets the needs of students, and sees to enhance their experiences.

During the 2007-08 school year, our team of four teachers, an administrator, a university professor and a graduate student worked together to implement changes to existing high school physical education classes. Our goal was to develop and implement innovative approaches to better meet the needs of students taking physical education classes at Bedford Road Collegiate and find ways of increasing student interest in leading healthy active lifestyles. The general objective of the study was to investigate the effectiveness of the development and implementation of four innovative physical education programs on the physical activity behaviours and attitudes of students. In this project we moved away from what was always done, were allowed to see what was missing in the physical education programs and acted upon gaps we saw in the physical education program.

- Two significant changes were made to the required Wellness 10 offerings: 1) Health and Wellness 10 targeting those students who have been unsuccessful with traditional approaches to PE; and 2) non-semestered programming was given to a group of grade 10 boys backed with Science 10.
- In grades 11 and 12, we focused on offering a girls-only section of PE 20/30, and PED 35, a grade 12 class that challenged students and helped them in the area of personal training, fitness and active living, was made available to students in grade 12.

One of our goals in the project was to offer teachers opportunities to learn in their school context. Action research focuses on “specific situations and localized solutions” (Stringer, 2007). The teachers in this project had opportunity to work together to discuss programming in physical education in their school, and to plan and implement new classes and new ideas specific to their school setting.

The results presented highlight our actions on a curricular level as well as the lessons learned with changing practice and changing culture through innovation, collaboration and the process of research. A culture of wellness was created at the school with staff and students, and a culture of collegiality, respect, trust and learning was established with the research team.

Background

What happens when a group of educators passionate about the role that quality physical education can play in the lives of youth decide to question their practice? What happens when they come together to pose (and answer) difficult questions? Questions like: What are we doing and why? Can we do better? Do our programs meet our goals? Do we have the courage to change?

This project is about the answers to these questions and much more. We are that group of educators, and this report will tell you of our journey. Who are we, you ask? We are a diverse group, but what unites us is our desire to offer students in physical education classes the best experience possible, an experience so great that they will not only have a positive experience in our classes, but they will also be physically active for a lifetime! This is a lofty goal, one that is articulated in the curriculum of all provinces in Canada . . . one that is difficult to achieve.

The hardest part of conducting research is always the “telling of the story.” The process of research is both exciting and challenging. We planned, we acted, we reflected, we made changes, and we continued the process of learning and growing individually and as a team. Telling the story of our journey together offers only a glimpse into the research experiences of, and the results achieved by, the educators and students involved. This project took place in a school full of diversity and energy located in a core neighbourhood in Saskatoon. It is a community school that services many marginalized young people as well as offering full academic and extracurricular programming. The population of the school during the time of the study was approximately 700 students.

A journey is often used in research to describe the process used during the study. As a team we worked together to make change happen. Our team consisted of a group of physical educators that included four teachers, one administrator, one university professor and one graduate student. Although we worked as a team, we each had different roles or responsibilities that often overlapped and evolved within the project. The teachers were the heart of our project. Although they had varied backgrounds and interests, they were united by their passion for their students. Two of our teachers were male and, at the outset of this project, they were in their first three years of teaching. Two female teachers shared the responsibility of this project as one teacher who was in her sixth year of teaching left in March on a maternity leave. This opened the door for a teacher new to the school division to join the physical education department and to become part of our project.

Over the years a positive relationship with the College of Kinesiology at the University of Saskatchewan has developed. A faculty member and a graduate student provided our team with support in the research process, and their thoughtful questions challenged us at all stages of the project.

I am the final piece to this puzzle. Physical education and teaching are two of my passions. I have been away from that for three years in my role as an assistant principal. I miss it, but found myself comfortable with the position I now have, as a part of a team to question what we were doing in the area of physical education at the school level and what we wanted to change. It was my privilege to lead this team, and it is an honour to tell our story.

Our questioning of practice and class structure began about the same time our school division began looking at student engagement and Collegiate Renewal. Collegiate Renewal is a system priority focused on transforming our high schools and the learning students receive. Collegiate Renewal is an invitation for innovation. Because of the direction the school division was going with professional development and priorities, we had permission to question, to reflect and to sit as a team to make change happen. In my professional career, I have been intrigued by change and I was excited that now I had an opportunity to work with young, motivated teachers as we embarked on change . . . change in practice, change in structure and, perhaps most important, change in culture. From Michael Fullan's earlier work (1999), we have learned that "change is a process not an event." What I have learned from this experience is that change is ongoing and without it we lose the best part of teaching . . . meeting the needs of our students and learning with our students. With change we find ways of having our students at the center of our program, and we can then build a program around what they need. Change involves teachers making change happen in the context of their classes. Change knowledge engages teachers in continuous and sustained learning about their practice and in the settings in which they work (Fullan, 2007). In my experience, the process of change includes action, collaboration, communication and reflection. It is action research and it is reflective practice.

More and more we read in educational research about the need for collaboration, vision, choice, ownership and action. It has been suggested "to be successful in a changing and increasingly complex world . . . school communities need to work and learn together to take charge of change, finding the best ways to enhance young people's learning (Stoll, et al., 2006). Date & Ryan (2008), along with Fullan (2006), discuss moving traditional professional development with teachers towards creating opportunities for teachers to build leadership capacity within schools by providing teachers with "much needed choice and responsibility for learning in the school context" (Date & Ryan, p. 6). The action research model of look, think, act (Stringer, 2007) was ideal for this study as it allowed us to work together to not only question our practice but also to plan and reflect on our current practice and, most importantly, on the changes we made.

One of our goals in the project was to offer teachers opportunities to learn in their school context. The teachers had an opportunity to listen to their students. The teachers had an opportunity to work together to discuss programming in physical education, and to plan and implement new classes and new ideas. The teachers had an opportunity to create change in a comfortable safe setting. My role was to support the process and allow the ideas to grow and take shape. The students in our school saw the benefits. Not only was a culture of wellness created during this project, but a culture of collegiality and learning was also established. A team of educators learned from each other, grew together and trusted the process and the people. Our project gave us a chance to move, to change ... together.

