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Implementation of an Elementary School-Based Action Team for Active and Healthy Living

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
in the Department of Kinesiology and Physical Education
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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to describe and evaluate the process of implementing an elementary school-based action team dedicated to increasing physical activity and healthy living opportunities for students. To facilitate this intervention, Epstein and colleagues' (2002) partnership framework, coupled with action research principles, was used to create partnerships between the school, home, and community. The results suggest that an action team based on Epstein and colleagues' guidelines may be suitable for creating opportunities for healthy and active living in an elementary school setting. In particular, families, students, teachers, and administration believed that the action team initiatives added to the school environment, school spirit, and value of the family as an essential component in the school. Likewise, the action team members felt that the health and wellness committee they represented was a valued component in the school culture that could be further developed and improved on in future years.

Résumé

Cette étude visait à décrire et évaluer le processus d'implantation dans une école primaire d'une équipe d'action ayant pour but de créer des opportunités de vie active et saine chez les élèves. À fin de faciliter l'intervention, le cadre théorique des partenariats de Epstein et ses collègues (2002), combiné avec des principes d'action recherche, a été utilisé pour promouvoir des partenariats entre l'école, la famille, et la communauté. Les résultats suggèrent qu'une équipe d'action basée sur les critères établis par Epstein et ses collègues peut être une stratégie efficace pour créer des opportunités de vie saine et active dans le contexte de l'école primaire. De façon spécifique, des données recueillies auprès des familles, des élèves, des enseignants et de l'administration ont indiqué que les initiatives planifiées par l'équipe d'action contribuèrent de façon significative à l'environnement et l'esprit de l'école et à rehausser la valeur de la famille en tant qu'élément essentiel dans l'école. En plus, les perceptions des membres de l'équipe d'action ont suggéré que le comité de santé et bien être qu'ils ont représenté a été une partie importante de la culture de l'école qui pourrait être développée davantage et améliorée dans les années à venir.

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CHAPTER 1: Introduction

Recent statistics have indicated that approximately 60% of North American youth do not meet minimum physical activity standards for optimal health benefits (Canadian Institute for Health Information [CIHI], 2005; Centre for Disease Control [CDC], 2005). Likewise, increased youth obesity rates and high inactivity trends have been identified as primary outcomes of unhealthy lifestyle behaviours among school-aged children (CIHI, 2005; Pate et al., 2003; Pate & Sirard, 2005). Accordingly, identification of the main sources of influence over physical activity participation has become a major concern (e.g. Daley, 2002; Siedentop, 1996). Specifically, researchers have targeted homes, schools, and communities as the most influential settings in the development and continuation of youth physical activity involvement (e.g., Biddle, Gorely, & Stensel, 2004; CDC, 1997; Duncan, Duncan, & Strycker, 2005; Siedentop, 1996).

Physical activity and health research has centered mainly on interventions that aim to improve tangible aspects of health, including increasing physical activity and decreasing obesity rates (e.g., CIHI, 2005; Hesketh, Waters, Green, Salmon, & Williams, 2005). However, these interventions have focused primarily on individual behaviours and their effect was found to be limited (e.g., Campbell, Waters, O'Meara, & Summerbell, 2001; Hesketh et al., 2005; Spence & Lee, 2003). More recently, the relationship between family, school, and community has been identified as having a potential influence over youth physical activity levels (CDC, 1997; Duncan et al., 2005; Siedentop, 1996). This relationship has stimulated a research focus on interrelating factors that affect both physical activity participation and healthy lifestyles (Spence & Lee, 2003). Given the amount of direct influence diverse settings have on youth, it is not surprising that there is a large body of research on the univariate relationships between physical activity and single determinants

(Gordon-Larsen, McMurray, & Popkin, 2000). However, a focus on multivariate relationships is needed considering the vast amount of literature emphasizing the interaction between individual physical activity determinants (Barnett, O'Loughlin, Gauvin, Paradis, & Hanley, 2006; Gordon-Larsen et al., 2000).

Gauvin, Lévesque, and Richard (2001) identified an improved need to understand the multifaceted aspects of physical activity influences, including human interrelations, health, and the environment. Ecological models have long described how multiple structures within the environment, including families, schools, and communities, affect an individual's development (e.g., Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Specifically, these models examine the relationships between a hierarchy of structures and how they directly and indirectly influence an individual's behaviour (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Spence & Lee, 2003). For health promotion research, ecological models have provided a starting point to illustrate how interrelating structures work both individually and collectively to influence the lifestyle behaviours of an individual (Spence & Lee, 2003). For this study, Spence and Lee's (2003) ecological model of physical activity (EMPA) provides a broad framework to help describe the interrelatedness between families, schools, communities, and the physically active student.

Given the importance of recognizing how structures within the EMPA work together to influence physical activity participation, it is only fitting to employ an applied means that encourages the developmental processes between the structures. Accordingly, Epstein's partnership framework (1996; Epstein et al., 2002) builds upon the relationships between structures by providing a practical approach to foster collaboration between family, school, and community. This framework focuses primarily on the collaborative manner in which family, school, and community stakeholders interact for the benefit of student success

(Epstein, 1996; Epstein et al., 2002). Specifically, Epstein (1996) identifies six different types of involvement that take place. With her colleagues, Epstein expanded this framework to include action teams designed to work collectively towards including all types of involvement in school activities (Epstein et al., 2002).

Inherent within the EMPA and Epstein's framework are the structures or stakeholders of families, schools, and communities. Each structure has a specific role to develop socially and academically competent students (CIHI, 2005.; Duncan et al., 2005; Epstein et al., 2002; National Association for Sport and Physical Education [NASPE] 2004; Welk, Wood, & Morss, 2003; Welk, 1999). Furthermore, families, schools, and communities provide a varying level of support for physical activity participation. For example, families provide a wealth of support through encouragement, facilitation through financial and transportation needs, and role modeling (Duncan et al., 2005; Welk et al., 2003). Likewise, schools support physical activity through physical education, teaching health education, and using recess and after school programs as methods to increase physical activity opportunities within the school day (e.g., Anspaugh & Ezell, 2004; Daley, 2002; McKenzie, Marshall, Sallis, & Conway, 2000; Prochaska, Sallis, Slymen & McKenzie, 2003; Rink, 2005; Sallis, Prochaska, & Taylor, 2000). Communities supplement family and school influence by encouraging physical activity participation through the design of safe community neighborhoods and accessible recreational facilities and programs (Biddle et al., 2004; Gordon-Larsen et al., 2000; Powell, Slater, Chaloupka, & Harper, 2006; Sallis et al., 2000).

Considering much research (e.g., Scott & Willits, 1989; Scott & Willits, 1998; Taylor, Blair, Cummings, Wun, & Malina, 1999; Wallhead & Buckworth, 2004) has shown that healthy living and physical activity habits learned during childhood have the potential to extend to adulthood, it is important to focus on how families, schools, and communities

work together to promote healthy lifestyle habits. Siedentop (1996) suggested that the school is the common ground between the three stakeholders. In accordance, most physical activity interventions for youth have been school-based (e.g., Dowda, Sallis, McKenzie, Rosengard, & Kohl, 2005; McKenzie et al., 2000; Sallis et al., 1997; Powers, Conway, McKenzie, & Marshall, 2002). However, many of these interventions have focused on one structure at a time with some success (e.g., Campbell et al., 2001; Hopper, Munoz, Gruber, and Nguyen, 2005). Fortunately, recent interventions such as Living Schools have begun to incorporate all relative stakeholders to encourage physical activity participation (e.g., Shain, 2005; McKenzie et al., 2000).

Collaboration between all levels of educational stakeholders is essential in order to promote physical activity as an important and necessary aspect of a healthy lifestyle (Shain, 2005). The use of complex social partnerships encourages a qualitative method of data collection (Israel, Eng, Schulz, and Parker, 2005). Thus, action research, with an element of participation, provides a unique opportunity to engage relevant stakeholders as part of a healthy and active living action team in the research process (Israel et al., 2005). This type of research is grounded in the notion that participants perceive a need to cultivate change in naturalistic settings (Marshall & Rossman, 2005). The most important element of action research in this study is the blurred relationship between the researcher and participants during the development of the action team (Marshall & Rossman, 2005).

Purpose of the Study

The primary purpose of this study is to implement a collaborative action team in an elementary school setting dedicated to the creation of active and healthy lifestyle opportunities for youth. The process and effectiveness of the action team will be

documented by gathering participant perceptions, as well as the observations and reflections of the researcher.

Significance of the Study

Much of the school-based research in the area of physical activity and health promotion has focused on single sources of influence. Only recently, there has been a focus on the many different interrelating aspects of the environment that affect student knowledge and action. Thus, this study has the potential to augment current knowledge and improve practice of collaborative efforts between influential spheres that have an impact on youth physical activity participation. Additionally, the study will provide valuable knowledge about the process of implementing an action team specifically conceived to create active and healthy lifestyle opportunities for students based on Epstein and colleagues' (2002) framework.

Delimitations

For the purpose of this study, the following delimitations were identified:

1. Action team members had a direct link with the school in which the study was conducted.
2. The action team was formed to promote active and healthy lifestyle activity for all grades in the school.
3. The action team planned five initiatives during the school year.
4. The students on the student health and wellness committee were in either grade five or six.
5. One parent represented each cycle in order to ensure a fair representation of the school body.

Limitations

The limitations for the study were identified as:

1. The results were bound by the particular circumstances and context in which the action team will function; however, a rich description of the circumstances and context in which the results are found may allow the reader to determine the applicability of the results to other settings.
2. A large portion of the data was dependent upon the participants' willingness to share their experiences and their ability to recollect their thoughts, feelings and impressions over a relatively long period of time.
3. Due to the nature of this study, many unforeseen circumstances occurred which required adaptations in the design of the study as it evolved.

Operational Definitions

For the purpose of this study, the following definitions shall be used:

Action teams refer to the group of parents, teachers, students, and community members working together to develop a collaborative program of partnerships for a number of educational purposes (Epstein, 1996; Epstein et al., 2002).

Coordinated school health approaches involve the planning, administration, and evaluation of eight health related components through collaboration between schools, families, and community organizations. The components of CSHA are: (1) a healthful school environment, (2) school health instruction, (3) school based health services, (4) physical education, (5) nutrition and food services, (6) school-based counselling, (7) school site health promotion for staff, and (8) school, family, and community health promotion partnerships (Ansbaugh & Ezell, 2004).

Health promotion is defined as “the aggregate of all purposeful activities designed to improve personal and public health through a combination of strategies, including the competent implementation of behavioural change strategies, health education, health protection methods, risk factor detection, health enhancement and health maintenance” (Anspaugh & Ezell, 2004, p. 4-5).

Lifelong physical activity refers to the abilities of a person to have the skills necessary to perform a variety of physical activities, know the implications and benefits from involvement in physical activity, participate in regular activity, be physically fit, and value physical activity and its contribution to a healthy lifestyle (NASPE, 2004).

School, family, and community partnerships refer to the communication and interaction between schools, families, and communities in order to engage, motivate, and guide students to produce their own successes (Epstein et al., 2002).

Physical Activity is any bodily movement that increases energy expenditure above rest (Weinstein & Rosen, 2003). For the purposes of this study physical activity may include things such as participation in sports, physical education classes, exercise programs, and leisure time activities.

Physical and Health Education refers to the school, home, and community curriculum that develop the knowledge and skills of health and wellness of youth in order to foster participation and valuing of lifetime physical activity (NASPE, 2004; Rink, 2005; Siedentop, 1996).

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter will consist of four sections. In the first section, theoretical underpinnings of the study will be considered. Subsequently, a brief overview of influences over youth physical activity participation will be discussed. Following this, Epstein and colleagues' (2002) partnership framework will be introduced as the theoretical framework for the study. Lastly, research on school-based physical activity interventions for youth will be reviewed.

Theoretical Underpinnings

Physical activity and health promotion researchers have recently highlighted the influence of family, school, and community structures on the affective, cognitive, and psychomotor development of youth (Fridinger, Provence, & Provence, 1994; Sayers, Shapiro & Webster, 2003; Spence & Lee, 2003). Specifically, emphasis has been placed on how the relationships between these interrelated structures affect individuals' active and healthy lifestyle behaviours (Spence & Lee, 2003). Accordingly, this study is rooted within an ecological context (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Spence & Lee, 2003) which illustrates how these structures work together to have an impact on individuals' decisions to participate in physical activity. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory provides a framework to examine the hierarchy of interrelating structures that form an individual's environment. A more recent adaptation of this theory, the ecological model of physical activity [EMPA] (Figure 1), further explores the different levels of co-existing relationships between structures (Spence & Lee, 2003). However, it focuses on the direct and indirect influences that affect individuals' decisions to partake in physical activity.

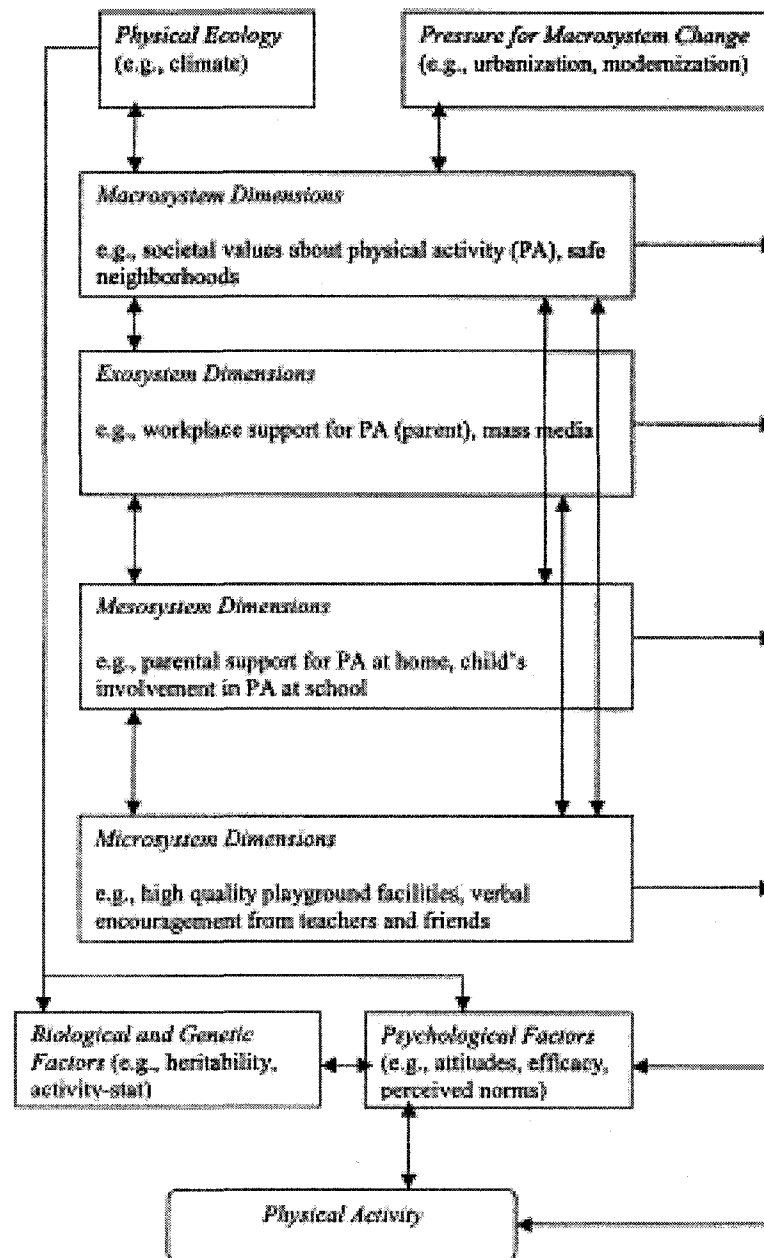


Figure 1: Ecological Model of Physical Activity (Spence & Lee, 2003)

Two levels of influence- the microsystem and the mesosystem- are the two most direct, co-existing relationships in the hierarchy and will be the focus of this study: The microsystem encompasses the individual structures of family, school, and community. These structures are direct sources of influence in a child's daily life and are bidirectional. For

instance, parents may affect the values and actions of a child and likewise, a child may affect the values and actions of the parent. It is at this level of the hierarchy that the three structures have the greatest impact over the child. The next level in the hierarchy is the more indirect mesosystemic influence and it refers to the relationships that exist between two or more microsystems. This level of the hierarchy also affects a person's decision to participate in physical activity, however it focuses specifically on the processes that occur within and between settings (Spence & Lee, 2003). For example, a child's physical activity level may be impacted by verbal support in the home and the physical education environment in the school. The following section will briefly review three microsystemic relationships.

