

27th ACHPER INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

Moving, Learning & Achieving

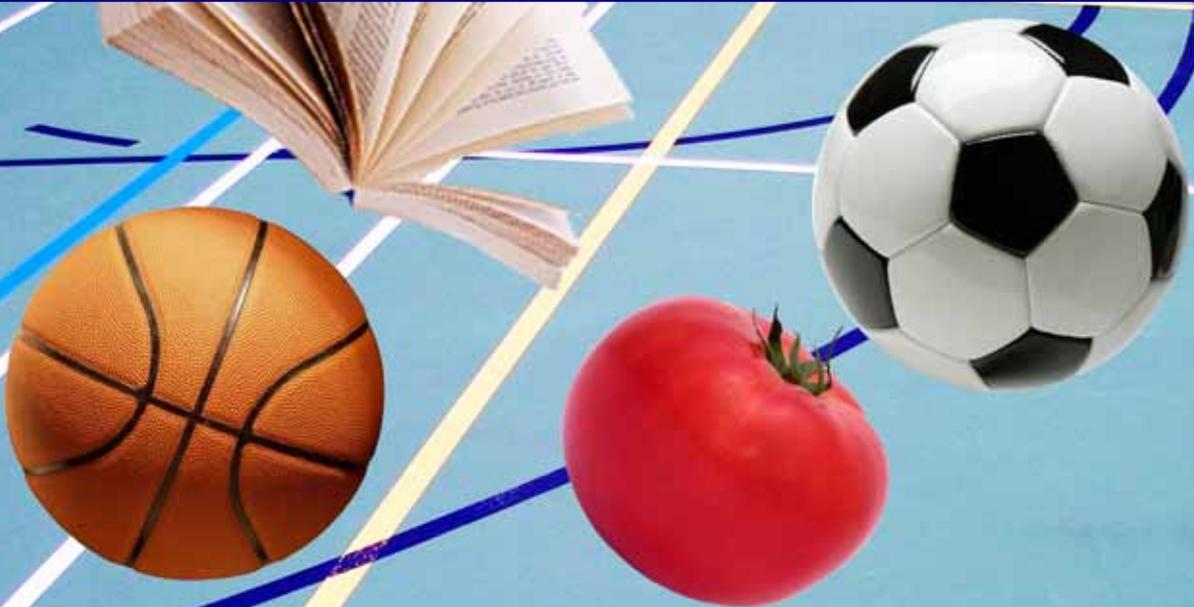
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Promoting Healthy Communities Through an Active Curriculum

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A tactical response project to support the inclusion of regular physical activity within the curriculum which was cultivated and implemented as a rejoinder to the Smart Moves – Physical Activity Program (2008) developed for Queensland State Schools.

The project involved consultation with and resource pooling from partner organisations responsible for physical activity, health and well-being within the local community. Fourth year education students developed integrated units of work using these resources and drew outcomes from both the Health and Physical Education(HPE) and Studies of Society and Environment (SOSE) Curriculum documents. An active curriculum and kinaesthetic learning is promoted by embedding physical activity as a crucial element within the units of work.

Arising from this, a collaborative, web-based learning community has been established to support both pre-service and existing educators with the knowledge, skills, resources and confidence to deliver a meaningful, effective and active curriculum to their students.

The outcomes of this project are significant to three stakeholders from the study, those being children, pre-service teachers and current teachers. For children, the project increases the time and opportunity to participate in meaningful physical activity within the curriculum. This project allows pre-service teachers to participate in professional dialogue and mutual sharing of ideas and resources and provides a framework for collaboration with their colleagues.

The project achieves meaningful outcomes for practicing teachers by acknowledging the planning and preparation workload of current teachers, and provides tangible support for classroom teachers to effectively facilitate physical activity to their students on a daily basis. The website also provides a platform for professional discourse within the education community across the region, supports higher order thinking skills, engages professional reflection and helps to raise the confidence and morale of teachers within the Fraser Coast community. Recommendations for future directions, expansion and sustainability of the website are also discussed.

Introduction

The worldwide rise in obesity and inactivity in children has spurred many levels of the Australian government into action to be accountable for the health and well being of its youngest citizens and future generations. A number of studies (Dobbins, 2001; Hands & Parker, 2003; Olds & Ridley, 2008; Raitakari, 1994; Shilton & Brown, 2004) have revealed a significant increase in childhood overweight and obesity statistics with an equally significant decline in physical activity participation rates at school. Many government initiatives have been developed within schools to promote participation in physical activity and raise awareness of good nutrition practices. A great deal of emphasis has been placed upon teachers, sport and community groups to provide physical activity for children, both within and outside of schools.

One such policy, implemented in Queensland, *Smart Moves* (Queensland Government Department of Education Training and the Arts Local Government Planning Sport and Recreation, 2006) was directed squarely at schools, and placed the onus on classroom teachers to deliver the physical activity, health and well being message in their classrooms.