What Guided Us

Physical activity during youth is associated with a variety of well-documented positive health outcomes. Unfortunately, physical activity declines substantially during adolescence. Experts in education and public health have identified school physical education programs as having the potential to play an important role in positively impacting physical activity patterns in children and promoting lifelong involvement (Kahn, et al., 2002; Trudeau & Shephard, 2005).

Clearly students need to be more physically active, and physical education programs in schools have the potential to reach nearly all school-aged youth. However, designing meaningful physical education programs for high school students continues to be an intriguing challenge for both teachers and researchers. It is well documented that many students become disillusioned with physical education in their middle school and secondary school years. Few school-based studies have developed and examined the effects of a comprehensive physical education program that addresses the needs of high school physical education students.

This study offered a group of educators an opportunity to develop and implement physical education programs specifically designed to meet the needs of students, and to determine the effects of such programs on the attitudes and behaviours of students enrolled in a variety of high school physical education classes.

OBJECTIVES AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The general objective of our research study was to investigate the effectiveness of the development and implementation of four innovative physical education programs on the physical activity behaviours, attitudes and experiences of students. To achieve our objective, we planned to make changes at both the school and classroom level.

SCHOOL LEVEL

- Create a culture of wellness and excitement around physical activity.
- Explore and create more options for meeting student needs in the area of physical education/wellness.
- Increase the number of students who apply to take credit physical education.
- Increase number of students participating in intramurals and in the fitness room.
- Change curricular structure by offering Wellness 10 in a non-semester format.
- Offer an opportunity for physical education teachers to reflect on their current practices and plan for ways to better meet the needs of students.

CLASSROOM LEVEL

- Positively change the physical activity behaviours of our students.
- Support students in successfully attaining positive attitudes in physical activity in the non-traditional PE classroom setting.
- Provide an opportunity to increase credit attainment of disengaged youth.
- Encourage and engage more female students to choose credit PE 20/30 at Bedford Road Collegiate.

The following research questions guided our work:

1. What are the experiences of a team of physical educators as they work together to develop innovative approaches to the instruction of physical education?
2. How can we as physical educators and we as a school better meet the interests and needs of our physically active, involved and engaged students?
3. Do innovative approaches to the instruction of physical education increase the physical activity levels of students during school and after school hours?
4. Do innovative approaches to the instruction of physical education improve the experiences, attitudes and perceptions of students in physical education classes?
5. Do innovative approaches to the instruction of physical education in grade 10 increase the enrolment of students in grades 11 and 12 physical education?
6. Will innovative programming challenge the physically active, involved and engaged students to look at and learn about physical activity and physical fitness at a higher level?

COLLECTING DATA

An integral component of the action research process is the collection of information that facilitates the reflections on actions and offers valuable knowledge to inform future actions. In our project, multiple methods of data collection were used and included the following: individual interviews; focus group discussions; project meetings; document analysis; teacher reflection journals; and student questionnaires.

- Individual interviews and focus groups were conducted to give teachers and students the opportunity to discuss experiences with the implementation of new programming as well as reflect on past experiences.
- Project meetings were key to the study; we met to reflect on experiences and actions and plan for next steps in the process. Notes were taken during each meeting.
- Document analysis took the form of a review of provincial curricula and supporting documentation, department and individual yearly plans and Collegiate Renewal documents.
- Reflective journals were kept by educators to record their plans and experiences with the development, instruction and evaluation of the proposed physical education program. Journal stems and reflective questions were given to each teacher at various times in the study.
- Student questionnaires were given out at the beginning of each semester and were reviewed, revised and discussed during the study. Questionnaires were designed to:
 - determine attitudes towards physical education and physical activity;
 - ask students to describe what they would like to see in their physical education classes; and
 - offer students an opportunity to discuss the activities they liked or disliked and the environment (actions of teachers and students) they felt would enhance their learning in a physical education setting.

The Journey

From our initial talks and meetings which began in January of 2007 until our final team meeting and focus group in November of 2008, we worked as a team to determine the best way to create change in our physical education program, how to better meet the student needs of our community, and how to motivate and interest more students to continue taking physical education in grades 11 and 12. The results presented highlight our actions on a curricular level as well as the lessons learned about changing practice and changing culture through innovation, collaboration and the process of research.

It was never our intent to change the provincial curricula or to disrupt what was going well in our school. It was our intention, however, to look critically at our complete physical education program and reflect critically on our actions and our beliefs. Currently in Saskatoon Public Schools, Wellness 10 is the last required physical education class students need to graduate. At our school, Wellness 10 is a semestered class, which means that students take it every day for half the school year. Wellness 10 is structured in a segregated setting with girls-only and boys-only classes. Physical Education 20 and 30 are optional or elective classes that students take as a credit towards graduation. Like Wellness 10, Physical Education 20 and 30 are semestered, but unlike Wellness 10, they are offered in a co-ed setting with boys and girls together.

During our first meetings, we began the difficult process of asking why we were doing what we were doing and if we had the courage to answer the difficult questions and embark upon our journey together. Essential to the success of our project was the courage it took the teachers to critically examine our school's physical education program and their own practices and ask: what is missing, what more can be done? In addition to this courage, a sense of trust and safety existed in our research group that made our teachers willing to take risks and challenge traditions. Once this group was given time to reflect on our programs, review the curriculum and question class structure and activities, brainstorming concerns and searching for possible solutions became common practice. These actions, an essential part of being a reflective practitioner, were made possible by the safe, trusting environment in which we worked.

Because Collegiate Renewal was occurring at the system level and this project took place at the school level, we felt we had permission to move away from what was always done. Not only did we look to see what was missing in our physical education program, but we also decided to act and put the wheels in motion to move for a change in our program. In reflection, we now see that the permission we had to initiate, implement and, we hope, maintain change in program and practice came from the mutual respect among the researchers, the leadership and support offered through the school administration and, most importantly, our knowledge deep down that we could do better. Having permission to move away from what was always done allowed us to see what was missing in our physical education program and decide where to act and move for a change in our service programming.

- In an attempt to reach students who were not successful in “traditional” types of physical education programming, four new classes were implemented: a new Wellness 10 class was offered called Health and Wellness 10. Many students enrolled in the Health and Wellness sections had experienced failure in traditional programs and were not pursuing a healthy, physically active lifestyle; we felt that this choice had resulted in disengagement of these students from the school and the school community.