Physical Activity and Youth

A large body of research has shown that healthy living and physical activity habits learned during childhood have the potential to extend to adulthood (e.g., Scott & Willits, 1989; Scott & Willits, 1998; Taylor et al., 1999; Wallhead & Buckworth, 2004). As a result, researchers have identified that these behaviours are highly influenced by a multitude of sources, including parents, schools, communities, siblings, friends, and the media (Epstein et al., 2002). Specifically, families, schools, and communities have been targeted as the most influential foundation for youth's decision to live active and healthy lives (Duncan et al., 2005; Siedentop, 1996; Spence & Lee, 2003).

Families

Families have been established as essential socialization contexts in the development of children's lifestyle behaviours (Barbour & Barbour, 2001; CIHI, 2005; Epstein et al., 2002). Researchers maintain that parents have both direct and indirect influences on their children and that these influences are manifested through social cognitive mechanisms of role modeling, encouragement, and facilitation (Taylor, Baranowski, & Sallis, 1994; Welk et

al., 2003). In particular, researchers have identified the central components of family involvement as providing information, giving emotional support, and assisting the child in his/her endeavours (Duncan et al., 2005; Gustafson & Rhodes, 2006; Welk et al., 2003). For example, parents were found to provide tangible support such as transportation and funds for teams and equipment (Duncan et al., 2005; García Bengoechea & Streat, 2007; Welk et al., 2003). In addition, parents were also found to facilitate their children's participation in physical activity based on family preferences, children's preferences, children's abilities, geographic location of the family home, and the access the family has to community programs and services (Sayers et al., 2003; Welk et al., 2003).

Welk and colleagues (2003) also found that role modelling was influential, but not entirely by means of the parents. They attributed this to the minimal amount of exposure school-aged children have to parental role modelling on a daily basis. Lending support to this contention, a recent *Canadian Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth* (CIHI, 2005), indicated that only 43% of Canadian parents were regularly active with their children in 2000. However, empirical research has shown that parental modeling of physical activity behaviours does have positive effects on the frequency of youth exercise, with more active parents having more active children (e.g., Duncan et al., 2005; Raudsepp & Viira, 2000; Welk et al., 2003; Wold & Anderssen, 1992). In fact, parental role modelling was found to be more significant in influencing children's physical activity behaviours than encouragement (Dielman et al., 1982; Godin, Shephard, & Colantonio, 1986; Gottlieb & Baker, 1986 as cited in McMurray et al., 1993). Children whose parents regularly supervised them during physical activity were also considerably more active than their counterparts (Prochaska, Rogers, & Sallis, 2002; Virgilo, 1990).

Schools

The school has been recognized as a setting that offers opportunities to the majority of children for both structured and unstructured physical activity during physical education, before and after school, at lunchtime, and during recess (Daley, 2002; Prochaska et al., 2003; Sallis et al., 2000; Sallis et al., 1997). Considering the available time, several studies have shown that there is a consistent decrease with physical activity participation in the school as the grade level increases (e.g., Wallhead & Buckworth, 2004; Sallis et al., 1999). Given these points along with research associating active and healthy lifestyles with academic success, it has become apparent that the promotion of physical activity during and in addition to school hours is vital for student development (Barnett et al., 2006; Sallis et al., 1999).

Accordingly, the development of well-planned and collaborative approaches has encouraged the promotion of partnerships between home, school, and community which aim to foster holistic wellness objectives. Specifically, in Canada and the United States, comprehensive or coordinated school health approaches [CSHA], incorporate national guidelines (CDC, 2005; NASPE, 2004), while simultaneously addressing the needs of the homes, schools, and communities they are established in. The CSHA (Allensworth & Kolbe, 1987) is comprised of eight different components to encourage school-wide promotion of healthy behaviours (Figure 2). All eight components fall in line with the interrelatedness of the EMPA as well as with the collaborative processes that will be emphasized in Epstein's partnership framework. Although these collaborative approaches have been shown to contribute significantly to responsible decision-making for healthy behaviours, many states and provinces, including Quebec, elect to focus on only a few of the eight components. This has been attributed to lack of financial resources, volunteers, and time (Ansbaugh & Ezell, 2004).

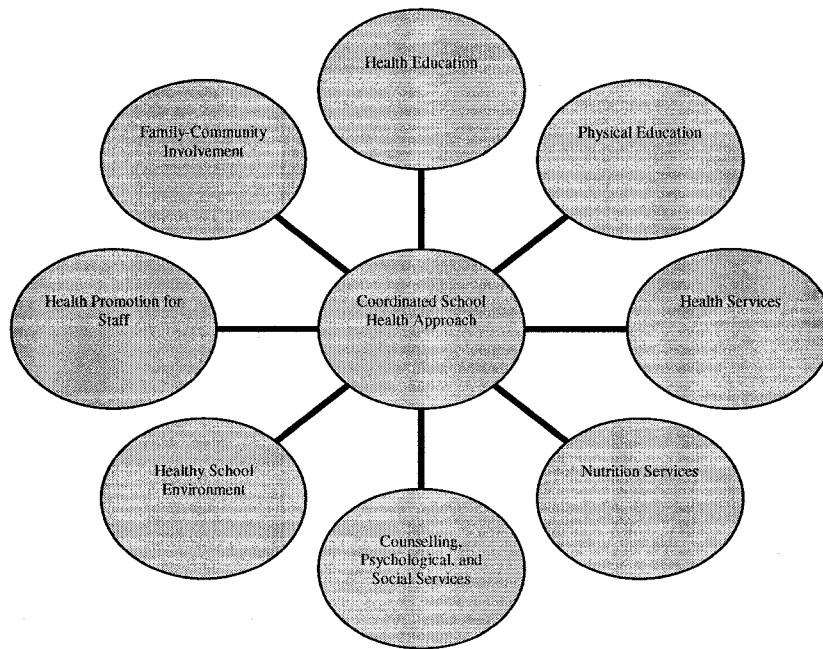


Figure 2: Coordinated School Health Approach adapted from Butler (2001)

Communities

Finally, communities also play an integral role in the promotion of physical activity participation among youth (Biddle et al., 2004; Gordon-Larsen et al., 2000). This is not surprising taking into consideration that communities provide a wealth of resources and expertise through businesses; cultural, religious, or civic organizations; colleges and universities; and governmental agencies (Epstein et al., 2002). Thus, community recreation programs have the ability to reach a large population of different ages in a cost-effective manner (Welk, 1999).

Communities that have a recreation centre have also been associated with youth reporting higher levels of physical activity participation (e.g., CIHI, 2005; Powell et al., 2006). In addition, several researchers have suggested that the improvement or new development of community-based physical activity programs can encourage youth physical activity involvement (Gordon-Larsen et al., 2000; Trost et al., 1997; Welk, 1999). In a related vein,

Welk (1999) identified a need for more innovative after-school programs to give youth from families with two working parents the opportunity to be active.

Facilitating awareness and use of community programs requires the development of partnerships between parents, schools, and community organizations (da Costa, Diniz, Cavalho, & Onofre, 1996). Such community partnerships may include influential members such as physical therapists, fitness club managers, community sport coordinators, aquatic center directors, golf course managers, and bowling alley supervisors (Modell & Megginson, 2001; Sayers et al., 2003). Sayers and colleagues (2003) reflected that these community partnerships not only encourage the adoption of physical activity for youth, but they also provide positive benefits such as publicity and community involvement awareness.

In summary, families, schools, and communities have been identified as invaluable sources of active and healthy living promotion and facilitation. Families provide a wealth of support through role modelling, facilitation, and encouragement. Schools offer ample opportunities for participation in physical activity, as well as instruction and delivery of healthy lifestyle behaviours. Communities offer an abundance of recreational facilities, while encouraging physical activity participation for youth through community partnerships and programs.

Theoretical Framework

Given the importance of how the above individual structures have an influence on an individual's decision to participate in physical activity, it is particularly important to examine applied methods that encourage the developmental processes between the structures. Accordingly, Epstein's partnership framework (1996, Epstein et al., 2002) builds upon both microsystem structures and mesosystem relationships in the EMPA by providing

a practical approach to encourage collaboration between the structures of family, school, and community. This model will now be discussed.

Epstein's Partnership Framework

The National Network of Partnership Schools [NNSP] at John Hopkins University, in partnership with Joyce Epstein and Stephen Sheldon, directors of the Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships, recognize that school, family, and community partnerships are a multidimensional concept (2002). Through research at this center, a commitment has been developed to help conduct and disseminate research, while providing professional development programs that strengthen the knowledge and practices of schools, families, and communities working together towards the enhancement of student learning (Epstein, 2007). In turn, a practical manual has been developed by Epstein and her colleagues (2002) to share the knowledge and approach for implementing a partnership framework within an elementary or secondary high school.

The practical manual is the staple of the NNSP and it focuses on the planning and organization of involving families and communities in the school (Epstein, 1996; Epstein et al., 2002). The framework highlights the integration of relevant educational stakeholders such as family, school, and community into a collaborative relationship. Similar to the interrelated structures previously discussed in the EMPA, Epstein describes the family, school, and community stakeholders as overlapping spheres of influence (Epstein, 1987). These spheres share qualities with other spheres, while ultimately working towards the common goal of social and academic success. The bi-directional relations between the spheres further reinforce the overlapping or interrelated characteristics of the structures. For example, within the school setting, administrators may work to make schools more family-like. Likewise, at home, families try to be more school-like by reinforcing the importance of

schoolwork, homework, and the development of effective learning skills. Families may also aim to be more community-minded by having a presence within the community neighbourhood. Furthermore, communities may be designed to be family-like by offering a variety of programs that enable families to better support their children. Lastly, Epstein (1987) describes caring communities as a combination of all the family-friendly and equitable programs that take into account the multiple needs and realities of families.

In order to understand the role of each stakeholder within a wider context, Epstein and colleagues highlight the importance of working collaboratively with other stakeholders (Epstein, 1987, 1996; Epstein et al., 2002). More precisely, they indicate that the key component of successful collaboration is the ability to work not only as an individual stakeholder, but also in conjunction with all relevant stakeholders (Epstein, 1987, 1996; Epstein et al., 2002). As a result, Epstein and colleagues (2002) developed the concept of school-based action teams dedicated to fostering collaboration. These teams are comprised of relevant educational stakeholders including parents, teachers, administrators, community members, and students. Epstein and colleagues (2002) explain that action teams are formed to work collaboratively together in order to create both academic and partnership goals, while integrating the resources and thoughts of relevant stakeholders (Epstein, 1987, 1996; Epstein et al., 2002). Research by Sheldon (2005) identified that schools that developed action teams were more likely to form committees, write plans, reach out to more families, evaluate their efforts, and sustain their programs over time. Action teams that followed the above actions were more efficient at reaching a large population of families, as well as increasing family and community involvement (Sheldon, 2003).

Epstein and colleagues (2002) describe six different types of involvement which are utilized by action teams to facilitate collaboration between families, schools, and

communities. These types of involvement also serve to achieve the goals set by the action team. The six types of involvement are: (a) parenting, (b) communicating, (c) volunteering, (d) learning at home, (e) decision-making, and (f) collaborating with the community. These types of involvement are summarized in Table 1.

Epstein and colleagues' partnership framework (1996; Epstein et al., 2002) has been used extensively in schools to promote collaboration among families, schools, and communities for academic purposes (Deslandes, Royer, Potvin, & Leclerc, 1999; Epstein et al., 2002; Sanders, 1998). However, only a handful of interventions have been used based on Epstein's (2002) framework to develop and work toward a physical activity or healthy living goal (Epstein & Clark Salinas, 2004; NNPS, 2000). One recent example was a one-day event, 'You Go, Girl' (NNPS, 2000), that targeted daily activity and healthy living for girls between grades six and twelve. The initiative was held with a specific goal of increasing physical activity, while promoting community collaboration via mentors and handouts. A similar physical activity goal was set for a program called, 'Try it at Lunch', where the action collaborated with community instructors to volunteer their services to offer lunch time physical activity classes for the students (Epstein & Clark Salinas, 2004). Unfortunately, there are no interventions documented in the literature designed specifically to promote partnerships between schools, families, and communities to increase active and healthy living based on the framework put forth by Epstein and colleagues (2002).

In summary, Epstein's partnership framework provides a solid foundation for encouraging collaboration between families, schools, and communities. Through the development of an action team that sets academic and partnership goals for the school, six different types of involvement can be focused on and maintained. Additionally, this partnership framework represents a useful means of linking together families, schools, and

communities towards the goal of student development. Research through this study will help to expand the framework into a physical activity and healthy living context within an elementary school.

Table 1

Types 1-3 of Involvement (adapted from Epstein et al., 2002)

	Type 1: Parenting	Type 2: Communicating	Type:3 Volunteering
Definition of Type of Involvement	The support families receive from schools in order to help establish home environments that encourage students to be children	The use of effective school-to-home and home-to-school communication about school programs and progress of students	The recruitment and organization of parent and community help and support
Sample practices of Involvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workshops, parental education courses, and family support program 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Newsletters, school websites, student portfolio presentations, and language translation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing assistance to teachers, administrators, students, and parents • Field trips, extracurricular
Examples of Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing information to all families who want and need it • Enable families to share information about culture, background, and children's needs and talents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider parents who do not speak English well, do not read well, and need large type • Review the schedule and structure of communication (newsletter, report cards, meetings) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruit volunteers widely • Make flexible schedules for volunteers • Provide training to match school needs and volunteer needs
Expected Results for Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness of family supervision • Awareness of importance of school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness of own role in partnerships, through being a courier and communicating 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skills in communicating with adults • Awareness of skills, talents, occupations, and contributions of parents and volunteers
Expected Results for Parents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding and confidence in parenting • Awareness of own and others' challenges in parenting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding school programs and policies • Interactions with teachers and ease of communications with school and teachers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding teacher's job • Self-confidence about ability to work in school and with children • Awareness that families are welcome and valued
Expected Results for Teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding families' backgrounds, cultures, concerns, goals, needs, and views of their children • Respect for families' strengths and efforts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased diversity and use of communications with families • Appreciation and use of parent network 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Readiness to involve families in new ways • Awareness of parent talents and interests in school and children • Greater individual attention to students, with help from volunteers

Table 1 continued

Types 4-6 of Involvement (adapted from Epstein et al., 2002)

	Type 4: Learning at Home	Type 5: Decision-Making	Type 6: Collaborating with the Community
Definition of Type of Involvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The information and ideas that schools provide to families about how to help students with homework and other curriculum-related activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focuses on the importance of decisions made by parents and schools • Development of PTAs, governing boards, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability of the action team to identify and integrate resources and services from the community to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning
Sample practices of Involvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Homework policies, distribution of calendars and summer learning packets 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include students in decision-making groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distribution of community activity information through partnerships
Examples of Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design and organize a regular schedule of interactive homework that gives students responsibility for discussing important things • Coordinate family-linked homework activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include parent leaders from all racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, and other groups in the school • Offer training to enable leaders • Include students along with parents in decision-making groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inform families of community programs for students, such as mentoring, tutoring, and business partnerships • Match community contributions with school goals • Ensure equity of opportunities for families to participate in community programs
Expected Results for Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive attitude toward schoolwork • View of parent as more similar to teacher and home as more similar to school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness of representation of families in school decisions • Benefits linked to policies enacted by parent organizations and experienced by students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased skills and talents through enriched curricular and extracurricular experiences • Specific benefits linked to programs, services and resources that connect students with community
Expected Results for Parents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Know how to support and encourage student at home • Appreciation of teaching skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feeling of ownership of school • Awareness of parents' voices in school • Awareness of school and district policies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge and use of local resources by family and child to increase skills and talents • Interaction with other families • Awareness of school's role in community
Expected Results for Teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respect of family time • Recognition of family types and structures • Satisfaction with family involvement and support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness of parent perspectives as factors in policy development • View of equal status of family representatives on committees 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness of community resources to enrich curriculum • Openness to and skill in using mentors, business partners, and volunteers to assist students and augment teaching practice

School-based Physical Activity Interventions

The World Health Organization (2003) recently identified a global aim to increase the number of people who voluntarily participate in regular physical activity. Similarly, the United Nations inaugurated 2005 as the Year of Sport and Physical Education. With a large body of research suggesting that childhood activity participation is a relevant determinant of adult activity patterns, it is extremely important to teach this worldwide valuing of physical activity to children at a young age (Pate, Baranowski, Dowda, & Trost, 1996). Thus, the school has been targeted as the most logical environment to intervene (Siedentop, 1996; WHO, 2003).

Siedentop (1996) suggested that the school is the central component of planning and implementing physical activity infrastructure such as school-based interventions, community sport, and physical activity committees. He further established that these infrastructures are created with the intention of promoting accessibility for all, having persistent adult leadership, and offering challenging activities that increase opportunities for physical activity participation (Siedentop, 1996). Furthermore, he suggested that the creation of appropriate physical activity infrastructure is heavily dependent on the developmental triangle of family, school, and community. In fact, several researchers expanded this work and recognized the need to consult and include these relevant stakeholders in the planning and organization of health infrastructure and interventions (e.g., Epstein et al., 2002; Hesketh et al., 2005; Potvin, Cargo, McComber, Delormier, & Macauley, 2003).