Smart Moves is a Queensland Government policy initiative to:

“...increase the curriculum time in which students are effectively engaged in physical activity and improve the quality of that activity....all primary schools must allocate 30 minutes per day of physical activity of at least moderate intensity....”

(Queensland Government Department of Education Training and the Arts Local Government Planning Sport and Recreation, 2006 p.3)

The impetus for this project arose from the perceived problems both educators and pre-service educators were experiencing implementing the *Smart Moves* policy. The need for specialist support and morale building within the teaching profession became apparent, and was identified as a key outcome for the project. In order to achieve this it was essential to form a united front where educators could engage in professional discourse, share ideas and resources, collaborate to create a sense of community and provide a professional support mechanism for teachers.

The aim of the project was threefold: to support teachers to deliver meaningful and regular physical activity to students; to provide education students with the knowledge and skills to create integrated units of work involving physical activity; and to increase participation in daily physical activity for children.

Method

A participative inquiry method was employed for this study, as it involves a co-operative inquiry into an identified problem, as well as participatory action research to transform existing practices (Fals-Borda & Rahman, 1991). The central problem within this research is ‘how to support pre-service and in-service teachers in effectively implementing *Smart Moves* within schools’.

The researcher identified this central problem through numerous discussions with practicing teachers who were mentors for pre-service teachers, around implementing *Smart Moves*. During these discussions, most primary school classroom teachers admitted to being hesitant to implement *Smart Moves* with their students. When questioned further, most attributed lack of knowledge, skills and time as barriers to their ability to provide effective opportunities for their students to participate in regular physical activity during school time. When discussing this issue with pre-service teachers, many voiced similar concerns with their own teaching practice.

As a result of these initial investigations, and in an effort to scaffold pre-service teachers and adequately prepare them for teaching, the researcher encouraged them to seek out community organisations who had vested interests in promoting physical activity to children. Invitations were then sent out to these groups to form a reference group to promote physical activity to children.

A series of three community meetings were held to explore existing support structures and resources used to promote health and physical activity within our community. From these meetings resources were pooled, and ideas as to how to best support teachers were shared. The reference group was composed of representatives from federal, state and local levels of government, as well as University of Southern Queensland Faculty of Education academics. The group identified a central focus of supporting teachers and pre-service teachers to gather knowledge, skills and confidence to deliver physical activity to children. This resulted in the formation of a “Healthy Communities” reference group. The specifics of which can be seen in Table 1 below. These meetings forged partnerships between stakeholders who committed to a collaborative approach to effectively assist teachers and pre-service teachers to promote physical activity to children in schools. Classroom teachers and pre-service teachers were targeted in this study as they were able to address these wellness issues in ways that were relevant to the student’s particular stage of physical, social, emotional and cognitive development (O'Connor & Parker, 1995). **Table 1** provides a detailed list of partners and their identified roles within this reference group.

Table 1: Healthy Communities Reference Group partners

TITLE	GROUP	ROLE
Active After Schools Co-ordinator	Australian Sports Commission	Personnel to deliver Community Coaching Program to Education students
Fraser Coast Community Health and Nutrition	Queensland Health	Personnel to hold workshop on Nutrition
Youth Development Officer	Fraser Coast Regional Council	Support for website by promoting it to schools
Physical Activity Health Promotions Officer	Wide Bay Population Health	Personnel to assist in delivering Traditional Indigenous Games to Education students
Sport and Recreation Officer	Queensland Government	Support for website by promoting it to schools
5 Education Lecturers	University of Southern Queensland	Personnel to lecture Education students over a semester in creating units of work that promote a Healthy School Community

As a result of these community meetings several needs were identified relating to teachers, education students and children. Initially community groups agreed on a common goal to assist teachers and pre-service teachers to provide opportunities for children to participate in regular physical activity. Principals, teachers and education students from within the University were identified as key stakeholders to ensure equitable opportunity existed for all children to participate in physical activity in school time. Ideas and resources to enhance children's participation in physical activity could be put into a usable format for teachers in schools.

Several barriers teachers faced in promoting physical activity to children were identified, in particular, time, resources and knowledge. Once these needs were identified and a plan made to address these barriers to provide achievable outcomes, the Healthy Communities Reference Group received funding from the Queensland Government's *Eat Well Be Active Community Partnerships Program* (2007) to work towards these outcomes.

A tactical response plan was formulated whereby the Healthy Communities reference group would pool resources and final year Education students would use these to develop integrated units of work. These units provided many hands-on learning experiences that involved students moving their whole body and being out of breath. The physical activity students' undertake within the units of work, are designed to reinforce educational outcomes from their classroom lessons. The key learning area of Studies of Society and the Environment (SOSE) was used as a vehicle to allow physical activity to be integrated within the SOSE content. Pre-service students had to demonstrate learning experiences that reflected intellectual quality, recognition of differences, supportive environments and connectedness as foundational elements of their pedagogy. In order to achieve this, students incorporated strategies based on Gardener's theory of *Multiple Intelligences* (Gardner, 1983), De Bono's *Six Thinking Hats* (De Bono, 1990) and Mosston and Ashworth's *Spectrum of Teaching Styles* (Mosston & Ashworth, 2002) within their learning experiences. This allowed students to demonstrate inclusive practices and utilise authentic assessment as part of the unit of work. The lessons within these unit plans demonstrated an inquiry-based, student-centred approach to teaching and learning, and follow the 5E format used within the *Primary Connections* (Australian Government Quality Teacher Programme, 2008) resource for science teachers.