- A very unique opportunity was offered to a second group of grade 10 boys. A class was developed and offered in a non-semestered format that allowed them to stay together all year, every day, with the same teacher teaching, for both Wellness 10 and Science 10.
- The third class implemented was a “girls-only” PE 20/30 class. It was our intention to provide this opportunity to better meet the needs and interests of all youth, promote the movement of more females into credit physical education and offer the young women the support they need in order to live healthy active lifestyles.
- Too often we forget about how to challenge our students who do lead healthy lifestyles, who are engaged and who are active. Often we see these students in leadership roles and participating in school and community extracurricular offerings, but we, as a school, have not found ways to help these students in the area of personal training and fitness; we did this with Physical Education 35. Each of these classes will be discussed later as actions taken at each grade level.
- Another action we implemented grew out of our midterm reflection as we questioned our elective physical education numbers. The Kinesiology graduate student that worked with our project sat in on this discussion and shared her work in this area. As a team we came up with a promotional strategy to increase the awareness of and interest in our credit physical education programming. This action was not proposed in our initial study, but was a very successful result of our time together carrying out the study.

The following chart on the next page outlines the physical education program established at the school and the course changes implemented at the outset of the project.

	CURRENT COURSE DESCRIPTION:	PROPOSED IMPLEMENTED COURSE:
GRADE 10	<p>Aim of Course:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a wellness philosophy • Encourage you to pursue wellness as a lifelong behaviour and pattern in your life • Investigate six components of wellness: physical activity; stress management; physical fitness; leisure; relationships; and healthy eating <p>Goals of Course:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and enhance self concept • Develop an understanding and appreciation of the components and skills of health related fitness through a healthy active lifestyle • Develop and refine motor skills enabling participation in a wide variety of physical activities • Develop competency in recognizing, establishing and maintaining positive relationships • Develop personal dignity through a positive sense of one's own sexuality • Develop a sense of spirituality <p>Activities Included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Archery, badminton, cross country skiing, football, golf, gymnastics, health and fitness, jazz dance, lacrosse, rugby, slow pitch, soccer, social dance, step aerobics, team handball, tennis, ultimate frisbee, weight training and wrestling 	<p>A: Health and Wellness Section</p> <p>Target Group → Those students who have been unsuccessful with traditional approaches to PE in grade 9 or have failed Wellness 10 previously.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-ed section • Semester class • Bring instruction closer to the Wellness 10 curriculum (60/40) • Look at more lifelong activities (vs. traditional team sports) • Negotiated curriculum • Volunteerism <hr/> <p>B: Non-Semester Programming</p> <p>Target Group → One section (boys only). Those students who have high need for physical education program all year (high energy, at risk, in need of positive mentoring, not leading healthy active lifestyles). As well, we looked to those students who were in need of slowing down the content in the area of science.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Backed with Science 10 • Integrate some health modules with Science 10 curriculum

<p>GRADE 11</p>	<p>Co-Ed Program</p> <p>Aim of Course:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction to activities that students did not experience in Wellness 10 and lifelong activities <p>Activities Included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aquatics, badminton, bowling, broomball, cross country skiing, curling, downhill skiing/snowboarding, fencing, fitness, golf, lawn bowling, outdoor games, racquetball, squash, scuba diving, social dance, tennis and wall climbing 	<p>Segregated PE20/30 (Girls-Only Offering)</p> <p>Target Group → More than just our female school athletes who were traditionally taking credit PE.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Goal to increase female activity levels and school involvement (class, intramural, extra-curricular) • Similar programming • Negotiated curriculum – students provided choice in activities
<p>GRADE 12</p>	<p>Co-Ed Program</p> <p>Aim of Course:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction to activities that students did not experience in Wellness 10 and lifelong activities <p>Activities Included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aquatics, badminton, bowling, broomball, cross country skiing, curling, downhill skiing/snowboarding, fencing, fitness, golf, lawn bowling, outdoor games, racquetball, squash, scuba diving, social dance, tennis, and wall climbing 	<p>Physical Education 35</p> <p>Target Group → Those students who wish to experience a more individualized fitness focused grade 12 physical education class.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training principles and techniques • Personal fit plans • Personal goal setting • Nutrition goals/plan • Sport specific training • Seasonal training • Injury prevention • Fit labs

Actions, Outcomes and Lessons Learned in our Journey

... what we do in Physical Education is engagement. You know – I think we have taken it or tried to take it to another level to not just engage the kids who want to be in PE, but to do our best to engage all the kids – make a purposeful program that meets the needs of all our kids . . . kids in grades 9 through 12. We want all kids active all year, every year from walking in the door to walking across the stage. (J – Oct 08)

ACTION 1: HEALTH AND WELLNESS 10 SECTION

It is just that you are building a relationship with them – it's not just get in a line and do this, now go . . . it is what we are going to do together. And those 4 girls they are even buying in and are here every day – like I mean every day. They have even come to a couple intramural sessions and didn't just stand at the door and look in – they did something – they actually came in and did something – they took part in a school activity - WOW! (J – Nov 09)

Not only in core neighbourhoods or community schools do we find students who are turned off physical education, leading unhealthy lifestyles and not involved in the school community. However, when you are looking at meeting the needs of all students, meeting the needs of those who have only seen failure is where teachers in a community school often want to start. The purpose of this particular class was to find ways of engaging our students who had been unsuccessful with traditional approaches to physical education in grade 9 or had previously failed Wellness 10. The Health and Wellness 10 section was also created for those students from our community registering in the fall who might be at risk of not completing a regular physical education program or completing their school commitments.

The section was set up as a co-educational, semestered class. It was purposely scheduled for period three, which is the period right before lunch. During this time slot, there was no other regular class scheduled in the gym; therefore, the class provided a more comfortable environment for PE than would have been possible during other periods when one or more classes might have been scheduled at the same time.

One goal of this class was to put into place a program that would meet the needs of a group of students who did not like physical activity or were very poor attenders so success in a class was difficult. We wanted to find ways to motivate the unmotivated.