School-based physical activity interventions are the most common form of physical activity intervention with youth (Cale & Harris, 2006). With increased government awareness for active and healthy living, governments have come to recognize and support the development of coordinated school health interventions, or programs such as Healthy

Schools in Quebec (Cale & Harris, 2006). This is not surprising considering the large amounts of time youth spend in educational setting. Stone and colleagues (1998) further rationalize that schools have a unique advantage as interventions can become institutionalized into the regular school curriculum, staff development, and other school infrastructure. In particular, schools at the elementary level have often been solicited due to their flexible curriculum and holistic approaches to health, number of trained personnel, and capacity to interact with local community organizations (Cale & Harris, 1997; Ringuet & Trost, 2001).

School-based interventions have primarily focused on either the physical education program, classroom health and well-being or after-school programs (e.g., Cale & Harris, 2006; Dowda et al., 2005; McKenzie et al., 2000; Powers et al., 2002; Stone et al., 1998). Likewise, many studies have looked solely at the influences of parents and community sports on physical activity participation (e.g., Hopper et al., 2005; Ransdell, Dratt, Kennedy, O'Neill, & DeVoe, 2001). Despite the vast amount of research, several authors have suggested that interventions focusing primarily on changing individual behaviours through one source of influence have limited effectiveness (e.g., Campbell et al., 2001; Hesketh et al., 2005; Spence & Lee, 2003). In addition, many of these interventions were also criticized for being too short-term, raising issues of sustainability (Biddle et al., 2004; Shephard & Trudeau, 2000).

Physical activity intervention studies have been predominantly outcome-based, with particular focus on increasing activity and energy expenditure (Cale & Harris, 2006). A review of intervention effectiveness by Almond and Harris (as cited in Biddle et al., 2004) showed that school-based interventions which resulted in an increase in physical activity occurred outside of and in addition to the physical education program. Contrary to this,

researchers in public health and physical activity promotion point out that physical activity interventions should aim to influence physical activity, not necessarily fitness (Cale & Harris, 2006; Corbin, 2002; Pangrazi, 2000). A review by Ringuet and Trost (2001) echoed this by stating that community-based school interventions should be designed to encourage students to participate in non-competition based activities.

One main focus of physical activity interventions that researchers have identified to be of importance is the ability of the intervention to establish regular physical activity patterns for youth that can be carried into adulthood (Shephard & Trudeau, 2000). Accordingly, there has been a recent surge in youth physical activity research focusing on the triad of families, schools, and communities during the school years (CIHI, 2005; Shain, 2005; Pate et al., 2003). For example, the Living Schools initiative in Ontario is designed to develop, support, and evaluate a comprehensive and coordinated community-driven approach to disease prevention in elementary schools. Findings from the evaluation of the pilot project revealed an increase in physical activity as well as in the number of partnerships (Shain, 2005). However, the evaluation did not include information on how stakeholders worked together to implement the intervention.

Ringuet and Trost (2001) posit that, in addition to school-based interventions, there is a need for community-based interventions. Recent interventions have included Living Schools; Child and Adolescent Trial for Cardiovascular Health [CATCH]; Sports, Play and Active Recreation for Kids [SPARK]; Be a Fit Kid; and Middle-School Physical Activity and Nutrition [M-SPAN]. These interventions promote shared responsibility for student health between the family, school, and community (McKenzie, 1999; Shain, 2005). For example, the 'Be a Fit Kid' intervention relied on community sponsors of food and gift certificates to help expose children to a variety of nutritious foods (Slawta, Bentley, Smith, Kelly, and

Syman-Degler, 2006). In addition, this type of approach enables the use of existing community physical activity facilities while potentially offering available and cost-efficient programs (Ringuet & Trost, 2001). Unfortunately, these interventions have lacked detail on the protocol of implementation (Cale and Harris, 2005a; Stone et al., 1998). Harrington, Franklin, Davies, Shewchuk, and Binns (2005) likened this notion by arguing that there is a need for researchers to “share the ‘nuts and bolts’ of their methods to help future programs maximize their implementation”.

Presently, the province of Quebec is in the process of implementing a Healthy Schools approach (Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport, 2005). This collaborative approach aims to facilitate the acquisition and development of healthy behaviours, promote healthy school, and community environments, and create relationships between schools, families, and the community. Moreover, the Healthy Schools approach follows a similar outline as Epstein and colleagues partnership framework: developing a team of responsible stakeholders, adopting a common vision, analyzing the situation, improving the school's success plan, implementing the success plan, and critically evaluating the entire process. Currently, the Healthy Schools approach has been implemented in several French elementary schools and is being piloted in English elementary schools.

In conclusion, there is a growing body of literature on school-based interventions for the promotion of physical activity among youth. This literature reflects the important role of the school as a setting to efficiently reach a large number of children and adolescents. However, much of the literature notes that studies predominantly focus on measurable outcomes of physical activity interventions such as energy expenditure or weight loss. In turn, there is a critical lack of information concerning the implementation of interventions aimed to increase active and healthy lifestyle opportunities for school-aged children. Thus, a

need exists for studies outlining the 'nuts and bolts' of creating and implementing an intervention. As a result, Epstein and colleagues' (2002) framework was chosen to highlight the inner workings of planning and implementing school-based physical activity interventions.

CHAPTER 3: Methodology

This chapter outlines the methodology that was used to conduct the current study. Action research guidelines, as well as several community-based research principles proposed by Israel, Eng, Schulz, and Parker (2005) and Strand, Marullo, Cutforth, Stoecker, and Donohue (2003) were used to implement a collaborative action team and healthy and active lifestyle activities in an elementary school. Multiple data collection methods were used to provide rich descriptions about the processes used to implement the action team including observations, reflections, informal conversations, print data, and follow-up open-ended questionnaires. The following section will discuss action research, participants, procedures, instruments, data analysis, and trustworthiness aspects of this study.

Although much literature exists on physical activity determinants and the outcome of interventions to promote physical activity, there is not much information available about the process of implementing these interventions. This study attempted to partially fill this gap by focusing on the actual process of using an action team based on the framework of Epstein and colleagues (2002) to increase physical activity opportunities for youth. Much of the thesis emerged throughout the process of reflection by the action team members and myself, as it helped to mould the implementation of the initiatives (Fisher & Phelps, 2006). The use of Epstein's (1996; Epstein et al., 2002) framework facilitated the planning, implementation, and reflection during the ongoing development of action research (Fisher & Phelps, 2006; Reason, 2004). With an increased emphasis being placed on health promotion instead of treatment, the action team approach took an action-oriented approach with the hope of initiating change (Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

In this study, action research facilitated the use of Epstein and colleagues' (2002) framework in order to plan and implement physical activity opportunities using a variety of

available resources. It encouraged the development of partnerships both within the school and community. In addition, it allowed me, as a researcher and teacher practitioner, to participate in the study as a member of the action team.

Action Research

Action research is a qualitative method that encourages the researcher to facilitate the collaborative production of knowledge to help improve the living conditions of people (Reason, 2004; Rossman & Rallis, 2003). It is a goal-oriented effort that maintains a balance between theory and practice (Gilbert & Smith, 2003). Fisher and Phelps (2006) liken this type of research to the “depicting of context, change processes, resultant learning and theorizing of individuals or groups in a process of mutual change and inquiry.” Furthermore, action research encompasses a cyclical nature of assessing, exploring, researching, discussing, documenting, evaluating, monitoring, analyzing, refining, and revising (Schoen & Bullard, 2002).

Action research develops from the researcher’s values, attitudes, and beliefs (Fisher & Phelps, 2006). As a researcher, I have a strong background in physical activity participation, along with a desire to increase the healthy lifestyle choices and physical activity opportunities for youth. With my recent degree in physical education along with teaching experience at both the elementary and secondary levels, I have become aware that there is a gap between what is taught in the gymnasium and what is transferred to the home and community. For this reason, I believe that through collaboration between the school, family, and community, an opportunity for creating a unified approach to promote physical activity participation presents itself.

Collaboration is necessary between all levels of educational stakeholders in order to promote physical activity as an important and necessary aspect of a healthy lifestyle

(Fridinger et al., 1994). In this study, action research provided a unique opportunity for an action team to work together toward the common goal of increasing active and healthy lifestyle opportunities. It allowed the action team to work together to assess the current issues, plan activities, and then re-evaluate the effectiveness of the implementation process. Furthermore, this type of research instilled a sense of independence that allowed the action team the ability to be carried on during the subsequent school year (Israel et al., 2005). Finally, in addition to the use of a natural setting, this type of research gave a living “voice” to all who participated in the study (Israel et al., 2005; Rossman & Rallis, 2003).

Participants

An elementary school within the Lester B. Pearson school board in Montreal was selected to participate in the research study. An elementary school setting was chosen as students are under the age of 12, a critical age where much initial exposure to physical activity occurs (Pangrazi, Corbin, & Welk, 1996). Likewise, a significant drop occurs in student participation in physical activity as grade level increases (Wallhead & Buckworth, 2004; Sallis et al., 1999).

Epstein and colleagues' (2002) framework, along with community-based action research guidelines (Israel et al., 2005; Strand et al., 2003) assisted with the development of an action team dedicated to creating active and healthy living opportunities for youth. These guidelines structured an action team of relevant stakeholders who combined their unique backgrounds and resources together. As the researcher-practitioner, I, along with the physical education teacher and principal played a central role in the guidance and development of the action team, most notably with the recruitment of the members.

Members of the action team were recruited through various media including newsletters, the school website, and word of mouth. The team consisted of the physical

educator(s), three parents, two students, two community members, and me, a researcher-teacher. With six members, the small size of the team allowed for improved communication and increased active participation in the group discussion and goals (Epstein et al., 2002; Israel et al., 2005). Each member contributed to the many roles of assessing practices, organizing initiatives, implementing initiatives, and evaluating future directions. The physical educators were represented by a full time physical education teacher and me, a part time physical educator. One parent represented each cycle in order to ensure a fair representation of the school body. In Quebec, the elementary and secondary school systems are divided into cycles, with each cycle representing two grades (i.e., cycle 1 is grade 1 and grade 2). The community members were represented by a master's student and a teacher from a nearby school.

Procedures

The Lester B. Pearson school board was contacted, informed of the nature of the study, and invited to have a school within it participate. Once consent was granted from the school board, I approached Terry Fox, which had a passionate principal and new physical education teacher. Soon after, I was hired as a part-time physical education teacher at the school in early September. This allowed me to build relationships with students and families prior to recruiting members for the action team. Unfortunately, several unexpected events occurred between September and November, and the action team was only started in December. Not surprisingly, during these months I was able to gain many insights from my prolonged engagement in the school. In December, members were invited to an introductory action team meeting via school newsletters sent home (Appendix A), the school website, and word of mouth. Each of these modes of contact included a description of the

study, the purpose of creating the action team, and information about a few potential activities.

In late December, action team members were recruited by Julie and me through school newsletters and word of mouth. Similar to Epstein and colleagues' (2002) framework, members represented each of the grade levels as well as the wider community. Once the members of the action team were established, an introductory meeting was held in early January. Members were introduced to Epstein and colleagues' (2002) partnership framework as the central component behind the action team for active and healthy living. This included determining shared leadership responsibilities and roles, establishing a communication system, and discussing and planning the initiatives. More specifically, this included considering protocols for gaining family and school support for the action team and initiatives. As well, consent forms (Appendix B) were provided to all members of the action team.

As the action team progressed, students and their families were invited to participate in organized initiatives such as family physical education nights, health calendars, and the apple tree. The health initiatives were run through the classrooms at recess and invited students to bring healthy snacks. Letters were sent home notifying parents about the initiatives, inviting students and their families to take part in eating more healthily. Families were not obliged to participate, nor did anyone check to see if students were bringing healthy snacks or filling out their calendars. Likewise, families were invited to participate in active initiatives, such as the skating and family physical education nights, via newsletters. Once again, families participated out of their own choosing.

Throughout the process, I had two separate and distinct roles- one as the researcher and the other as the participant (Reason, 2004). As a researcher, the study occurred in five

phases, following recommendations by Strand and colleagues (2003). First, I identified the need to incorporate collaborative efforts for active and healthy living in an elementary school. Second, I worked with the principal and physical education teacher to develop an action team. This phase included implementing the initiatives within the school and community. Third, I collected data continuously via observations, reflections, and informal conversations throughout the process of creating the action team and implementing the initiatives. Fourth, data analysis took place continually in order to assist with ongoing reflection about the process of the action team. Lastly, the results were disseminated through narrative and rich description in this thesis, with hopes of reaching researchers and practitioners.

From the view of an action team member, the development of the action team also emerged in five phases based on several community-based action research guidelines (Israel et al., 2005; Strand et al., 2002). First, as researcher, I formulated the action team based on a perceived need to increase active and healthy living opportunities for youth. This included integrating Epstein and colleagues' (2002) guidelines which allowed the action team members to work collaboratively to identify resources, and develop, implement, and evaluate the active and healthy living initiatives (Reason, 2004). Second, upon meeting at the introductory meeting, action team members used their personal capacities to identify and share resources and information about community strengths (Israel et al., 2005; Strand et al., 2003). These resources included established partners and partnerships in city networks, facilities, and knowledge of local businesses that were essential for the organization of initiatives (Babkie & Provost, 2004; Epstein et al., 2002).

Third, a plan of action was developed for meetings and organizing the five initiatives (Babkie & Provost, 2004; Epstein et al., 2003; Strand et al., 2003). This plan of action

centered on strategies that encouraged the use of Epstein and colleagues' (2002) six types of involvement: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with the community. Fourth, the action team implemented the initiatives in the school and community at several different facilities. This phase included a cyclical nature of planning, relaying information to families, implementing initiatives, and evaluating. For example, three family physical education nights were held in February and after each evening, action team members gathered feedback from parents in order to assist with planning for the subsequent nights.

Last, the action team evaluated the process of identifying, planning, and implementing the plan of action. In order to make improvements, continual reflection through daily conversations occurred during the ongoing process of implementing the action team (Babkie & Provost, 2004; Epstein et al., 2002; Reason, 2004). As well, a final evaluation session was held at the culmination of the initiatives to analyze the future directions of the action team. This included considering methods to assist with sustaining the partnerships over a longer period of time (Epstein et al., 2002; Israel et al., 2005; Reason, 2004).

Data Collection

Several authors (e.g., Patton 2002; Rossman & Rallis 2003) have encouraged the use of multiple sources of data in order to enhance the rigor, credibility, and usefulness of the study. This allows alternative methods to triangulate and compensate for the limitations of any individual method (Israel et al., 2005; Patton, 2002; Rossman & Rallis, 2003). For this study, data collection included field observations and reflections, print copy, informal conversations, and finally culminating open-ended questionnaires.

Field Notes

Field notes were collected in naturalistic settings and encompassed two components: the running record and the observer comments (Johnson & Christensen, 2004; Rossman & Rallis, 2003). The first component refers to observations about the research and entails capturing as much detail as possible about the setting and people (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). This included taking into account the school setting, the characteristics of the leaders in the school, and several aspects of the physical education program. The second component describes the process and my reactions to it. This included detailing emotional reactions to the events, analytic insights, interpretations, and ideas about how to modify the design of the study (Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Rossman & Rallis, 2003). In this study, field notes provided rich descriptions of occurrences that arose both from observations during meetings and initiatives, as well as from my ongoing reflections (Rossman & Rallis, 2003).

Print Copy

Print copy was collected and filed throughout the implementation of the study. This data included newsletters, meeting notes, pictures of initiatives, and written communications home. This form of data was amassed so that it could be referenced by future action teams. As well, it provided a means to evaluate methods of communication with parents and teachers, as well as the visibility of the action team. Consent was verbally given for pictures to be used in the presentation of this thesis.

Open-ended questionnaires

An open-ended questionnaire (Appendix C) was given to action team members at the conclusion of the major action team initiatives. This type of questionnaire allowed several different topics of discussion to be integrated in a manner that the action team member was able to answer freely (Rossman & Rallis, 2003; Rubin & Rubin, 1995). For this

study, the questionnaires were given as oral interviews in person or on the phone, as well as filled in through email correspondence. This method was chosen by the action team members to accommodate the different needs of the action team members. For example, some members felt that their opinions were openly conveyed in daily conversations, thus they filled in the questionnaire through email.