These units of work were primarily an integration of two key learning areas: *Studies of Society and the Environment (SOSE)* and *Health and Physical Education (HPE)*, in the *Essential Learnings* component of the Queensland Curriculum (Queensland Studies Authority, 2009). These units incorporated a variety of resources from the partnership reference group who fostered a collaborative approach to promoting physical activity to children.

Results

The partnership formed within the reference group was a viable one in that it successfully procured a grant to create a web resource to facilitate professional dialogue and sharing of resources. The Healthy communities website was introduced to teachers within the Fraser coast via a regional professional development seminar, and through a series of mail-outs to schools within the region so that they could access the website. By tracking access to the site it is evident that teachers and pre-service educators have been accessing the materials provided. This pooling of resources and a sharing of knowledge and expertise also allowed fourth year education students at USQ more material with which to write units of work incorporating physical activity.

The creation of the website (Louth, 2009) and subsequent sharing of ideas, skills, knowledge and resources showcased the work of the University's pre-service educators and enhanced their professional standing within the educational community of the Fraser Coast. Many students used the

site as evidence to support their learning and competence within their e-portfolios for their prospective employers.

Participation on the website occurred at two levels, each aligning with several *Professional Standards for Teachers*, as outlined by the Queensland College of Teachers (QCOT) (2007). The first level of participation involved downloading units from the website and providing feedback. In doing so teachers demonstrated they could contribute effectively to professional teams and contribute to reflective practice and ongoing professional renewal. The second level of participation occurred when teachers contributed units to the website, this way they have shown they can design and implement engaging and flexible learning experiences for individuals and groups. These learning experiences were intellectually challenging and developed language, literacy and numeracy. By engaging with the Healthy Communities website, teachers achieve several standards outlined by QCOT and can use this when reapplying for Queensland teacher registration. Users need to join the USQ community site to access the information and certificates of their engagement would be sent to them.

The website encourages a streamlined approach to collecting feedback on the units using the *Six Thinking Hats* (De Bono, 1990), to make contributing feedback less time consuming and more structured. Coloured hat icons were highlighted on the website so participants could upload their comments in the appropriate category. In addition to this, it also gave immediate reflections to other teachers who had not yet taught that unit. For example, the yellow hat for positive comments, the black hat to highlight areas of concern, and the green hat for creative alternatives within the lessons.

The interactive nature of the website allows teachers to engage with collaborative professional communities and become involved with design, implementation and reflection of learning experiences.

Conclusion

This project united professional and academic groups striving to enhance children's participation in physical activity. It provided a practical solution to the problem many teachers face in implementing *Smart Moves* policy in schools.

The *Healthy Communities Website* has been developed to support teachers to include regular physical activity within the daily curriculum. The website resources assisted practising and pre-service teachers to develop their knowledge and skills in facilitating physical activity, through their access and participation in the website. Sharing of the resources allowed teachers time to adapt and deliver this material effectively, and this is evidenced through feedback reported on the website.

Teacher educators and trainee teachers benefited from the site as it provided a model which emphasised a kinaesthetic approach (Lazear, 1999) to teaching and learning. This helped support and maintain healthy communities, within classrooms, schools, and the wider society. Future directions for this website are to expand the scope of topics to include all key learning areas, and to promote its use to teachers both nationally and internationally.

The action research method employed in this study is one which has a global aim of assisting teachers to engage their students in physical activity to promote wellness. Over time continuous improvement and reframing of original solutions to problems occurred. In this way, the objectives of the study were sustainable, in line with government requirements for the curriculum, and flexible enough to adapt to the changing needs of the teaching profession.

As a result of this project pre-service and in-service teachers from all areas have been afforded equitable access to resources to enable them to deliver meaningful physical activity to their students. This collaborative resource empowered teachers with the confidence, knowledge and skills to incorporate a healthy lifestyles approach to teaching and communicating with children via physical activity in their schools and communities. In this way children participated in daily physical activity that was meaningful, supportive, connected to their learning environment and contributed to their general health and wellbeing.

The interactive and sustainable nature of the Healthy Communities Website demonstrated the successful achievement of the aims of the project which were: to support teachers to deliver meaningful and regular physical activity to students; to provide education students with the knowledge and skills to create integrated units of work involving physical activity; and to increase participation in daily physical activity for children. The units of work within this resource provide models for educators to assist children to learn through whole body kinaesthetic experiences, hence increase the amount of daily physical activity for students. In this way, the website promotes health and well-being by providing a model for a more physically active curriculum.

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