First and foremost, the teacher worked very hard on providing his students with a welcoming, non-threatening environment. He did this by allowing the students to be a part of the decision-making around the structure of the class and the activities in which they would participate. The teacher took the time to build relationships and simply play with the students. Our lesson learned was the importance of relationships and building the rapport and trust with your students. In a conversation during one of our reflection and

planning sessions, discussion centered around the success of this class and the surprise at the level of participation and student engagement we were seeing.

J – The best thing about this class is the connections with kids – the gym became their space – they saw success – they belonged there.

R – I see a huge change – those boys walk in here now like they own the gym. You made it that way – you worked with them to create a place that they felt safe. It isn't just the classroom or the gym – it is the person – or the people – it's all about building the relationships – the trust. The kids made it their own space because you allowed them to. (Nov 07 meeting)

Feeling safe and a sense of belonging were themes that we heard constantly with this class. The students saw the gym as a place they could have fun, where they could see and feel success.

I didn't really feel a part of the class before you know – I don't know – now I just kind of feel like I belong . . . and Mr. Reis plays with us – it is fun. (Student response)

Feeling safe for these students was not just about physical safety; for most, it was social safety that was important. In this class students did not feel compared to everyone else or judged by anyone else. An environment was created where they felt they could take risks, try something new, make mistakes and learn. The class as a whole was filled with students who usually were not changed for PE and either stood on the sidelines with excuses or wandered the halls during class time. This group of students who had felt marginalized in the gym prior to this class felt some ownership, success and enjoyment.

It was different this time – Mr. Reis took the time to talk and get to know me. It wasn't so structured and stuff but I was totally sweating all the time – I even changed out – cause I wanted to . . . you know? (Student response)

A second goal of this class was to increase the activity level of the students and promote healthy choices and healthy lifestyles. Allowing choice in activities, students quickly began to increase their level of active participation in the class. When choice was given to the students, initially the students wanted what was most familiar to them; this meant basketball and floor hockey for the boys and volleyball and basketball for the girls. Slowly more and more activities were introduced and, as trust and the class climate were established, the students engaged more readily in the new activities. As well, we observed and documented more involvement by these students in the weight room and with intramural activities. Because of the relationships built between teacher and student and among the students, many felt welcome and comfortable in participating in activities outside the physical education class time. One student also tried out for and made the school basketball team. Fifteen of the seventeen students in this section received a Wellness 10 credit; however, we celebrated an even better outcome in observing the personal, individual confidence and growth in each of these young people. We believe that school engagement and school attachment were enhanced with many, if not all, of the students in the class.

It was good – I got the credit and now I want to take it next year. You know I failed PE in grade 9 and tried two other times to take it in grade 10. I don't know – this was kind of different. I like it. I like the weight room and stuff. (Student response)

ACTION 2: NON-SEMESTERED PROGRAMMING

The non-semestered Wellness course came from wanting to try that scheduling-wise – but we had quite a group of boys in that grade 9 bunch the year before that were really a challenge in many classes – and through the year we were continually saying how we need support for these boys – we need some positive mentoring for them – what kind of programming can we put in place to help their behaviour. So really we saw this as an opportunity to better support this group of boys and the all year PE was like icing on the cake. (T – Nov. 09)

Physical education teachers will never argue against an opportunity to have a physical education class offered all year. The problem usually doesn't come from the need to justify non-semestered classes, but from the difficulty in scheduling them. It is difficult to find classes to back each other for the entire year and keep the class and teacher together for the full year. During the beginning stages of planning for this project, we discussed the idea of a non-semestered class. At the classroom level, one of our project goals was to increase the physical activity behaviours of our students, but we also wanted to see what impact a non-semestered class would have on our students' academic work and school involvement.

This class was offered during period two. There were two other Wellness sections offered at the same time as well as four other science classes. Classroom space and schedules were established prior to the start of the class. The teacher had the same science classroom for the entire year, and flexible programming was possible so the class did not follow a traditional odd/even non-semestered schedule. In most non-semestered programming, classes are held every other day for the entire school year, and in some situations, the teachers change at the semester change. With the flexibility and opportunities provided by working as a research team, the teacher had opportunity to create a schedule that benefited his teaching style and the needs and interests of the students. The same group of students stayed with the same teacher for the year; thus, they were together every day for the entire school year.

It is awesome – we have gym all year. Sometimes we have it three times, then science after that. It was like there was a schedule and everything – but things happened like more flexible. And I like having Mr. Bowes everyday and he is my football coach – you really get to know him and you can talk to him about stuff. (Student response)

I like it because I understand science now. Mr. Bowes is a good teacher and makes it fun. Sometimes I get tired of seeing everyone every day though. (Student response)

As we did with the Health and Wellness 10 section, we learned from this class the importance of the relationships and building of rapport within classrooms. The group of young men targeted for this class was interesting, diverse and energetic. Generally, these youths were skilled movers who wanted to be in the gym and active. For some, having the Science 10 class spread over an entire year was helpful because they had struggled with science and/or math in their grade 9 year.

Positive relationships with this class happened quickly and, once established, they promoted school involvement and school engagement. The teacher influenced in a very positive way the development of a sense of community. Not only did we see this group of young men become more involved in our athletics program, we also saw them

become more involved in intramurals and the weight room and come forward as volunteers at school activities and our tournaments. The sense of community was highlighted when this class initiated wider community involvement. As part of the volunteerism component of the Wellness 10 curriculum, the class helped to build a rink at one of our elementary schools as well as initiating a neighbourhood snow shoveling partnership with a community senior complex.

I didn't really get into anything last year in school. Now that I know Bowes and Reis so well I am going to wrestle and play football next year. (Student response)

I like it because you feel better knowing you have gym all year. And the days we are in science I sometimes go to the weight room and stuff. I'm doing way more than my friends who only have it next semester. They don't have their gym stuff here so they don't even go at noon or anything. (Student response)

It makes me less lazy, and I do more stuff because I have confidence about what I can do. (Student response)

Every student in this class saw success. Each student received a credit for both Wellness and Science 10. More specifically, all students increased their marks in both subject areas in comparison to their grade 9 marks. Also, in tracking this group of students as they moved into their 20 level (grade 11) sciences, we learned that possibly there was better retention of the science concepts as well.