The questionnaire was created based on Epstein's framework (1996; Epstein et al., 2002), as well as on relevant issues emerging during the process of implementing the action team. It included open-ended questions, which allowed me to gain final insights and a deeper understanding of the member's perceptions of the implementation of the action team (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). Four members chose to complete the questionnaire by email, while one opted to be asked the questions over the phone. Interestingly, the member that completed the phone questionnaire was legally blind. To further accommodate a busy schedule, the principal chose to respond to the questionnaire in person at the beginning of the subsequent school year.

Questions focused on Epstein and colleagues' (2002) six types of involvement and issues of sustainability. One question, for example, included asking the members to envision the role of the action team in future years. Another question probed the participant to identify three important aspects of organizing health and wellness initiatives at Terry Fox. These open-ended questions allowed me to conclude my understanding of the actions, thoughts, beliefs, reasoning, and motivations that I perceived about each action team member (Johnson & Christensen, 2004; Patton, 2002).

Data Analysis

The primary purpose of data analysis for this study was to bring order to emerging ideas from the reflections and perceptions of action team members about the process of

implementing the action team. Analysis of the data was inductive and followed guidelines set out by Marshall and Rossman (2006), which consist of seven main steps: (a) organizing the data, (b) immersion in the data, (c) generating categories and themes, (d) coding the data, (e) offering interpretations through analytic memos, (f) searching for alternative understandings, and (g) writing the report.

The first four steps defined by Marshall and Rossman (2006) were used to create an understanding and organization of the data to be understood. Throughout the process I constantly immersed myself in comparing field notes, conversations, and open-ended questionnaires through re-reading, listening, and asking questions. This greatly assisted my familiarization with the data in order to better organize and compare emerging ideas. Generation of categories and themes occurred inductively as data emerged during the study. Inductive analysis occurred in order to identify categories that accounted for participant views. Rossman and Rallis (2003) describe categories as a word or phrase that describes a portion of the data. Themes, however, represent the more subtle recurring ideas and patterns of belief and emerge during more intensive analysis (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). In order to generate categories and themes, concept mapping and constant comparison methods were used to lay out recurring ideas. Once these were achieved, coding took place in order to formally represent the categorical and thematic analysis.

Throughout the analytic process, I wrote notes and reflective memos to assist with generating insight and understanding (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). From these memos, I began the journey of 'telling the story', by bringing meaning and coherence to the categories through reflection. Through the development of the story, I attempted to make sense of the findings by offering explanations, drawing conclusions, and extrapolating lessons (Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Patton, 2002). In many cases, making sense of lessons learned was a

collaborative activity with the action team. For example, I learned many of the issues and difficulties of recruiting action team members through discussion with the parent members during meetings. Finally, this story entailed searching for alternative meanings through reflection and discussion, as well as providing guidelines for future research (Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

The last step included disseminating the findings into a thesis. The use of narrative provided rich and detailed descriptions to better understand the lessons learned by the action team. Within this report, existing theory is integrated along with potential alternative finds in order to create a holistic report. In particular, an emphasis is placed on creating a report that is relevant and informative for future researchers, action team members, and practitioners (Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

Trustworthiness

Establishing trustworthiness is essential during qualitative research (Johnson & Christensen, 2004). This level of trust ensured that the study was conducted appropriately and the findings are rigorous, credible, and informative. This study followed suggestions outlined by Marshall and Rossman (2006) and Patton (2002). Specifically, trustworthiness encompassed peer debriefing, member checks, triangulation, and prolonged engagement. Peer debriefing were used to ensure rigor and credibility of the study (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Ongoing conversation with my supervisor occurred regularly, where he critically questioned my emerging interpretations to assist with clarification of the foundations behind them. Continual dialogue also helped me to reflect upon and become aware of how I contributed to shape the course of the research (Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

Member checks were also used to confirm that the participant's questionnaire transcription and narratives are correct and that each participant felt that they were

represented appropriately (Patton, 2002; Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Action team members were continually presented with the researcher's interpretations and conclusions to see if they embodied the values, beliefs, and actions within the context of the intervention (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). They were also given the opportunity to verbalize any questions, concerns, or comments about the data if they wish at the beginning of the subsequent school year.

Triangulation is particularly important for the study as it brings several sources of data together towards a single research question (Marshall & Rossman 2006). The use of observations and field notes, reflections, print copy, and open-ended questionnaires overlap different sources of information together in a manner that allows for one method of data collection to compensate for the shortcomings of another (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). More importantly, the use of several data collection methods strengthened the usefulness of this study for other settings (Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

For this study, the situating of the researcher, or prolonged engagement, was of utmost importance. The situating of the researcher refers to the researcher engaging one's self within the environment and culture of the participants in order to build trust with the participants (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). In this study, I was working as a part-time physical education teacher, thus allowing myself to be familiar with the school while building relationships with the students and staff, and with parents. Patton (2002) describes this as having a high level of *participantness*, or real-life participation in the daily situations. This allowed me to gain insight into the daily workings of the school, as well as to the methods of communication between school and home. Furthermore, members of the school community became familiar with my role as a teacher, action team member, and researcher. Hence, I had an excellent working knowledge of the school committees and developed a good

rapport with parents on the action team. Thus, situating myself within the school setting was the most crucial element for building the trust required to allow for honest and open reflection from action team members concerning the process of implementing an action team.

CHAPTER 4: Results

The results are presented as a chronological narrative of the process of implementing the action team based upon observations, open-ended questionnaires, print copy, and field notes. This includes a rich description of the initiatives designed by the action team and the participants' perceptions of the value and future of the action team and the initiatives. Throughout the chapter, abundant illustrative material in the form of quotes and excerpts from the open-ended questionnaires and print copy are provided.

An Action Team for Active and Healthy Living

Prior to detailing the process of implementing the action team, I would like to first introduce myself. I am 25 years old, a native of Ontario, and a resident in Montreal for the past 7 years. I graduated with an undergraduate degree in physical education two years ago and have since been pursuing this study along with a handful of other jobs, including supervising at a gym, substitute teaching, acting as a teacher's assistant to undergraduate physical education students, and supervising physical education students during their field experiences. In addition to this, I worked at Terry Fox Elementary School as a 50% physical education teacher between the months of September and December before being asked to stay on as a contract Health and Wellness teacher for the remainder of the year. Needless to say, I would best describe myself as being passionate about physical education and physical activity. I am also very driven in my desire to extend a love of physical activity to others. I enjoy not only playing sports, but also forming new relationships with the people who play them. This leads to the reasons behind my decision to pursue the action team for active and healthy living as a master's thesis.

Context and Setting

Terry Fox Public Elementary School is located in Pierrefonds, small borough of Montreal with a population of 56, 000 people. The borough has the feel of a small community, complete with tree-lined streets and parks situated every few blocks. The city caters to a variety of cultural and physical activity needs, including badminton, ringette, and judo. Also in the vicinity, community members have access to community centers, cultural centers, baseball diamonds, and other recreational facilities. The school is positioned on the edge of Pierrefonds, with an outdoor community pool and skating rink within walking distance.

The student population of Terry Fox Elementary is approximately 350 students, with most students living in the Pierrefonds borough or in nearby boroughs. The school is heterogeneous, with small populations of Muslim, Indian, and black students. Students in the school belong to a middle class socioeconomic group, with most families having two working parents. Many families have more than one child in the school.

Terry Fox qualifies as a French immersion school and employs 25 teachers and a large support staff. Students in K to grade 2 receive instruction in the French language, whereas students in grade 3 and higher learn in French and English on opposite days. The school also employs several specialists to give instruction in physical education, computers, and music. As well, the school offers a full daycare program for interested families, beginning at 7:30am and ending at 6:30pm. To support the school, a very friendly daytime and evening janitorial staff keeps the school well maintained.

The school's education project is representative of not only the curriculum taught, but also of the supportive and energetic staff. The educational project mandates that children should be happy, thus the school should be an enjoyable place to grow and develop.

Citizen characteristics such as friendship, respect, creativity, cooperation, academic excellence and healthy body and mind are emphasized throughout the school. To complement this, the school recently became a member of Peaceful Schools International.

The school success plan aims to improve literacy and “encourage the development of a healthy body, mind and spirit, by promoting positive attitudes towards themselves, their peers and the learning environment.” The latter portion of the plan is supported by the goal of developing and integrating daily opportunities for physical activities, as well as increasing the frequency of school-wide fitness events. The principal identified the required resources for working towards these goals as hiring a physical education specialist to prepare samples of daily classroom exercises and gaining financial support from the Home and School organization to support a variety of “whole school” activities. As of this year, the first steps towards attaining these goals were put into place with the hiring of a new physical education teacher and the sale of coupon books to fundraise money for the physical education program.

The principal at the school, affectionately called Mr. T., is the cornerstone of the values and beliefs that embody the school success plan. Mr. T. is a visible face within the school, often wandering the halls to see if help is needed or just to check in and say ‘hi’. He is extremely supportive of teachers’ instructional methods and design, as well as of teacher interests beyond the school walls. In particular, Mr. T. is an active participant and supporter of physical activity and in turn physical education. Interestingly, this coincides with research indicating that the principal’s level of physical activity is related to the opportunities for physical activity within the school (Barnett and colleagues, 2006).

Complementary of a strong principal, are a set of dedicated teachers. The teaching staff within the school is predominantly female. The teachers are highly motivated and

student-centered with such activities as peer mediation, fieldtrips, a production of 'Le Petit Prince', running intramurals, and organizing school teams to participate in interscholastic tournaments. In addition, several staff members participate on the staff council and/or governing board to assist with decision-making in the school. Staff cohesion is emphasized at the school, and staff events are held prior to the beginning of the school year, before Christmas, and at the end of the school year.

Parental and community support for the school is exemplified by the number of parents within the school at any given time. Many parents are in the school on a daily basis and assist with the library, pizza days, lice checks, and field trips. Several parents also take part in the school's governing board. Within the community, the school has links with a grocery store, a nearby pool where students receive a swimming lesson in June, and several individuals who help with a variety of items.

Physical Education

Since active and healthy lifestyles are of importance in this study, the physical education program must also be examined. The physical education program has a newly graduated specialist teacher who in the words of the principal, 'has turned the program around 180 degrees.' In addition, the program has a 50% teacher who also teaches in the classroom. Between the months of September to December, I was replacing the 50% teacher. The program centers around the idea of fostering participation and enjoyment, while focusing on life skills such as cooperation and respect. The program now consists of a variety of activities including cooperative games, team building activities, Omnikin, playground games, gymnastics, Pilo Polo, and orienteering. Much of the program occurs within the gymnasium, however students are often taken outside or to a nearby park. Intramurals are also run at recess and lunch time with sports such as handball and ultimate

Frisbee. The physical education teacher has also taken the students to all interscholastic tournaments this year. The gymnasium is perhaps the most vibrant place in the school, with posters, artwork, and inspiring words on the wall (Figure 3).



Figure 3: Two students participating in physical education class in the Terry Fox Elementary gymnasium.

The Members of the Action Team

The action team was made up of the physical education teacher- Julie, 3 parents- Brenda, Darrin, and Bessy, 2 community members- Laurie and Sandy, and myself as a teacher-researcher. In addition, a group of students formed a Student Health and Wellness Committee. The organization of the team was based on guidelines set out by Epstein and colleagues (2003) that recommended a fair representation of the school body. In addition to the members, several parents expressed interest in helping out with initiatives, but did not show up to meetings. The majority of the activities were planned by Julie, Brenda, Darrin, Bessy, and myself. However, Laurie, Sandy, and several interested parents often shared their ideas and opinions during informal conversations. The following paragraphs will help you to get to know the members of the action team.

Julie is a 25 year old first year physical education specialist at Terry Fox. The year prior to working at Terry Fox, Julie completed a Master's degree with a focus on Sport Psychology that consisted of creating team building interventions for youth hockey teams. Having done an undergraduate degree in physical education with Julie, I can personally say that she is one of the most energetic and focused people that I have ever met. This can be especially seen with the way she organizes activities for students and in turn, the positive way that students respond to her. She is also the type of person that consistently puts others ahead of herself and is often found lending a helping hand. She is consistently found running around the school in search of students, equipment, or fellow teachers to help set up a recess or lunchtime activity. Students and staff at Terry Fox will echo my sentiments, with Julie being named 'the number one teacher of the year' both in the student yearbooks and by the principal. When asked about her decision to partake in this study, Julie commented:

When the project was described to me by Krista at the beginning of the year I knew immediately that I wanted to take part in it. I knew this was a novel idea within the school as nothing like this had ever taken place before. As a first year teacher I wanted to absorb as many great ideas as possible so that in upcoming years I could continue adding on to what had already been established. I was eager to work with a committee of enthusiastic people who could bring about increased opportunities for physical activity and health promotion. As the primary Physical Education teacher within the school I believed I could motivate the students to take part and that the entire experience would be a lot of fun for everyone involved. I was motivated to share my ideas, learn from others, and begin the initiatives. The entire project had a lot of potential from the onset and I loved my entire experience! (Julie)

Julie's role on the action team was essential to the organization and vision of the initiatives.

She was not only responsible for organizing, but also for a lot of the day-to-day duties, since she was at the school everyday:

My role on the action team consisted of brainstorming activities during the meetings as well as organizing events for the students and their families. More specifically, as I was one of the people who worked closest to the student body, I helped in handing out forms, describing events to students, motivating students to join us, collecting signed permission forms, and organizing events so that they ran smoothly the day of the event. I was always in communication with the primary researcher and was able to

adapt things at the last minute should any unforeseen occurrences take place (e.g., more people than we thought at the Phys. Ed. Family Night). (Julie)

Brenda, or Artzy Brenda, is a mother of two sons, one in grade 1 and the other in grade 4. She is the most visible volunteer in the school, helping out with anything from Governing Board to the library to publishing the weekly school newsletter, 'What's Up'. On the action team, Brenda has been a wealth of information. She is extremely knowledgeable with the inner workings of the school, as well as with nearby community facilities. She is always full of creative ideas and is extremely computer literate when it comes to designing handouts and newsletters. She, like Julie, is very driven and puts 100% effort into anything she is asked to do. Brenda joined the committee because she felt that

The program was of interest to me, as much as it was for our students and their families. I liked the fact that it was going to enrich our already strong sense of community. At first, I was approached by Krista and Julie to help recruit some members, and then I ended up becoming a member. (Brenda)

Brenda's role on the action team was varied, but she was by far the most prominent figure at all initiatives:

I worked alongside the other committee members when required and took part in co-ordinating the family ice skating outing and the upcoming family bike ride and picnic at the Ile Bizard Nature Park this coming September. I also designed and helped to photocopy the "Vivacious Veggie & Groovy Fruit Student Calendar" for our students. (Brenda)

Darrin is a father of two girls, one in grade 2 and the other in grade 4. He is also chair of the governing board and a volunteer with Home and School. Darrin could best be described as one's typical 'go to guy'. He has contacts throughout the community and he has been known for getting anything from metal bleachers for concerts to a trailer to carry bikes to the Bike Rally we had planned. Interestingly and unknown to me for five months, Darrin is also legally blind. Darrin's role on the action team was very hands-on and included making the apple tree with his children. Darrin became involved for two reasons:

As soon as I heard about the action team, I knew I wanted to get involved for two reasons. First, my kids. This was a great opportunity to be active with them. Second, when I heard about it, I thought it was a great thing. We always talk about reading, writing, and arithmetic, but we don't reach out to the kids who have other interests and strengths. The initiatives offered them the chance to get involved in another aspect of the school. (Darrin)

Bessy is a mother of two children, one in grade 2 and the other will be entering kindergarten in the upcoming school year. She also works as a private therapist, rehabilitates elderly patients, teaches aerobics, and coaches youth soccer. In the school, she volunteers in the library, with the parent organization, and as a class mom when she has time. She brought a different angle to the committee, as she truly is dedicated to living a healthy lifestyle. She puts a lot of effort into bringing her children up to eat healthy, with cutting out extras such as sodas. Bessy, although very busy, was able to bring a very parent-centred opinion to the action team. Bessy's reasons for being involved, centered around the physical education program:

I always felt that the physical education program was one of the weakest parts of the school. Kids until this year only got one physical education class per week and there was no excitement to get them more active. Adding the health and wellness action to the exciting new physical education program seemed like a great idea. All the members were in it for the kids. (Bessy)

Laurie is a physical education teacher at a nearby school and a master's student with a focus on sport psychology. She is an avid promoter for physical education and health curriculum and has worked with physical education teachers in training. Although not a member of the Terry Fox community, my rationale for asking Laurie to come to our meetings and initiatives was two-fold. First, Laurie is a wealth of information for designing activities and has a good working knowledge of nearby community facilities. Second, with Laurie being a first year teacher, it offered a unique opportunity to see how the action team worked at our school in hopes of starting up something similar at her own school the

following year. Laurie was a great asset during the physical education family nights with her help in running team building activities.