. . . initially I heard from the grade 11 Science teachers that these kids are behind – they were slow – they work slower because it was every other day – some days we would have it on Thursday and their assignment wasn't due till Monday – so now for things to be done overnight – they didn't have that expectation behind them . . . so they are already behind three weeks in and the teachers are looking at me like I didn't teach them anything. They asked me, 'How did they do last year in class?' 'Well, they did fine, but they were used to a very relaxed pace.' We backed everything with PE. And I would see the kids every day so leaving the gym I would yell 'remember Science 10 – this is due tomorrow' – so not only do they get the hand-holding reminder – they get another night to get it done. So initially I thought I really did these kids a disservice – the academic realm backed with PE didn't do them any favours. But then, realizing now talking to teachers again at midterm – this group of boys got a better, more in-depth understanding of the concepts we took. So now talking to (the 20 level teachers), once those teachers understood more of the process from last year and helped the kids through more of the quicker paced expectations – the kids really are doing well, and I think last year's class maybe even gave the boys a step up from some other kids who maybe didn't get the depth of understanding because we had the full year, we had more time. I really miss having those guys every day – now I see them in the hallway, we are pretty close. We only ended up with 18 because a couple of them moved away – and we really became a pretty tight-knit group. Twelve of them played football for us this year and a few of them are wrestling as well. (R – Nov 09)

ACTION 3: “TASTE OF . . . ”

When planning the actions for the second semester of our project, the question we were discussing was one that you could hear in physical education department meetings across the province. We believed that we could probably pick the grade 10 students likely to choose Physical Education 20 (PED 20) on the basis of their activity levels, skill levels, interest and motivation. At times we were disappointed when some of these students did not choose PED 20 because many students think they need every math and every science. The question we pondered was: how can we change the thinking of our top-end, active kids so that they see the mental and physical benefits of taking PED 20? And at the same time, how can we reach those kids who simply need to be more active? Much discussion took place and, after some talk, we asked ourselves: Do the students really know what credit or elective physical education (PED 20 and PED 30) is all about? Do they know how different it is from Wellness? How well have we promoted it? At that point we quickly began planning for our “Taste Of . . . ” week.

With the support of our community school coordinator, we were able to take all of our Wellness 10 students out to community activities for one entire week of physical education classes. We provided the students with the opportunity to experience a bit of what the grade 11 class has to offer. In choosing the activities, we had to take into account cost and proximity. Each student was able to experience bowling, billiards and a fitness facility.

Positive outcomes of this action were immediately apparent in the feedback from both students and staff. Then, when we saw the number of students who chose PED 20 as an option and had gathered data showing increased enrollment for the following year, we knew we were on the right track. We are sure to continue this action in the future. The importance of creating awareness and providing students with opportunities to promote and experience grade 11 physical education were strong factors contributing to the enrollment figures noted below.

Phys Ed 20 and Phys Ed 30 enrolments on Sep 30 2008 at Bedford Road

Year	PED 20	total	% PED 20
Sep 30 2007	100	262	38.17%
Sep 30 2008	79	158	50.00%

Year	PED 30	total	% PED 30
Sep 30 2007	67	195	34.36%
Sep 30 2008	88	248	35.48%

ACTION 4: GIRLS-ONLY PHYSICAL EDUCATION 20/30

*It allows options for females to feel comfortable in the gym. It is a celebration almost of equality that girls know they count, that their opinion matters when they select a female-only gym class, and actually get it. It shows that our program will work towards getting more people active when the students are not required to take PED 20/30.
(D – March 09)*

Physical Education 20 and 30 are elective classes that students choose to take. They are credits toward graduation but they are not required to graduate. It was felt by the team that the 20 and 30 program at the school was very traditional and addressed the needs and interests of a small population of students.

The debate around segregated physical education has been ongoing for many years. Our intention in creating a “girls-only” class was to contribute to the literature in this area, but more importantly, we wanted to better meet the needs of our female students. The goal of this class was to increase female activity levels and school involvement and to target more than just our female school athletes as candidates for elective physical education. We wanted everyone to find our physical education programs available, attractive and achievable.

The girls in PED 20/30 appreciated the atmosphere in the class – non-threatening, not worrying about how they looked doing an activity. It was still competitive but they had more confidence in approaching the activity when it was just females and I was able to connect with just females and my teaching style was more relaxed than having to deal with males as well. (D – March 09)

This class followed an activity schedule similar to that in other credit physical education classes, but the schedule was flexible in allowing student choice and negotiation of curriculum. The class was scheduled for period three in the second semester. Two other credit physical education classes were scheduled at the same time. At the outset of the class, it had a very low enrollment, but with the support of the school administration, the class was allowed to run anyway. As a research team, we felt strongly about providing this opportunity to our female students and we took the low enrollment as an opportunity to be more flexible, opening the doors to the class in a very different way.

When we were looking at what changes we wanted, mine really was that the majority of people in our SPED classes are males – I am not okay with that – and really I still have difficulty with it. But to have the support to do something about it was great. To actually hear, ‘Yeah, we will run a class with eight,’ ‘Yeah, we will do this,’ ‘We will try that,’ and having administration support it and continually say, ‘You know, we need to start somewhere’ – gave us so much leeway to do things. I mean, although nothing changed too much with the curriculum with the activities and class delivery, cause I would like to see much more change, I would still like to push it to be different, I just felt that we needed something for the girls so they knew they are important and we want to make things better for them. (D – Apr 08)

This girls-only class was scheduled at the same time as a regular PED 20 and PED 30 (grade 11 and 12) class. The girls in all three sections were given an opportunity to move in and out of these three classes during any of the activities. Again, when looking at the girls involved, we saw great diversity within the group. The female students who chose this girls-only class were diverse in their physical abilities and in their level of school engagement. They would not have taken PED 20 or 30 if it was a co-ed section. This group of girls wanted to be active and enjoyed physical education, but they were not confident enough to be in a co-ed and (as they perceived it) competitive setting. The girls who chose the co-ed setting were more skilled, were school athletes and were more involved in the school. When we approached the girls in the co-ed class, encouraging them to switch classes to increase the enrollment of the girls-only class, we found that they did not want to change. At the time, they wanted a class that was more competitive and more active. Our next step was to provide choice and allow the girls to experience different programming. The girls could see what activities each teacher was initiating, and they were able to choose which activity they would like to do.