I wanted to use the ideas in my own school. I basically wanted to learn for my own benefit and development, what sort of things were done, what worked, how many people were needed. I felt that there could also be a need for such a committee in my own school. (Laurie)

Sandy is a member of a nearby community, as well as a master's student in the same physical education pedagogy program as myself. She was very interested in the program and thus came out to the first few meetings to gain further insight into the inner workings of a school. Sandy, with her background in soccer and hockey, had quite a lot of input into searching for community facilities for our family skate.

I decided to help out for two reasons. First, the project seemed really interesting and related to my field of study. I wanted to help out a fellow master's student and see the process of doing a study. Second, I will eventually be teaching physical education and I hope to gain some interesting elements to add to my teaching repertoire. (Sandy)

The members of the action team had an assortment of backgrounds, but one common goal, to promote health and physical activity within the school. Through this commonality, the action team came to life and progressed during the school year. It was both a learning experience and a new excitement for the members, that left each member feeling invigorated with their abilities to promote health and physical activity.

The Beginning of the Action Team

The following section will detail the beginning of the health and wellness action team. In August 2006, I approached Julie, the newly appointed physical education teacher, with the possibility of running this study at Terry Fox. She forwarded a brochure to the principal that outlined the project (Appendix D) and the benefits it may have for the school. In turn, Mr. T. expressed an interest in the project and wanted to find out more about it once school began.

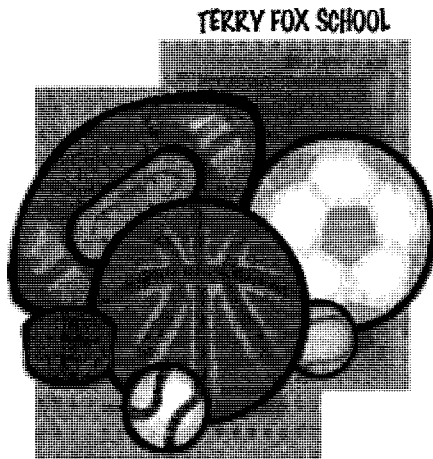
I wanted to have this project in the school because it followed a direction that the schools were being encouraged to go in. There is a need for activities like this, and the action team recognized it. As well, I am a firm believer in community schools and it was significant in the role of the school in terms of interaction with other elements of the community. It also focuses on the well-being of children as they saw that the role of the family was important- so that kids could see how children interacted with other families. (Mr. T.)

Unfortunately, the idea was put on hold for two reasons. First and most unfortunate, was that Mr. T. found out he had an unexpected illness and was forced to undergo treatment. Secondly, I had difficulty gaining support with the school board, which had recently downsized the amount of university projects allowed at any one time. Fortunately, there were also two positives that helped to establish the beginning of the project during the fall months. Although Mr. T. was not at the school, we had a wonderful retired teacher, Mario, who stepped in to take his place. Mario was extremely supportive and collaborated with Mr. T. to get this project accepted by the school board. The second positive included myself getting a 50 percent physical education contract at the school, due to the illness of a classroom teacher. This was by far the largest step in getting myself acquainted with the school and the students, teachers, and stakeholders in it.

As the months progressed toward the end of the year, I focused on gaining knowledge and confidence in my abilities as a Terry Fox teacher. This included helping to run intramurals, participating in parent-teacher interviews, and attending staff socials. At this point, I learned who the influential parents within the school were, as well as the families who were consistently helping out with school projects. One parent in particular, Brenda, stood out as she was a volunteer in the library and was in charge of organizing the school newsletter, 'What's Up'. Since Brenda was the most visible volunteer within the school, I discussed with Julie about potentially encouraging Brenda to become a member of our action team.

At the end of November, Mr. T. slowly began to re-integrate himself into the school. It was at this point that we started seriously discussing the beginning of the health and wellness action team. He let me know that it was “in all senses a go”, but that it must first be approved by both Staff Council and Governing Board. To make a case for the project, he encouraged me to come and present the action team plan at a Governing Board meeting. At the meeting, several parents, teachers including Julie and Mr. T. were present. In addition, Brenda was also at the meeting. I distributed handouts about the project as well as gave a brief description of what it would entail. The Governing Board members responded favourably to the project, and even more so when Mr. T. told them he believed the collaborative aspects of this project fit in with the school environment and that it would be run at relatively little to no cost to the school. A motion was then set forth and passed to accept the project.

The next step to starting the action team was to find members. As it was important to include the physical education teacher, I worked with Julie to come up with a variety of ways to encourage parents to participate in this new committee. We focused on two main avenues to get the word out. First, we decided to put a paragraph in both the school newsletter, ‘What’s Up’, and in the PE Newsletter, ‘Let’s Get Physically Educated’ (Figure 4). This avenue invited interested members to reply by sending a note with their child, call the school, or email myself. The second avenue we targeted was speaking with parents and teachers before and after school about the action team. This included being present near the front door when the bell went at the end of the day, and inviting parents who were picking up their children into the gym. In addition, during a parent teacher interview evening, Julie and I actively encouraged families to come into the gym to meet us so we could show them a few of the exciting things we were doing in the physical education program.



HEALTH & WELLNESS ACTION TEAM

Physical Education teachers, Julie Newin & Krista Smeltzer are happy to announce the implementation of the "Health & Wellness Program" at Terry Fox School. Beginning this month, the "Action Team" will emphasise a holistic health and wellness approach through healthy behaviours and participation in student & family oriented physical activities.

They are looking for 3-4 parents, 2-3 community members & 2 Cycle three students interested in being a member of this "Action Team" alongside Ms Newin & Ms. Smeltzer.

If you're keen on joining them, please send a note with your child, call the school or e-mail Ms. Smeltzer at krista.smeltzer@gmail.com with your name, telephone number & e-mail address (optional).

The introductory meeting has been scheduled for this evening at 19h00 in the Teacher's Staff Room. They are looking forward to seeing you there!

Figure 4: An example of recruiting action team members in the school newsletter, 'What's Up?'.

Unfortunately, we did not receive many responses, in fact less than I had anticipated. I received only two emails from parents, Robin and Bessy, who were interested in knowing further details and wanted to attend the first meeting in January. At first, when Julie and I had received only two responses, we decided it was time to try a different approach. Upon discussion with Mr. T., he suggested that we start recruiting people. Julie and I then decided to start with the parents who were visible in the school. The first parent we approached was Brenda, who is an avid parent volunteer in the library as well as in many other aspects of school life. We discussed with her our lack of response, and she offered to speak to a few parents that might be willing to help. Soon after this, we had three parents willing to commit to the health and wellness team: Brenda, Darrin, and Bessy. In addition, Julie and I sought out two community members with some difficulty. Specifically, since I was new to the school and area, I was not really familiar with the community surroundings. For the time being, we decided to ask a colleague from McGill, as well as another physical education teacher from a nearby school, to sit in and offer their opinions and ideas for the beginning of the Terry Fox health and wellness action team.

Later on during our first meeting, we discussed the lack of response and attributed it to the unfortunate timing around Christmas holidays, the Christmas concert, and the school's open house. Although we had conversations with parents who seemed excited about the prospect of the new committee, we were met with responses such as, "I would love to join, but I already belong to several other committees" (Parent).

Unfortunately with the children in ballet, jazz, and hockey, I just don't have the time right now to attend meetings. If you need any help organizing the activities, just let me know and I will do my best to help out. (Parent)

Unfortunately it's always the same parents who volunteer for the committees. There needs to be an increased effort to recruit more members if we want this program to succeed permanently at our school. (Bessy)

On a positive note, we had succeeded in letting parents know about the committee, and getting to know parents better. This would prove important between February and June when many of these parents would attend at least one, and if not all, of our initiatives.

Action Team Meetings

The following section will describe the progression of action team meetings, including the objectives and goals of the action team. The health and wellness action team met in a variety of forms over the course of five months. The meetings began in early January with all action team members attending the first three meetings held in the school staffroom. As the school year progressed, meetings were altered to shorter lunchtime and recess gatherings during school hours to accommodate the schedules of the members. Often these meetings took place in the physical education office or the library, where Brenda and Bessy volunteered.

The meetings were effective in gathering members of the committee together in order to brainstorm ideas for the Health and Wellness initiatives. I thought the first meeting was superb – our energies were focused on what we wanted to do within the school year. All members were present and we tossed ideas around and elaborated on one another's suggestions. The subsequent meetings were more centered on assigning tasks to certain people and making sure that we were still on-task. Once the initiatives were

thought up and agreed upon at the beginning of the project, communications took place primarily in the Phys. Ed. office where we would meet for small periods of time to update one another. There were really no evening meetings after the first three. (Julie)

The first official meeting of the action team took place in early January and ran in accordance with many of the partnership principles outlined by Epstein and colleagues (2003). Specifically, we focused on establishing a welcoming environment, brainstorming goals, delegating responsibilities, and establishing means of communication. First off, I shared with the members a brief outline of my rationale for the action team, as well as several potential directions that I anticipated the action team would take:

With the amount of students not participating regularly in physical activity and the exciting new physical education program we have at Terry Fox, I want to take things a step further. I envision the action team working with parents, students, friends, and community members and facilities to provide additional healthy and active lifestyle activities that are open to ALL members of the Terry Fox community. I would like our committee to give families the opportunity to participate in physical activity together in a variety of old and new activities. (Krista)

After this, I invited the members to share their visions of the action team within Terry Fox Elementary School:

I am a firm believer in being consistent. By educating the students both at home and in school, not only will we be able to pass on the "health & wellness" information on to them [students], but also to their respective families. (Brenda)

I've always tried to be health conscious and have seen a lot in my work that worries me for the future of healthy lifestyles. We need to focus on both school and family. If you want to target the family, you have to find ways to get them excited. Something that they could do on their own that is affordable is the best. (Bessy)


To create longevity, sustainability. This committee has to become a part of the culture in the building. It has to become embedded in the philosophy of the school. What happens to the committee with the transfer of staff? How do you promote? We need to continually encourage the young people coming into the system. (Mr. T.)

The meeting then progressed to identifying the roles that each member would play. As a group, it was decided that Julie and I would co-chair the committee since we were at the school regularly and would have the most contact with the students. The action team then

determined that being such a small committee, it would be wise to delegate members to different initiatives as they were planned. This was of particular importance since the members had a variety of skills to offer and could choose what they would like to help out with. These will be illustrated during the description of the initiatives in the upcoming section.

Communication

One of the most important guidelines from Epstein and colleagues that we followed was establishing our methods of communication. Action team members agreed that communication was a major contributor to the success of this project. This included communication between action members, staff, students, parents, and community facilities. Communication took on a variety of forms, such as newsletters, handouts, email, website, verbal conversations, and announcements.



TERRY FOX ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
HEALTH & WELLNESS FAMILY BIKE RIDE & PICNIC

WHERE: Bois de l'Île Bizard Nature Park
Pointe aux Carrières Sector
2115, chemin Bord du Lac, Île Bizard
TEL: (514) 280-8517 **WEB SITE:** Bois de l'Île Bizard

WHEN: Saturday, June 9th or Sunday, June 10th (Rain Date)
TIME: 9h00-13h30
DEPARTURE TIME: From Chalet/Beach parking lot entrance at 9h30
DISTANCE: 8.5 kms. - Easy to Slightly Hilly Bike Route
- Pointe aux Carrières Sector to Rapids & Back
- Snacks will be provided for you at the Rapids.


COST: \$7.00 - all day parking fee (at your expense)

Please remember to wear your bike helmets & bring these items with you ... knapsack, sun screen, water bottles, bug repellent, a garbage bag, a family picnic and lots of smiles!

We're looking for volunteers ... if interested please contact Brenda Beaudoin at (514) 626-0043 or via e-mail at artzybrenda@mmic.net. Thanks.

Send your participation form to Ms. Newin at the phys-ed office, by Wednesday, June 6th. Merci.

Looking forward to seeing you then & there!



John Torunian
Principal, Terry Fox School

Family Name: _____ # of Children: _____
of Adults: _____


Signature: _____  Date: _____

Figure 5: An example of the letter sent home to parents about the Family Skate Evening

Communication between action team members took place at our meetings, through email, and conversation. As scheduling meetings was sometimes difficult, we had to rely on daily, and at the very least, weekly conversations between members to keep updated. This was particularly the case during the weeks when initiatives were being held.

The meetings were run smoothly. We were generally well prepared and made decisions easily because we had previously talked about many of the issues. As an example, I called the arena to arrange the time slot for the family skate, as well as found out about potentially having music and changing rooms available. When we came to the meetings, we presented all the material and were able to make decisions quickly. Everyone was responsible in carrying out their assigned tasks. (Brenda)

I think it was a good idea to get a bunch of people to just give ideas/activities. It was hard sometimes to get team members together to talk. We would grab whoever was available for an impromptu meeting. (Bessy)

I think the action team communicated very well with one another. Whether it was via email or in person we were always updating and encouraging one another for the work we had done. We met a couple of times a week in the Phys. Ed. office as the initiatives neared to make sure that the details had been looked into. I truly believe that everyone contributed beautifully. I believe the action team also communicated very well with the students and their families. They were always informed well in advance of the different activities we were running and were always given a written form indicating all pertinent information concerning things such as: the date, the time, the location, what to bring, and so on. (Julie)

Specifically, communication between the action team and the teachers was essential to increasing student knowledge, interest and excitement about the projects within the school. To enable this, Julie, Brenda, and I were selected to communicate with teachers via speaking and sending memos through teacher mailboxes and the daily log book (Figure 6). Through the consistent flow of information, teachers commented that they were happy to know what was going on so that they could assist with the activities. Often, when Julie, Brenda, or I were visible in the halls or staffroom, teachers were full of comments, questions, and ideas to help improve the initiatives. This was particularly evident with the Apple Tree since it required the most amounts of help from teachers.

We also communicated well with the teachers whether it was in person, via email, or in writing. Each teacher was encouraged to motivate their students and collect forms and pass them on to the Phys. Ed. office. While not many teachers engaged in the Health and Wellness initiatives, the majority expressed their pleasure and their encouragement that we were doing activities so novel to the school. I think that all people involved in the initiatives were very well informed and that the lines of communication between committee members, students and their families, and the teachers, remained positive and open at all times. (Julie)

The governing board and school council had access to relevant information ahead of time, and goals and criteria were clearly established. This knowledge encouraged a sense of cooperation in that the school community teachers were more willing to cooperate and do things as a team. (Mr. T.)

Hi Teachers!

The Health and Wellness Action Team will be starting 2 healthy eating initiatives on Monday, February 5th that will last until the end of the school year. These activities are the **Health Tree** and the **Rockin' Green and Groovy Fruit Calendar**. Descriptions of the initiatives are below. They will not require any additional classroom time on your part, however your participation would be greatly appreciated! The Student Health and Wellness Committee will be around each lunch to check on and motivate student participation..

With your cooperation, we will be posting the **Canada Food Guide**, as well as 'apples' in your classroom. Should you wish to contribute small stickers for the Health Tree initiative, it would be greatly appreciated..

Lastly, since this is a school-wide initiative, it would be exciting and encouraging if the staff also participated in the initiatives! There are already 3 apples in the staffroom over the microwave waiting to be filled with stickers from fruit! Also, you will be getting a Rockin' Green and Groovy Fruit Calendar for your own home!

2 students from the Health and Wellness Committee will be coming around this afternoon to briefly explain the activities for 2-4 minutes. We appreciate your time!

Yours in Health, Krista

Figure 6: An example of a message left in the daily teacher logbook.

A particular form of communication that we targeted was verbal communication between older students and the student body. Epstein and colleagues (2002) suggested that students be involved in action team processes. At the first meeting, Darrin proposed the notion of using grade five and six students as 'the action team voices within the school'. He rationalized that if the students were excited about the activities, then they would be able to

pass on that excitement to students throughout the school. After much discussion about different ways to include students in the process, the action team opted to include a student health and wellness committee that functioned during school hours. This option was chosen because action team meetings were held late in the evening and it would offer students a sense of responsibility and ownership for the initiatives. In addition, the action team felt that students would be more apt to help out if they were able to participate with friends.

For students, messages were received from us while they were in their classrooms, via the news letter and in separate letters going home. Cycle three students on the student health and wellness committee also helped to get our message across to the others by talking to classes and coordinating some of the activities, like handing out apples for the Apple Tree and collecting the health calendars. (Brenda)

It's hard to get students at the elementary school level involved. It's easy for adults to sit there saying 'this is what we need, this is what we want'. But what do the students want? There is definitely a place for older students on the committee, but they have to be directed with caution. Adding a separate committee for students directed by Julie and/or Krista during school hours was a valuable addition. (Darrin)

Originally, it was decided that the student health and wellness committee would consist of six to eight students that would be chosen at random. However, once Julie and I spoke to each of the grade five and six during physical education classes, we discovered that we had fifty students willing to help out. With such an overwhelming response, Julie and I proposed to the action team that we use all the students in some manner. We felt that if we had the attention and excitement of over 70% of the grade five and six students, then we shouldn't turn any of the students away. Since we knew the students, we went through the list of volunteers and carefully selected 8 students who we felt were responsible and able to lead the remainder of the student volunteers. The remainder of the students who volunteered were put on a list of monthly volunteers who helped out with the collection of health calendars, as well as small daily tasks such as distributing handouts or checking the upkeep of the apple tree.