I think one important part of the scheduling last year was that although you only had eight girls, but there were two other classes going on at the same time – so (the teacher) opened her class to those girls as well. Each of the teachers were like ‘ok, you girls decide when you want to be a part of what Ms H is doing,’ and she was more than flexible to say ‘this is what we are doing; you are welcome to come whenever you want.’ What a wonderful way to get things started and to get the word out about what we offer and it shows students, parents, teachers and administration what happens in the PE department to really meet the needs and interests of kids. (T – Oct 08)

You know, one thing with the people we are working with in this department – we just want kids active – doesn’t matter if it happens in your class or your class or hers or his – to get five teachers and admin to say ‘ok, it doesn’t matter – just get out there like you have to produce, you have to be involved and active and you have to follow these rules and for the most part we all have the same expectations or rules in our classes – just get out there – we don’t care where it is’ – that is pretty cool. (R – Oct 08)

A true team approach was taken by the physical education teachers to better meet the needs of the females in their classes. During the period three group of credit physical education classes, the female students were given opportunity to move from one class to the other in order to meet their areas of interests and experience the girls-only structure. The girls who registered in the girls-only class stayed with their initial teacher the entire time. The girls from the two other classes were able to flow from one class setting to the other, and what we learned from students through surveys and interviews was that the girls in the co-ed setting wanted a class where everyone participates and is actively involved. They wanted to be in a class, not necessarily with boys, but with people who were willing to work hard. They were basing their choice on their experiences in grade 9 and 10 physical education classes and, at this level, it wasn’t the co-ed aspect to the class that intrigued them; it was a higher level of student engagement that they were looking for. This observation was shared with one of our teachers who had thought that the girls were joining the boys in order to improve their physical education experience; however, once the girls were with the boys, in many situations they were reluctant to join in. This teacher now felt that our school just needed a couple of years to get an all-girls section into the culture of the school.

Some of the activities were really cool. I think that the girls-only class needs to stay and the girls need to try it out and not just think being with the boys is the good thing – this was pretty cool. (Student response)

The girls that didn't want to come into this class really didn't want to be with the boys they wanted to just be in a class that had everyone active and participating and stuff. They should realize that all the girls who take the credit PE are the ones that want to be there – they are not forced to take it because they have to. This was a good year but I would have liked to do some totally different things like stuff I can't do otherwise. But I really liked it. (Student response)

Enrollment numbers alone do not represent the success of a class. While this class had an original enrolment of only eight students, these were young women who would not have taken the class at all in the traditional format. Success also lies in seeing small changes and the benefits of those changes to our students. In this girls-only section, all girls received a credit. Two of them graduated. All of the other girls went on to register in a PED 30 class the following year. The class provided an opportunity for the young women to feel comfortable in the gym and with physical activities. The PED 20 and 30 classes focus on lifelong activities and community facilities. The girls gained confidence and each one reported increased activity in her lifestyle. This class had a very positive impact on the mental health and the physical health of the students enrolled, as indicated in the following comments:

I am more active now because it (the class) gave me more motivation to go out if even for a walk and confidence to try things I haven't done before.

I am more active now cause when I have SPED every day it reminds me to try and do active things outside of school. This SPED class also gave me some ideas for activities I would like to try that I didn't think I could do before.

I know how to play more sports and where to play them in the city so I can be more active. I graduate this year and I think I might even buy a pass to the Y or something because I like doing stuff now and I don't feel stupid doing it.

What would have been better was if we combined a special fitness class with this one and went every day all year and got two credits.

ACTION 5: PHYSICAL EDUCATION 35

Physical Education 35 was the class that initiated this project. The teacher saw the need for it after talking to students in his wrestling program. Other schools in the city and province were running similar courses, and he wanted an opportunity to explore what it might look like at our school with our student population. The class was offered as a semestered, co-educational class. It was scheduled in period two. The entire focus of the class was on individual fitness, development and knowledge. The goal of the class was to increase activity levels and to promote lifelong fitness practices. It is important to note that this class is the only change we implemented that responded to the needs of the active, engaged, physically skilled students.

I think that the PED 35 really met the needs of those kids who were already involved and engaged in our school. It didn't change their activity levels right now very much – but we certainly met their needs

better. But, what I really noticed was a huge difference in those that were not our school athletes. There were more just regular kids wanting to be active through fitness rather than the sport model. Like look at those two girls – I didn't even know them – and they were completely into it and doing more things around the school. So I noticed a difference with the lower end disengaged kids up to the mid-range kids. You really made an impact with them. (T – Nov 08)

Aside from units of instruction within our physical education classes, school teams, school fit clubs, school weight room instruction and program development, we have not provided our students with quality instruction in the area of fitness or human performance. Many youth who want to learn more in this area find themselves looking for programming opportunities in the community rather than in the school. We felt that we are really doing a disservice to many of our students who want to move away from a sports model for physical education class toward a model focused on fitness and individual fitness. Initially, the target population for this class consisted primarily of the school's high performance athletes and school athletes. What resulted was another diverse grouping of students who had in common the desire to learn more about fitness and how to lead healthier, active lifestyles.

During our data collection we asked students to complete surveys and questionnaires. From the data collected, we found that this group of students best understood the health-related benefits of physical education and physical activity. As well, through student surveys we learned that this group had the deepest understanding of, and made plans for, incorporating activity into their lifestyles. The members of this group all reported increased activity levels and increased fitness room usage. In addition, there was strong student feedback to keep offering the course. In the words of one of our students:

This is a class every student should be required to take. It is a class that gets us really ready for life. Not only do I know how to keep healthy, I want to be healthy and now I know I can graduate, walk into a fitness facility and know I belong there – I will fit in.

The exciting outcome of this class was in seeing the evolution of many of the students enrolled. There were a few students who would be categorized as elite athletes but, generally, the class was composed of average students who wanted to increase their level of fitness. All students received credit for the class and were successful in their personal fitness plans. As educators, we were excited with the byproducts of the class, the outcomes that we had not planned for at the outset. We saw the change in the students for whom a high level of activity and feeling of wellness was new. We saw these students flourish and gain confidence. Many of the students in this class truly “bought into” active living and took ownership of their own learning and their own level of activity.