At first I thought we would get only a handful of students wanting to help out, but then when we had over thirty students, I thought 'How can we turn away any of these students away'? It was then that we decided that we had to come up with a way to use them all. They helped out with any detail that we asked them to. They were constantly knocking on the phys. ed. office door wanting to know if they could help out. It was both exciting and inspiring to see how excited the students were. (Julie)

Specifically, the student health and wellness committee acted as a liaison between the health and wellness action team and the student body. The eight members of the committee met at lunch for fifteen minutes every month to go over the list of responsibilities and welcome the new volunteers in for the month. Each member was given a duotang with a list of responsibilities, a list of monthly volunteers, and monthly schedules of meetings and initiatives.

To summarize, the health and wellness action team established communication as essential to keeping students, staff, and parents updated with current initiatives. Primarily, the action team focused on using multiple forms of communication, communicating consistently, and using students as the primary communicators. This was essential for the creation of the initiatives.

The Initiatives

The following section will describe the initiatives that the action team collaboratively planned, organized, and implemented between the months of January and June. The majority of the initiatives were designed with easy organization, low cost, and with maximum opportunity for family participation in mind.

The majority of the action team initiatives took place in the school, with the exception of the Family Skating event. As this was the first year running these initiatives having the activities take place at a location familiar to us, the parents, and the students, was probably a good thing. (Julie)

Each initiative was a learning experience that the action team grew from. This was especially the case since not all of our initiatives were successful. Below are descriptions of the

initiatives that the action team designed, implemented, and evaluated: the apple tree, family physical education nights, Rockin' Fruit and Groovy Greens Health Calendar, and the family skate night.

The Apple Tree

The apple tree was the first initiative to take place in the school. The idea for the apple tree originated alongside one of the action team's main objectives for the year, to encourage healthy eating. From discussion at our first meeting, we decided to focus on fruit and vegetable consumption by designing a creative way to encourage and reward students for eating healthy during school. Since keeping costs at minimum and giving students equal opportunities to participate were two core characteristics that we wanted to maintain, Darrin came up with a simple idea from a relatively insignificant item. Using inspiration from the stickers found on apples, Darrin suggested that we keep track of student intake of fruit in a practical manner. Each class received paper apples from the Dollar Store. Students who consumed a fruit or vegetable at snack time were allowed to remove the sticker from the fruit or vegetable and place it on the paper apple. However, if the fruit or vegetable had no sticker, students could ask their teacher for a sticker. Once a class had accumulated thirty-five stickers on an apple, they were invited to send a representative to the gym and place it on the health tree (Figure 7). As a monthly reward, the class from each cycle that had accumulated the most apples on the tree received a free physical education period. Each winning class also received a certificate to put up in their classroom.

This initiative was simple, cost-efficient, and easy to organize during each month. The major purchases were apples and stickers from the dollar store. Little effort was required on the part of the teachers, and for the most part, teachers were excited to participate. Some teachers offered advice such as 'include 100% pure fruit juice' and 'change

the focus each month'. Each piece of advice was taken into account as the health tree grew each month.



Figure 7: Two students placing apples on the health tree in the gymnasium.

The apple tree was most effective for grades K-4, and in particular with the classes who had the most motivated teachers. Students in these grades would often stop Julie or me in the hall to show us their snacks or tell us that they had gone grocery shopping with their parents. Grade five and six students participated in the first month, however, their participation staggered off in the third month. This was surprising considering that many of the students were also members of the student health and wellness committee and were anxious to help out. However, this was not surprising considering the increased amount of responsibility in schoolwork and lunchtime commitments that students in the older grades had.

Given the popularity of the activity with the younger students and the decreasing participation with the older students, the action team concluded that this would perhaps be an activity that would be better suited to shorter periods of time as opposed to a five month stint. In turn, members thought: "Darrin's idea for the health tree was thinking outside of the box- combining cross curricular competencies, promoting good nutrition, an artistic component, it had a visible element that students enjoyed." (Mr. T.)

I think the Health Tree was a large success and one the staff would like to see again. Student participation was high, but it would probably be better to run this activity twice in the fall and twice in the winter/spring to get maximum participation. (Julie)

It really encouraged students to talk to their parents about what sort of snacks they had everyday. Although it didn't work with some families, the students who did get a say in their lunches seemed to bring in much healthier snacks so they could contribute stickers to the class total. (Bessy)

Family Physical Education Nights

The idea for family physical education nights originated during my research that was done prior to setting up the committee. In several articles (e.g., Henderson & French, 1992; Sherblom, 2001; Tenoschok, 2002; Virgilo, 1990) in journals such as Canadian Association of Health, Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance and the Journal of Physical Education, Recreation, & Dance, there were instances of families visiting the school during after hours to participate in school-run physical activities. However, it seemed that these evenings were used solely to showcase the physical education or health programs. For this study, family physical education nights were proposed as a potential idea in the initial meeting with Mr. T. In fact, the initial proposal provided a concrete example that appealed to parents, students, and teachers in our quest to gain their support for the health and wellness action team. Likewise, the action team was extremely supportive of the idea and elaborated upon it during our brainstorming session.

The action team held three family physical education nights over a period of four weeks in February and March. Originally, we had planned to hold one night per grade, however Laurie suggested that we host one evening per cycle to make it less stressful on the action team, as well as for families with more than one child. At our second meeting, it was decided that Julie and I would take on the role of organizing the evenings with help from the remainder of the committee. Specifically, this sending a letter home, receiving replies, purchasing fruit and water, and designing the activities, schedules, and volunteers for the evening.

Family physical education nights were run similar to physical education classes, with free play, organized activity and a culminating activity at the end. Activities for the evening included those used in the physical education program that targeted the specific age group and spatial locations set aside for the number of participants. Examples of cycle one activities included cooperative games, team building activities, and a classroom based activity version of Battleship. Cycle two activities integrated Omnikin, team-building, cooperative games, and basketball, while cycle three included games of Omnikin, soccer, basketball, and a team-building activity.

The evening was well attended, particularly for the younger students in cycles one and two. This was interesting considering several parents the action team had spoken to were wary of the amount of participants we would get.

At the onset, some parent committee members who were more experienced with school-life warned us not to expect much participation. For instance, they said maybe we would have between 40 and 50 people at our first physical education family night. When the permission forms returned and we found out that almost 150 people were coming we were thrilled! We had more family members show up to each activity than we predicted every time. (Julie)

The amount of participation by parents and families, especially in the younger cycle showed that families value physical activity and support endeavours at Terry Fox

Elementary School. It was amazing to see how excited everyone was to be in the gym after school. (Laurie)

At last count, cycle one had 120 participants, cycle two had 85, and cycle three had 40. Most students arrived with one or two parents; however several students arrived with other families as their own parents were unable to attend.

Although Julie and I predominantly organized these evenings, the help of several others was solicited. Volunteers for the evenings included the action team members, teacher aides, and two students from the student health and wellness committee for the cycle one evening. In addition, four student teachers, who were performing their placements at the school, came out during the cycle three evening to help run the activities. The student teachers had heard about the previous evenings and were quite excited to see the activities, as well as get a feel for leading activities in a physical activity setting.

Each evening began with a fifteen minute period of free play where students could show their parents different equipment and skills. Some parents even stated that this was the first time they attempted to hula hoop in twenty years. Families were then divided into prearranged 'fruit groups' (Figure 8) and sent to their respective activity station. To end each night, we held a draw for a few pieces of equipment that were purchased with Canadian Tire money that the physical education program had accumulated during the year.

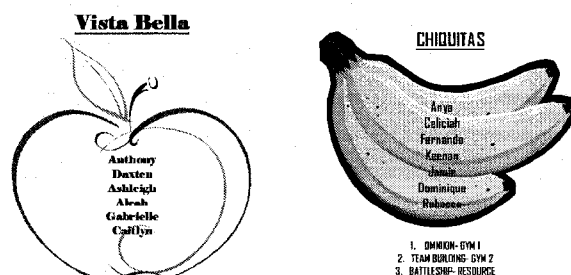


Figure 8: Two examples of the team lists at family physical education nights.

Family physical education nights received the most positive feedback out of all the initiatives. Unlike the other initiatives, a follow-up questionnaire was sent home (Appendix

E). After the cycle one evening, over half of the participating families responded to questions that helped the action team to design the cycle two and three activity evenings. Unfortunately, a questionnaire was sent home only to the families of the first evening due to a snow day and pedagogical day preventing questionnaires from being sent home in the 1-2 days following the cycle 2 and 3 evenings. Questions asked families to rank the evening on a scale of 1-5, as well as provide the action team with comments about their favourite activity and how they would like to see the evening improved. Julie and I then read through the responses to help us decide if we should maintain the same timeline and activities for the subsequent evenings. For example, several examples of comments from cycle 1 families received on the initiative were as follows: “Our family would love for the evening to last longer than one hour. It would be great if the family PE night would occur on a regular basis, one every 2/3 weeks” (Parent) and “Adam enjoyed soccer and tailtag. I personally enjoyed the quality of time I spent with Adam” (Father of grade 1 student).

A l'équipe de “Health & Wellness”, Quelle soirée magnifique nous avons passé en famille hier soir. Quelle merveilleuse idée! Bravo a toute l'équipe. [To the Health & Wellness Team, What a wonderful evening we had as a family last night. What a marvellous idea. Great job to the whole team.] (Mom of grade 1 and 3 sons)

The health food example of fruits and water was a nice added touch. Playing a part in school activities as a family helped show our support for our child's school, and gave him a chance to show us all the games he plays weekly. (Mother of grade 1 student)

Overall, the action team described the initiative as the most recognizable one for students, parents, and teachers: “All the families had fun, the kids got a chance to show off to their families and it is easily accessible for families with younger kids.” (Bessy)

From the moment the first family walked in the front door of the school until the last family left, we laughed, we ran, we talked, and we had FUN!!! Everyone, regardless of age and ability level, participated in all the activities we had drawn up (e.g., team building, exercise card games, juggling, basic games, Omnikin). No one was shy and I'm sure everyone learned something new those nights. It was wonderful to see parents and siblings participating together, whether they were on

the same team or not. Students were also paired with other students they didn't necessarily hang around with at school and everyone took advantage of the evening to get to know or know more about one another. We made them think and work together and everyone loved it! Some families even came to two or three of the evenings. (Julie)

The family nights were definitely the highlight of the year. They were by far my favourite initiatives. Any time you can get kids into the school to show their parents something they learned, it makes kids excited about school and learning. And we hope that this makes parents excited and want to participate too. (Darrin)

We had these events planned so well beforehand that, from an organizational standpoint, there was nothing much that could have gone wrong. Posters were hung around the school indicating stations, schedules were set indicating time and locations, families were in predetermined teams, and so on. These evenings were thought out so precisely (e.g., how to welcome people, where they were going to meet, what was going to happen first, second, third, and so on) that once the event began it sort of ran itself. (Julie)

Not only were family physical education nights a positive activity for families to participate in, but they also helped gain exposure for the health and wellness action team and physical education program. Based upon the reactions of families at the evening, along with suggestions from the first night, we felt that the evening would definitely be included in the upcoming school year. In fact, several parents proposed the idea of having parents organize and run the activities regularly throughout the winter. In addition, conversations with parents indicated that they would also be willing to pay a nominal fee to attend such evenings.

Vivacious Veggie and Rockin' Fruit Health Calendar

At the first action team meeting, Brenda proposed the idea of creating a calendar to help track and reward the consumption of fruit and vegetable servings at home. This initiative was proposed with the notion of fulfilling Epstein and colleagues' (2002) guidelines for linking school and family participation with our action team goal of increasing healthy eating. The development of the calendar took approximately a month, with several different formats being put forth by Brenda before the action team finally opted for the calendar in

Figure 9. We decided that this was the most child-friendly, durable, and attractive. The calendar was made up of a thick paper for the covers, with black and white photocopied months, and bound together with CombBind binding spines. Each month had health and nutrition facts, as well as a space to record the servings of fruits and vegetables consumed. Finally, there were columns to record minutes of physical activity participation and a parent's signature.

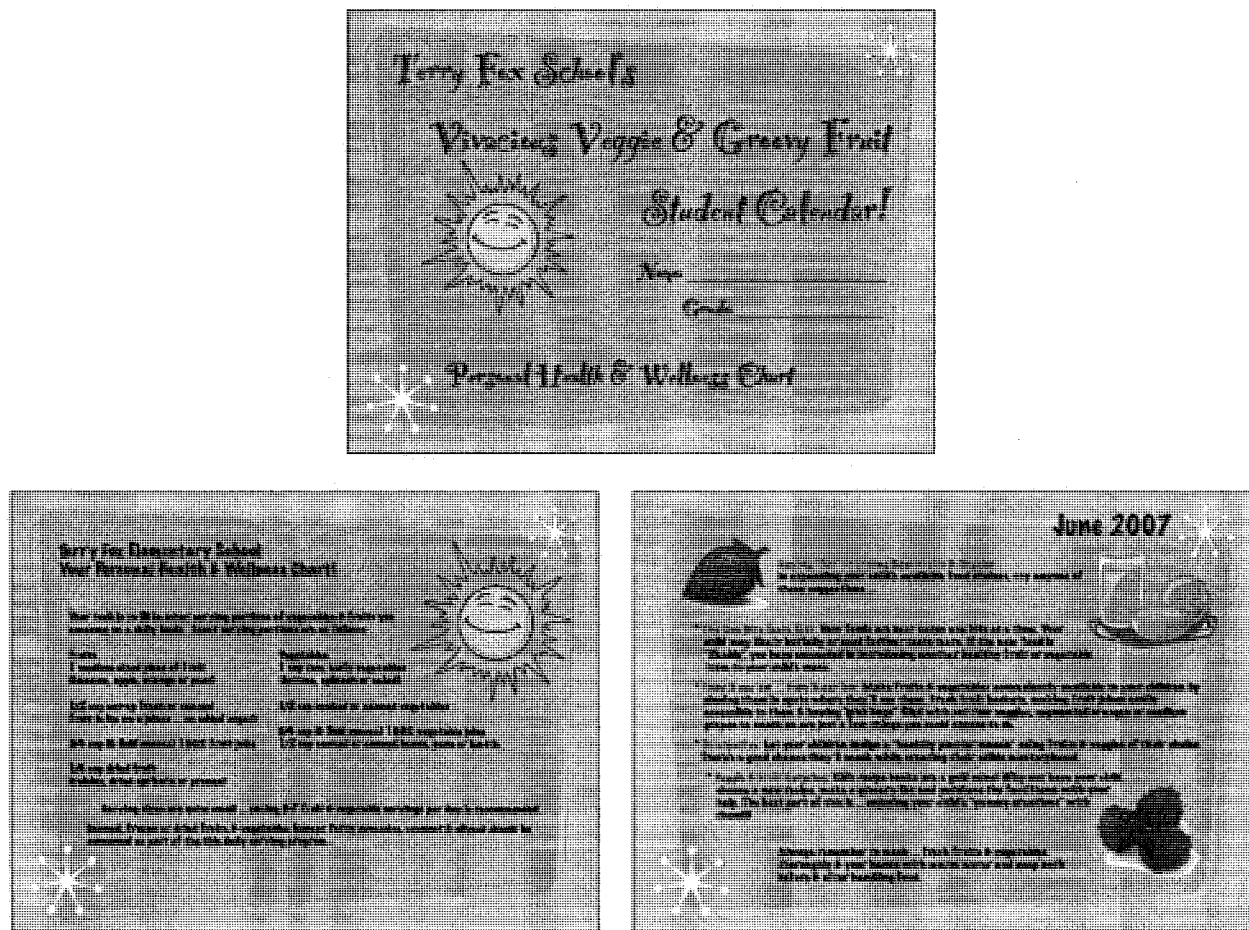


Figure 9: The Vivacious Veggie & Groovy Fruit Calendar.

The calendar was photocopied and distributed to all students and teachers during the first week of February. Photocopying and binding was time consuming, and only later did

Brenda and I find out that we could have sent the calendar to the school board to be printed for a cost. Although this would have saved us time, we ended up saving a considerable amount of money by doing it ourselves.

The roles, uses, and evaluation of the calendar had the most modifications of any initiative we held. Initially, we began with having students bring the calendars home, fill them out, and return them on Friday. The student health and wellness committee would then collect them on Fridays and allot points for calendars that were filled out correctly. At the end of each month, classes that had the most points received a reward, such as an outdoor physical education period or a healthy snack. Calendars were then redistributed and the process was repeated the following week.

Several issues arose with the above methods. First, collection of the calendars proved to be challenging considering that the first few Fridays included a snow day, absence of Julie or myself, or spring break. Thus, there was an inconsistency in the collection of the calendars, leading to confusion and in turn, a low return rate of calendars. As a result of the confusion, many calendars were misplaced at home or lost on the teachers' desks. This did not provide a positive way to start an initiative, and the action team felt that this hindered what could have been an effective initiative. Second, the method we had designed to evaluate the use of the calendars proved to be too complex and time-consuming. The student health and wellness committee had difficulty calculating points for servings consumed for each student for each day of the week.

Still, with approximately a third of students from each class fully or partially filling in their calendars, the action team decided to try several approaches to rectify the calendar situation. First, Julie suggested that we collect the calendars and redistribute them a few weeks later. She felt that this would allow us to regroup our ideas and give a break to the

students who were consistently filling the calendars. Second, instead of having the students collect the calendars on Friday I went around to each classroom and collected them myself. I would then bring them to the library for the student health and wellness committee to calculate points. Finally, we decided to make calculating points much simpler, by incorporating a weekly draw. Students who returned their calendar on Friday received one coupon in the draw. Students who returned the calendar and had it filled out, received two coupons in the draw. The draws were held on Friday afternoons and students whose names were selected received a coupon for a 'Free 15 minutes of physical activity'. A paper award coupon was then given to the student, and a laminated coupon was given to the teacher. The teacher was given instructions to send the winning student, a friend, and the laminated coupon to the gym for their free minutes, during a time that was convenient to the teacher (Figure 10). These changes in the calendar initiative maintained the students who were consistently participating, as well as encouraged a few additional students to 'find' their calendars.

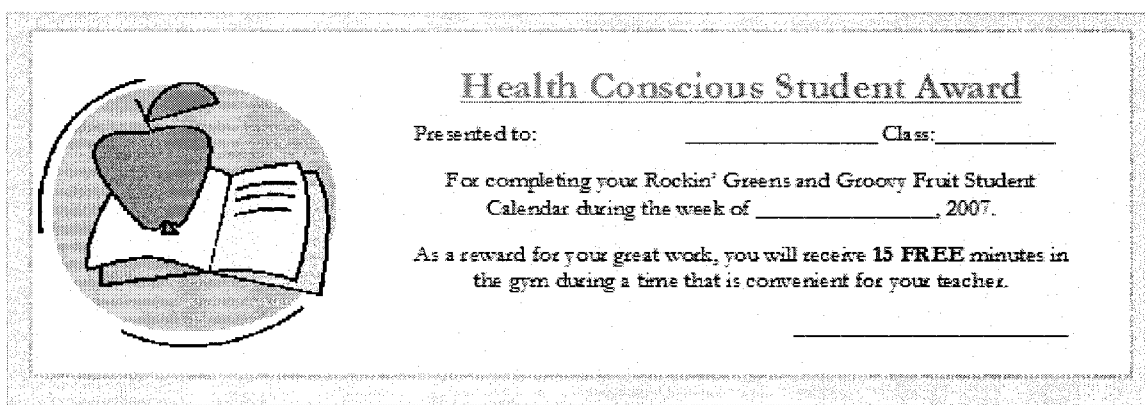


Figure 10: The coupon for students who participated in the health calendar initiatives.

The action team evaluation of the health calendar initiative led to several conclusions. We felt that the initiative had merit and was one that could succeed in upcoming school

years with a few changes. Specifically, Brenda initiated a discussion about the potential of including the calendar in student agendas. This idea was recommended to the agenda design committee. In addition, we felt that this initiative was too long-term and would be better suited to collecting the calendars several times throughout the entire year: “The food calendar was a good idea but there was too much paper work involved and the kids couldn’t see any immediate rewards” (Bessy) and “I think the health calendars will be repeated with a couple of minor adjustments. For example, calendars will have to be given out on a more short-term basis and will have to be monitored more closely.” (Julie)

As far as changes to the chart itself, I might like to suggest that we simplify the verification process. Rather than have the kids bring it home only to return it at the end of every week to be verified, I think it should remain in school. This may guarantee the receipt of more of them at week's end. Kids could fill in their charts every morning (with the teacher's support) at their desk before commencing the regular curriculum. (Brenda)

Family Skate Night

The family skate night was originally the first initiative that the action team had planned to hold as a method to link school, community, and family with physical activity. As it was winter, we felt that skating would provide an activity that many families would be able to participate in, considering the popularity of hockey, ringette, and figure skating in the West Island of Montreal. At the second action team meeting, we decided to hand out tasks to start preparing for the family skate to each member. For example, Sandy volunteered to make a list of all the nearby arenas and phone numbers to email to everyone. Once this email was sent, Brenda, Bessy, and I then divided the list between ourselves and called to inquire about availabilities and costs. Julie, who had once worked as a supervisor for public skating at one of the arenas, decided to go in person to the arena and talk to her former employer.

Unfortunately, we ran into a few issues, namely cost, ice availability, and rink size. As it was prime hockey season, ice time was extremely scarce and expensive. As an action team,

we decided that we wanted to keep costs at a minimum, and thus it would be better to run this activity after hockey season was over. The last issue we ran into was that of ice size. I managed to locate an arena at a much lower cost than other arenas. Unbeknownst to me, it was one of a set of 3-on-3 arenas which are considerably smaller and cannot accommodate the amount of people that a normal arena can. This was both frustrating and humorous at the same time, but it was a learning experience that helped the action team to determine what questions we would need to ask when we organized the activity a few months later.

Several months later, the action team was able to more effectively organize the family skate night for the last Friday night in April. When Brenda and Bessy called the arenas this time, they knew to ask for price, arena capacity, availability of changing rooms, music, pylons or chairs for beginner skaters, and the possibility of having table for the entrance. In addition, we had hoped to have space to distribute water and fruit after the skate, similar to the family physical education nights. Brenda managed to gain a contact at the arena located in the next borough over from Pierrefonds, and we scheduled the evening three weeks prior to the event. The evening would include the ice rental and two changing rooms, but unfortunately we had to bring our own music and use the arena's canteen.

Once the date was confirmed, a permission letter was sent home with students describing details as well as cost and liability issues (Appendix F). We decided to collect money ahead of time in order to pay for the ice rental. The action team had a large discussion about cost of the evening. We wanted to collect enough money to cover the cost of the rental, but we wanted to offer the activity with the lowest cost as possible. At end, we decided to opt for a charge of \$1 for Terry Fox students and their friends and \$2 for all other adults. This was consistent with the price of public skating. In addition, we had to

come up with some safety rules to cover any liability issues, such as all children under 13 wearing helmets (Figure 11).

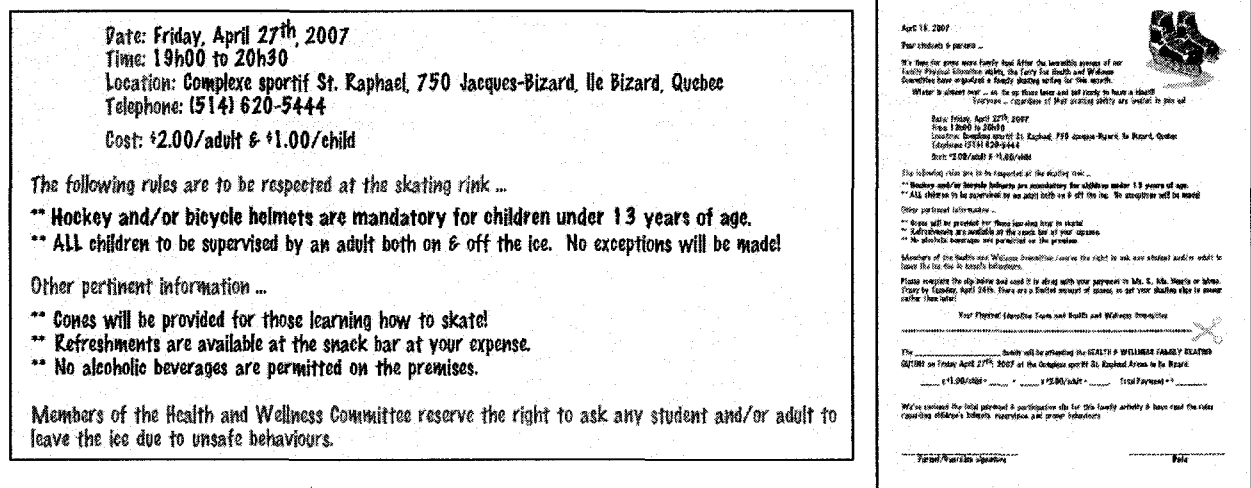


Figure 11: The letter sent home to parents for the family skate night.

At the entrance to the arena, Brenda and I set up a table to check people in and stamp their hands. The arena had an area sectioned off by cones at one end for the beginner skaters and the remainder of the ice was open for free skate. Julie brought a stereo with her from the school so that we could have music. For the most part, parents skated with the children for the entire hour and a half. However, there were parents who did not skate and sat along the boards to encourage their children. There was even one father who hadn't skated in fifteen years who decided to lace up his skates. At final count, we had over 150 skaters on the ice surface, with many more parents in the stands watching their children skate.

Reactions from the family skate were extremely favourable. All parents that attended the evening were excited to have an organized activity to do on a Friday evening. Although some parents had to shuffle schedules for their children who were attending ballet or gymnastics, these children attended once their practices were over. The majority of the

participants were children and their parents from cycles 1 and 2, however about fifteen cycle 3 students came and helped the younger students to skate. Reactions included: "I think the skating event will become a yearly activity, just like swimming already is" (Julie) and "I am so happy to be able to do an activity with my daughter organized by the school. I haven't skated all winter and it was great to do it with my daughter." (Mother of grade 1 child)

The skate night was a lot of fun. We have been waiting a long time for an activity like this in the school. This is what the school has been lacking. Again, all the families had fun, the kids to play with their families and it was appropriate for families with children of all ages. (Bessy)

Discussion after the skating activity led the action team to a few conclusions. First, the arena we used was a good location and accessible to a large amount of families by car or walking. Although the arena was one of the cheaper ones, the action team felt that there were several other free options that we could explore. For example, during the winter months, there are several nearby outdoor arenas that would work as well, weather permitting. A positive for this choice would be our ability to select our own snacks as opposed to using the arena canteen. A last discussion we held was the possibility of holding a short teacher-student hockey game, as discussed at the beginning of the action team. This would take slightly more organization, but we decided it would be feasible considering the number of participants we had at the event.

Family Biking Outing

The last family initiative that the action team tried to organize for the school year was a family biking outing in a park adjacent to the arena that family skate night was held at. Unfortunately, the only weekend that the park was available on happened to fall on the opening day for all local swimming pools. This greatly decreased the number of participants that returned their participation forms (Appendix G). However, since we had much of the organization done with regards to park maps and schedules, we decided to postpone the

activity to the middle of September as a back-to-school activity. The action team felt this would be an effective way to start the committee for the following year.

For this initiative, the action team decided to try and use more community resources. For example, Brenda's suggestion to use the park allowed her to create contacts with the recreation department in the city. From this contact, she was able to attain free maps of the park, as well as suggestions that would help improve future initiatives at the arena or park. In addition, the action team sought to give a few handouts to the participants. We sent letters to several different companies and managed to receive coupons from a fruit bar company to purchase snacks for all participants. However, with the cancellation of the initiative, we ended up handing out the snacks during the year end fun day to all students and staff.

In sum, the initiatives that were held created a new precedent within the school. Not only did they create a foundation for establishing family, school, and community links through physical activity, but they also initiated activities that fell within the school success plan. Using Epstein and colleagues' (2002) framework, the initiatives worked towards creating novel activities for students and families to participate in, while using school and community facilities. The initiatives were low-cost, encouraged maximum participation, and offered exciting opportunities for physical activity.

Value and Future of the Action Team and Initiatives

Data from observations, conversations, and open-ended questionnaires indicated that all action team members felt that our committee and our initiatives were of value to students, teachers, families, and the school in general.

I enjoyed every part of the action team experience! I was not surprised that the committee members were who they were; the same group of parents who volunteer for many of the school's functions. We had a wide variety of expertise on the committee and all ideas that came out during our brainstorming sessions were feasible ones. From the very first meeting to the last initiative, we communicated well as a group and everyone accomplished their assigned tasks (e.g., calling arenas, writing

permission forms, organizing sport schedules). I loved the initiatives we ran and I know for a fact that the parents and students enjoyed themselves immensely. I look forward to running the same activities next year and adding more to the schedule. (Julie)

This is a direction that schools need to go to, the present school system is obsolete, perpetuate obsolescence. Kids stop learning after the traditional context in school. Halfway through elementary school work becomes repetitious. Activities like the action team and its' initiatives broaden their perspectives on global community and learning. Schools have to evolve to meet the needs of a changing population. (Mr. T.)

As illustrated in the following quotes, action team members believed that the committee and the initiatives could and should be maintained and were eager to offer feedback and suggestions for improvement.

We need to get volunteers and new blood to really make this long standing. Is there any way either during the first parents assembly or curriculum day that this could be done? Let them know that this exists. Also you can talk to the new parents that come in for kindergarten orientation. Present it like a committee that exists in parallel with the others. (Bessy)

The committee could be translated to have more of a leadership component, using teams of children in older sectors to run activities. The grade 6 students that go to Camp EDPHY [a leadership camp organized during the second last week of school] could run the activities with the cycle 1 students and then train the grade 5 students so that next year they will already know what to do. (Mr. T.)

Julie and I met recently, and one of the ideas that we came up through verbal diarrhoea, was how cool it would be to do something like family nights with more of a direction to the community. Bringing in local coaches to do a clinic, soccer, rugby, - reaching out to different kids, different activities, and supporting the community by promoting things in the community. It would be a bonus for all involved- families, the school, and community organizations. (Darrin)

All of the initiatives that our committee ran this year could be continued next year. We gained a lot of support for the activities we ran, and I think there will be a level of expectation from parents and teachers next year to continue and improve some of the initiatives. I foresee these initiatives being carried out for a long time. (Julie)

The same initiatives need to be retained in upcoming years. The frequency of initiatives could be increased to one per month, doubling what the action team did this year. This would probably double the amount of participants. (Mr. T.)

Both Brenda and Mr. T. envisioned changes in the structure and function of the committee in order align it with the new "Healthy Schools" approach being implemented

across schools in Quebec while taking advantage of the inroads made thus far by the action team. Brenda made the following comment in this regard:

Plans are in the works to organize a formal committee, of which I will be a member ... to continue our ongoing "health and wellness" campaign at Terry Fox Elementary School. In keeping in line with the Lester B. Pearson School Board's intention of promoting this program [Healthy Schools] in all of its schools, I foresee our committee becoming a more prominent group with representatives from the school and parent volunteers. The action team will have an important role at the school because we've already been on the receiving end of very positive feedback in its first year of implementation. It will only grow from here on in.

After discussion with the principal, we became aware of how much change he felt that we had initiated in the school. While questioning the future of the action team, he believed that the health and wellness action team could be maintained and strengthened, in conjunction with adding more elements from the Healthy Schools Approach. The discussion will probe deeper into the relevant issues of committee dynamics, effectiveness, and sustainability.

CHAPTER 5: Discussion

The purpose of the current study was to describe and evaluate the process of implementing an action team in an elementary school dedicated to increasing opportunities for health and active living. Specifically, this study focused on the perceptions of action team members as they implemented health and wellness activities using guidelines from Epstein and colleagues' (2002) framework. The following chapter will discuss these perceptions and how they pertain to the organization of the action team, the implementation of initiatives, and finally, the value of the action team to families, the school, and the community. In addition, this chapter will also highlight some of the lessons learned during the process of designing and implementing the intervention. Finally, the end of this chapter will also consider practical implications of the study and recommendations for future research.

The results of this study illustrate the advantages of creating a motivated action team in order to effectively organize and promote healthy and active living opportunities during and after school hours. For instance, between the months of January and June, members of the action team embarked on a collaborative journey to establish the foundation for creating a permanent committee within the school. Each meeting and initiative proved to be a learning experience that fostered discussion about organizing the committee, creating initiatives, and sustaining the action team for the following school year. In turn, each member played an integral and varied role that was based as much upon their personal abilities and resources as their desire to bring together families through physical activity. Thus, throughout the process, discussion with action team members centered around three main topics, namely the *organization of the action team*, the *implementation of the action team's initiatives*, and the *value of the action team* for the Terry Fox School community. The following

paragraphs will therefore discuss experiences that the action team members found to be of importance to the creation of and running of such a committee.