J – You know, deep down he is a good kid – he is kind of mixed up in some bad things – but he actually came to me and said, ‘You still offering that class?’ and I said, ‘Yeah.’ ‘Well, that is the best class I have ever taken,’ and I was like, ‘Yeah, you got to work out like three times a week – how could it be a bad class?’ and he was like, ‘No, I mean all the stuff I learned. It was the best and most real class I ever took.’ And I went, ‘What – you learned something here?’ And then I thought about the class again and really they were not the elite good athletes – they are just into learning about working out, getting healthy, you know, individual needs for them with their own fitness. I see that yeah, they will maybe go and continue this – but really I am seeing from the kids

the confidence is there for them now to go to a gym and work out after high school. Many of these kids will buy a membership somewhere and they will continue this.

R – And it's not like some of these kids were a little active before the class – some of them were not active at all and have completely turned it around.

J – You know, to put it all together as to what this class gave us – we can compare my two girls that R is talking about that never did anything with the school, are not at all athletic, didn't work out or anything, decide to take this because they wanted to learn about getting fit and working out – and then there is L who was on every team, a great athlete. Before this class none of these three girls would ever have walked into a gym. The two girls R talked about would not have the interest or the desire before this class and L, who has the interest, the desire and even the knowledge, wouldn't because knowing her personality – I could never see her going to a gym and working out. She might because of Huskies track when they tell her she has to – but I really can't see her working out in a gym. But now, I think these girls all have the confidence to put themselves out there and work out somewhere. They really got comfortable with it – and for each of them it will be okay. (Nov 09)

Our Journey Continues . . .

I think this would work other places – (but specifically to this school) it works really well at BR because we are such a diverse place – and that was kind of my goal in looking at this – let’s try to meet the needs of all the students. I really wanted our kids to see that PE is a continuous 4-year program they should want to be a part of – you know, this seems like a pretty good class, I want to go that way – or that PE 35 is perfect, I want to go that way – you know. We are developing a menu of options to meet the diversity of our school – but every school really has diversity when talking about physical ability and activity. I think it worked really well here – we were able to try different things – the door was open to us to just make things happen. Taking risks and trying different things to meet the need of our kids worked because of the way our PE department and our administration are all together – we are all on the same page – we actually are all pretty close, and we do our best to help each other out and support each other. What we are doing will continue – change will be happening with all of us. It is who we are.
(J – Oct 08)

CREATING A CULTURE OF WELLNESS IN THE SCHOOL

The first goal of this project on a school level was to create a culture of wellness and excitement around physical activity. We can implement programs and ideas, but true change happens when the programs and ideas become a natural part of your school, when they become a part of your school culture, which is when you know your changes have truly taken root. This project is very young in its stages of implementation. As a team we are still questioning, taking risks, sharing ideas and moving forward in our practice and programming. At a school level we are excited about what changes are in place, and what changes are continuing from, or as a result of, this project.

CLASSROOM LEVEL ACTION

- During the 2008-09 school year, both Health and Wellness 10 and PE 35 sections have continued. The Health and Wellness class meets the needs of a target population that is consistent with many community schools, disengaged, at-risk youth. The PE 35 class meets the needs of every student within the school who wants lifelong activity and to make the commitment to improve their personal level of fitness. This class meets the needs of elite sport specific athletes, our high school or community athletes, but more importantly, this class meets the needs of students who want to lead healthy, active and fit lifestyles.
- “A Taste Of . . .” has been scheduled into the grade 10 schedule and will remain a part of the program offerings.
- A Personal Wellness Plan is a resource that we developed and is now being fully implemented into Wellness 10. This resource manual provides students opportunity to learn through inquiry. Each student in Wellness 10 will receive a manual as resource material for the class.

SCHOOL LEVEL ACTION

When creating a culture of wellness in the school, curricular programming is only one aspect that needs direction. During the study actions were initiated with more of a school-wide focus. The intention with these actions was to promote student and staff wellness and to increase activity levels of staff and students.

- The weight room or fitness center was moved from a room off the boys change room in the gym to a classroom space outside of the gym area.

I think we did meet the needs – you know, one thing we did really well last year was when we moved that weight room. I certainly have noticed more girls and more staff go in there now. The weight room before was on the boys' side, it was by both boys' change rooms, was in the back corner of the school, it was just kind of come and go. At one time – you know, five guys in jeans would go in there, see how much they can bench and leave – where now we have moved it. It is out of the gym, it is brighter, you can play and hear the music, the TV is going . . . I have noticed a lot of cheerleading girls go in there, it isn't a dungeon – it is people-friendly that way . . . you know, we are getting more of the non-athlete, regular kids in the weight room now. Lots of the new beginning kids especially are getting in here and that is lots because of the health and wellness class and a continual stream from the PED 35 class. (J – Nov 08)

- With the old weight room, the department has created a shared office space. This came from a direct result of a department that was few in numbers but worked very collaboratively together. At times, in the daily world of teachers, there seems to be moments of isolation. We wanted to remove this feeling and create a space where continued teamwork could be enhanced.
- Hand in hand with the shared office space is a purposeful planning of a common prep time for the teachers in this study and then continuing for the 2008-09 school year. This opportunity allows for shared planning, reflection and collaboration.

The common prep is a time to talk and plan, but also to get our ducks lined up – it allows us to get all the other things done with equipment, teams, whatever, so that we are set up or ready to get at it again. You know, it is a time to collectively inhale/exhale kind of thing.

- Intramural programming is a huge part of creating a culture of wellness in the school. There are many great things that happen and the numbers coming out to intramurals grew as a result of many of our initiatives. Two aspects where action was needed were in promoting and enhancing the Women's Wednesdays and to develop and implement the Intramural Fit Club. Women's Wednesdays is an intramural time set up just for female students and staff. The Intramural Fit Club is a promotional strategy and rewards students who take part in intramural and weight room activities.
- An In Motion Champion was brought into the school leadership team for the 2008-09 school year. The role of this person is to promote In Motion, Active Living and Nutrition Positive initiatives.

CREATING A CULTURE OF LEARNING WITH OUR TEACHERS

We feel like we are a cohesive, gelled department. If we want to make change – no one hesitates – we feel good about the differences we bring to the department – we trust each other enough to allow that other person to try things out. (J – Nov meeting)

Other schools just say, 'We don't do that here.' Well, we have something different here – we embrace change – I don't want to be teaching the same in two years or five years, let alone 15 years. (R – Nov meeting)

Not only was a culture of wellness created during this project, but a culture of collegiality and learning was also established with our teachers. Many lessons are learned in the process of change and in the process of research. The team in this study created a culture of learning that included respect and trust. The team allowed themselves to be questioned and asked for feedback. The teachers allowed themselves to change in their thoughts and in their practices. The teachers are still moving for a change . . .

Although our research project has come to an end, it does not mean our journey for change has to end. As a research team we have learned that change is difficult, but it is necessary in order for us to grow as educators and in order for us to continue to offer quality programs to our students. We have experienced how important it is to reflect on our practice and critically examine our programs. A culture of learning has been created with this research team, and we will each continue to ask touchy questions, take risks, learn and change for a lifetime.

During the last stage of the research, the teachers in this study were asked to respond to some questions about the lessons that they each learned from the research experience. Their words are powerful and show the culture of learning that was created.

LESSONS LEARNED BY THE HEALTH AND WELLNESS 10 AND PE 35 TEACHER

- I learned that choice for students is a huge factor in determining the student's interest in P.E.
- I learned that regular collaboration in a PE dept. is necessary (between male and female dept.) especially when trying to meet the needs of all students.
- I learned that a strong female presence in the gym is necessary in having a quality PE program that will engage all students.
- I learned that we need to adapt each class based on the needs of the students. For example, the weight training class was supposed to be more of a high performance SPED but seeing that most of my students were not HP kids, setting up the class that way didn't make sense.
- Also students need structure, they like choice but it needs to be structured choice.
- I got the opportunity to see what our students wanted and tailor my teaching to meet their needs.

- I was able to adjust and reflect on my own teaching experience.
- As a group of three PE teachers, we got to work together more and collaborate more on what we were teaching.
- We were able to reach more students – because this is a very diverse school and the levels of activity in our students is very different, we were able to adapt our PE classes to meet this diversity.
- Communication is key (the common prep worked well, and now the co-ed office works well). Now that we can actually sit together as a whole dept., I find it easier to get stuff done. It also helps to have a staff with the same goals in mind or an openness to try different things.

LESSON LEARNED BY THE GIRLS-ONLY PE 20/30 TEACHER

- The most important aspect of being involved in this research process – I knew that I was part of a change to make things better and different for our students.
- I learned that I needed to be patient with wanting change right away; it won't happen but must be established and made consistent over semesters for the students and teachers to really feel the effect of the strategies we are trying to implement.
- We worked together to better the needs of our students in our school, that there are options for our students to be successful in PED, and we want them to get moving and be active in a variety of ways, not just the old school laps, push-ups, beep test type of teaching. PED has a place in all students' lives, but the teacher and student can find the right opportunity that can trigger the student to want to continue to be active long after they have left high school.
- I think any time a teacher reaches a student with their instruction, the student will feel the desire to continue to be active on her/his time and want to continue that connection with that teacher.
- I feel innovative programming will get more kids involved and, more importantly, will get more kids leading active lifestyles. It will, and J's class of SPED 35 is an example. Many of his students were keen on continuing their training after the class was through and maybe they won't go into Kinesiology, but they will care about themselves to continue their training after the class and gain knowledge on their own by attaining a gym membership or extend their knowledge by becoming a coach.

LESSONS LEARNED BY THE GIRLS-ONLY PE 20/30 TEACHER

- The most important aspects of being involved in the process of research was the chance to collaborate with colleagues about programming ideas, and having the resources and support to implement some trial changes was great. Being a part of this research allowed us the freedom to make some changes to our PE program that wouldn't have been available otherwise.

LESSONS LEARNED BY THE NON-SEMESTERED WELLNESS 10 TEACHER

- For me there were a few aspects of the project that I found uniquely meaningful. I really enjoyed the opportunity to work with my colleagues and other professionals in the area. Being able to have some extra time to discuss, plan and reflect allowed my colleagues and me to seemingly better meet the needs of the students here.
- Another aspect of the process that allowed it to be a success was the aid of additional funding that made it possible for us to restructure some of the current practices that we felt needed changing. Particularly, covering sub costs and having money to differentiate instruction with field trips were of great benefit when trying to better meet the needs of students.

Implications for others . . .

From our journey together and the lessons learned along the way, we are pleased to offer the following recommendations for those interested in meeting the needs and improving the experiences of our students.

1. Physical Educators need to critically look at their programs and practices. How does your program match the provincial curricula? Are you meeting the needs of your students? Do your programs and practices motivate your students to lead healthy lifestyles?
2. Student choice and options to keep students motivated and interested in all physical education programs are essential pieces of quality physical education programs. While offering choice may at first appear daunting, it will be well worth the effort.
3. Trying to make change in isolation is challenging. Trying to make change in collaboration is challenging but inviting. Working as a team allows the opportunity to learn from and share with each other. The opportunity to work together and grow as a group or department is the first step in creating and maintaining a change in program and practice.
4. Just as coming together in a team is important, it is very important to have school leaders and/or administrators sharing your vision and supporting your actions.
5. As you look critically at your program, reflect too on what you want your end result to be . . . the finish line. Rather than looking at beginning where each of your students is at, start by thinking where you want all your students to end; then create a program that will help them get there.
6. The promotion of physical activity within physical education settings is important. Physical education is often seen as a subject area that is not an essential component of the education of all children. Tiny steps of change in the classrooms are important but so are steps taken school wide and community wide to promote the benefits of active living and quality physical education programming. We need to help our parents, teachers and administrators and the community at large understand the importance of leading healthy, active lifestyles through programming that meets the interests and needs of our students.
7. Advice to administrators . . . as much as possible, lend your support and become part of a team of educators in your school who want to change their practice. Be creative in finding ways to give your teachers time to make change happen in their classrooms and to collaborate with others. Give your teachers permission to explore possibilities and implement ideas. Find creative ways to make things happen. As schools, as educators, we can't meet student needs when we are structuring and scheduling inside a box. Administrators need to provide a structure that celebrates and supports innovation. We need to create a culture in which there is mutual respect, trust is shared and risk taking can flourish.

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