Organization of the Action Team

Organization of the action team consisted mainly of recruiting members, structuring open meetings, communicating with students and parents, and fostering an environment for effective decision-making. Initially, Julie and I were responsible for the preliminary organization of the action team, however leadership shifted to the members we recruited over the subsequent months. Developing a structured organization for the action team was invaluable for sustaining the committee for the following school year.

Recruiting Members

The recruitment of action team members was both a challenging task and a learning experience. At the onset of the project, Julie and I recognized that support was necessary for structuring an effective committee and designing engaging initiatives. Later, as the action team progressed, the entire committee acknowledged that support was not only necessary, but essential to the operation of the committee. Thus, we canvassed parents and students to find motivated individuals who exhibited both leadership and creativity. This involved recruiting members who were influential within the school and had a desire to implement change. Not surprisingly, the action team included two parents, Brenda and Darrin, from the governing board. In addition, Bessie, a parent with a keen interest in healthy living approaches, also saw an opportunity to implement change. This was also the case with Laurie, a teacher at a nearby school, who saw the potential to incorporate a Health and Wellness action team into her own school. A committee comprised of energetic individuals dedicated to creating change was consistent with Epstein and colleagues' (2002) guidelines as outlined in their framework for creating action teams.

Despite the participation of several key members, attracting additional parents to the action team proved to be a difficult challenge. Discussion with action team members, the principal, and parents who participated in initiatives revealed that challenges included work schedules, interest, number of children, and a general lack of knowledge about the action team. These challenges were consistent with those identified by Epstein and colleagues (2002). For example, Epstein and colleagues acknowledged that families need to have equal access to information that is clear, usable, and linked to their children's success in school. In this study, this was attempted through multiple sources of communication including newsletters, conversations, governing board meetings, and the school website. In particular, word of mouth was an invaluable way to attract attention and participation in initiatives when action team members described the initiatives to fellow friends and parents.

In addition to presenting information about a new committee to parents, commencing a committee half way through a school year proved to be a further issue. Many parents were already involved with activities in the school or community and did not have time to join an additional committee. Guidelines recommended by Epstein and colleagues (2002), emphasized that an action team should be organized prior to the beginning of the school year in order to be consistent throughout the year. The year end open-ended questionnaires pointed out that this was a factor behind the moderate interest in the action team. Although commencing the committee earlier was not possible with this study, the action team did work together to establish the groundwork for the upcoming year. Interestingly, Epstein and colleagues (2002) stated that a minimum of three years is needed for the action team to institute itself as a permanent and productive structure within the school. As well, the continuation of a leader is essential for carrying on committees from year to year. Fortunately, this was met through Julie being reinstated as a teacher at Terry

Fox again, and Brenda beginning the year with the organization of the family bike outing. Thus, the action team is continuing to establish itself while gaining increased support from families who have participated in initiatives from the previous year.

Structuring of Meetings

Meetings were an essential and anticipated component of the action team. The action team met bi-weekly for the months of January and February during the evening. This allowed the maximum amount of members to regularly attend. Meetings offered action team members the opportunity to discuss, plan, and evaluate the process of implementing initiatives. Similarly, meetings also served as a ground for open discussion about the individual resources that each member had to offer. For example, Brenda had contacts with the recreation department in Ile Bizard, where the family skate and bike outing occurred. Likewise, Darrin had contacts with friends who could provide him with the large paper needed to make the apple tree. Thus, meetings provided a common ground to share resources and information concerning the organization of the action team and initiatives.

The beginning of the action team was dependent on the organization of meetings. Three initial meetings were held in January in order to structure the goals of the action team, the methods of communication, and outline potential initiatives for the remainder of the year. At the first meeting, I introduced Epstein and colleague's (2002) framework as the guiding structure for integrating school, family, and community partnerships together to foster physically active students. In particular, I emphasized that an opportunity existed within the school to foster family participation and community involvement in student health and physical activity. Discussion with action team members highlighted that this framework was ideal for the committee, considering the collaborative focus on creating

innovative ideas and effective communication. As a result of having similar beliefs, all members had an invested interest in the design and organization of the action team.

During the initial meetings, I highlighted the six different types of involvement and the importance of using effective means of communication. These aspects were chosen as the action team members felt they were realistic and important goals that could be met through the initiatives. For example, several action team members spoke about the effectiveness of means of communication used in previous events held in the school. They reminisced that although newsletters and letters home reached the majority of households, activities that had the highest participation rates in previous years were ones that the students were excited about. In addition, members described a need to bring the school-organized activities into the community.

Informal conversations after meetings revealed that action team members found the six types of involvement easy to understand as they already existed to variable degrees within the school. Thus, discussion at meetings often centered on methods to build the capacity to promote health and physical activities within the existing relationships. Together, the action team decided that the most innovative way to approach the committee's commitment to family-school relationships was through engaging student interest via the student health and wellness committee. This was especially observed through the development of the family-oriented activities such as family physical education night and the family skate where Epstein and colleagues' (2002) guidelines intersected with the ideas and resources of the Terry Fox action team.

Between the months of March and June, the entire action team met once monthly in congruence with Epstein and colleagues' (2002) guidelines. This allowed the smaller initiative-based committees to focus on details and delegate tasks to other committee

members, students, or volunteers. As the action team progressed towards the initiatives, small meetings for specific organizers of each initiative became crucial. In addition to these meetings, many of the action team members communicated regularly via phone calls, email, conversations over the photocopy machine, and informal chat before or after school. This was successful for smoothing out small details and providing encouragement and motivation. Thus, a variety of meeting methods were useful to keep members updated and focused on planning the initiatives.

Communication

In a manner consistent with Epstein and colleagues' (2002) framework, the action team found that communication, particularly between school and home, was indeed an essential component of this study. In fact, communication enabled family involvement in the school through newsletters, transfer of information by children, and informal meetings before, during, and after school. The action team attempted to maintain regular communication with families, following research by Sheehy (2006) that emphasized communication between school and home is integral to the value families place on physical education, and potentially physical activity in general. She postulated that a lack of communication about student learning and evaluation establishes physical education as less important than other subject. Findings from her study also indicated that parents identified consistent communication throughout the entire school year via newsletters, phone calls, and a link on the school website as a method to increase awareness and overall knowledge of the program. With these suggestions in mind, the action team worked to provide details of the committee and its initiatives weekly in the school newsletter, as well as monthly in the physical education newsletter. In addition, invitations for initiatives were sent out at least two weeks in advance in order to give equal access and advanced notice for all families. Most

parents commented that they were well aware of the action team's initiatives, as well as the dates for the activities. Informal conversations emphasized that parents attributed this knowledge to the newsletters and in particular, to the excitement levels of their child or children.

An interesting adaptation of Epstein and colleagues' (2002) framework with respect to communication was the creation of the student health and wellness committee. Julie and I explained the committee at the beginning of physical education classes and students were invited to sign up if they felt that they were able to commit to a committee. Students gave such an overwhelming response, that the action team came up with the idea to have a main student committee and use the remainder of the students for odd jobs throughout. Although a separate student committee was not part of Epstein's framework, the action team felt that it was necessary to fully involve students in order to foster excitement and participation within the school. For instance, more than half of the grade 5 and 6 students chose to help out in small activities such as collecting apples or in larger activities such as running a session at family physical education nights. As a group, we felt that our openness to include all interested students would increase the amount of students who would participate in the initiatives. This adaptation of the existing partnership framework was essential to the success of the action team and its initiatives through fostering positive student-school-home communication.

Decision Making & Leadership

Epstein and colleagues (2002) recognize decision-making as an essential element to increasing individual and group empowerment through sharing views, solving problems, and taking action. This study used decision-making at a variety of levels, most specifically between action team members at the school and committee levels, but also through the

development of the student health and wellness committee. This type of involvement was met by the action team in a multitude of ways, particularly by fostering a positive environment for sharing and exploring the resources of individual members. Action team members described the meeting atmosphere as a place where they were able to share their ideas while feeling both appreciated and valued. This openness with one another allowed decision-making to take place as a group, with ideas being built upon each other and strengthened through discussion.

At the school level, decision-making took place through accommodating students, teachers, and families. Since several members were also parents, their advice was invaluable in the sense that they were part of the target audience the action team was aiming the initiatives towards. Their knowledge was effective in gaining school-wide support through the governing board, as well as providing useful information to parents. Thus, Brenda, Darrin, and Bessie were constant sources of information regarding parental concerns of scheduling, costs, and safety that the action team relied on.

At the action team level, members were directly involved in decision-making by volunteering to take some form of leadership in at least part of each initiative that the committee designed. For the most part, each member had some part in the organization of the entire initiative, as well as a specific responsibility in the implementation of the activity. For example, Darrin created the notion of the apple tree and created it with his daughters, however, it was implemented by the students, Julie, and me during school hours. As a result, with each member choosing a part of each initiative in which to be involved, the committee was able to retain a group-oriented decision-making process that accommodated each member's needs, schedules, and lifestyles.

Lastly, the student health and wellness committee had a small, but influential part in helping the action team with decision-making. Specifically, the students were given the opportunity to take a lead role in the daily running of the apple tree and health calendar initiatives. In addition, two students were also sought to help organize an activity during the family physical education nights. Although the students had a minor involvement in the organization of the initiatives, action team members believed that this would change in future years when the committee was more established and the need for student help in organization was better outlined.

Implementing Initiatives

A large part of the action team responsibilities and energies rested with the organization and implementation of four different initiatives between January and June. In fact, action team members identified that the organization of initiatives required a large amount of time at meetings, during school hours, and through email correspondence. Although planning and organizing initiatives was occasionally tedious and frustrating, action team members agreed that these were worthwhile and enjoyable tasks, especially when members were able to share in the excitement of successes and frustrations. In turn, open-ended questionnaires revealed that the enjoyment action team members had in designing the new initiatives increased when they saw the excitement on the faces of the families that participated. Thus, members felt that the action team's initiatives were viable and worthwhile activities for family involvement and physical activity participation.

Planning

Open-ended questionnaires, informal conversations, and discussion with action team members revealed that the organization of the initiatives relied mainly on early planning, finding available resources, and fostering excitement within the school. This organization

was mediated by motivated action team members who had invested interests in the activities that we chose to hold. For example, Brenda was an avid cyclist and therefore took a lead role in developing the family bike outing. As a whole, the initiatives were discussed and decided upon during the first two meetings in order to create an outline for the entire five months. This was of particular importance to the action team as it gave us a timeline to work from and a direction in which to head towards. This in turn provided the principal, governing board, and families with a strategic plan and realistic goals that they could visibly see being met on a weekly and monthly basis.

Open-ended questionnaires with action team members and the principal identified that early planning was a necessity in many senses, for accommodating both the school and families. Members thought it was imperative that the major details of the initiatives were planned out at least a month in advance in order to have the idea approved by the governing board and school council, which only held monthly meetings that were often at different times of the month. Meeting the deadlines of these committees helped us to have our initiatives planned far in advance, while still allowing time for any potential issues. Early planning was further deemed a necessity in order to recruit volunteers, calculate the number of participants and available space, and order security or porters for the buildings.

Finding available resources was also reliant upon early planning. These resources stemmed from ice surfaces to cardboard paper to water to gym space and in some cases, volunteers. Despite the variety of resources needed, the action team was greatly aided by contacts and knowledge of people and businesses in the community. For instance, Darrin knew a friend who could get hold of large paper for the construction of the apple tree. However, we did run into a few instances where we were forced to adapt to the unavailability of a necessary resource. For example, the family skate initiative was originally

to be held in February, but had to be rescheduled to the end of April because of cost and ice availability. Fortunately, we had given ourselves sufficient time in order to accommodate such issues.

The organization of the initiatives relied as much on the action team's planning as on the fostering of excitement within the student body and their families. Thus, the action team felt that success of the initiatives was entirely dependent on the enjoyment and participation of the students and their families. This excitement and enjoyment was precisely the main purpose behind the development of the student health and wellness committee.

Observations demonstrated that students were of utmost importance when they spoke to each class about the initiatives, particularly when they were excited about and participating in the initiative themselves. In some cases, particularly for the family skate, this encouraged the students to tell their parents that they wanted to participate because their friends were also participating.

Volunteers

Epstein and colleagues (2002) stressed the importance of recruiting volunteers in order to pique interest and facilitate participation of families and staff members in action team initiatives. The recruitment of volunteers to help out with initiatives was both an exciting and sometimes last minute item. For many of the activities we were able to use the existing action team members and did not require any other assistance. However, the action team members expressed the need to use the services of any teachers or parents who were willing to help out with initiatives. For example, the replacement aide Sam helped out with the cycle 2 and 3 family physical education nights after hearing about the first evening. In another instance, we used two of the students from the student health and wellness committee and several student teachers to run some of the stations. Throughout the five

months, the action team found that people were excited and more than willing to help out when they perceived the initiatives to be exciting and worthwhile experiences to be involved in.

Choosing Activities

A large focus of the action team was to structure initiatives that would be accessible for a maximum amount of families to participate, as suggested by Siedentop (1996). As a result of discussion at the end of the school year, the action team felt that the initiatives reflected the lifestyles of average families. As a team, we initially created a long list of potential activities and chose the ones that we felt would reach the maximum amount of students and families. Specifically, after discussion with the parents on the action team we decided to focus on activities that families had most likely participated in at some point. These included activities that required running shoes, skates, and/or bikes. The action team also tried to choose locations that were accessible to all families, such as the school gym, a nearby community arena, and a park. All of these facilities were within a short driving or walking distance for a majority of the families. A last major focus was on creating cost-effective activities. This included charging a minimum fee for the family skate to cover the cost of ice rental, but not having a fee for the family physical education nights. However, small costs were incurred by the home and school committee in the purchasing of fruits and water for physical education nights from a local fruit wholesale store.

An interesting result that was consistently observed at each initiative was the prevalence of young students compared to older students. This observation was consistent with research indicating a decrease in physical activity participation as grade level increases (e.g., Wallhead & Buckworth, 2004; Sallis et al., 1999). Members rationalized this to the growing amount of responsibilities and pressures that students have in and outside of

school. Thus, students and their families had hectic schedules with many commitments. For instance, families may have several children participating in competitive hockey, swimming lessons, homework, and belonging to a youth group. Interestingly, this is also the beginning of 'specialization years' as described by Côté and Hay (2001), where twelve year olds begin to focus heavily on one or two sports.

In retrospect, members felt that if the action team were to continue in future years, it would be interesting to offer a choice of potential activities to families via a survey at either the end of the school year or within the first month of school. This would take into account more than the opinions and likes of the representative parents on the action team. As well, from a research standpoint, I feel that another potential avenue would be to create student focus groups to tap into what activities students found interesting. Conversations with members also highlighted that it would be more meaningful to include student opinions about initiatives. This would also provide an additional purpose for the student health and wellness committee.

Value of Action Teams for Families, Schools, and Community

The value of an action team for families, schools, and communities is multifaceted. In particular, participants in this study identified many benefits that echoed the expected results for the six types of involvement as outlined by Epstein and her colleagues (2002). Benefits included increased family participation in school-based wellness activities, student interest in leadership through physical activity, and newly established links with community facilities. These along with the other benefits listed below are a result of forming a school-based committee with an invested interest in both physical activity and family togetherness. In turn, this parallels the notion of family-minded schools and school-like families as outlined by Epstein and colleagues (2002).

Family

The family represented a major participant in both the action team and the initiatives it offered. The formation of a new committee dedicated to active and healthy living offered an unprecedented school-based opportunity for parents to potentially take part in the design of activities geared towards their children's lifestyles. This in particular attracted some of the parents who participated in other areas of the school, but also parents who felt that physical activity was an important part of family life. This was especially important considering the amount of input these parents had in the organization of the initiatives with respect to family interests.

The action team's most visible achievement was demonstrated by the enjoyment and participation of families in the different initiatives. In particular, parents highlighted that they enjoyed participating in activities with their children and would be likely to do so more often if consistent, low-cost activities were available. In addition, parents also identified an interest in taking leadership roles to help establish such activities. From this observation, action team members felt that when families participated in and were made aware of the components in low organization activities, they were more likely to see potential opportunities for volunteering. As well, participation in activities made families more aware of the inclusive and enjoyable environment that the initiatives offered and thus, families were more likely to participate in additional initiatives. As a result from observations and conversations throughout the five-month period, families that participated in at least one initiative were also involved in at least one of the other health initiatives.

An observation that was consistent with current trends was the impact of the children's preferences in relation to family physical activity participation (e.g., Welk, 1999). In the case of this study, where the product was active and healthy living, the child opinions

and preferences were essential for relaying information about the initiatives while conveying a sense of excitement to the parents. This was particularly evident with the families who attended the Family Skate, where some parents were encouraged and motivated by their children to participate. Thus, in this study, the child was an influential member for gaining family participation.

School

The implementation of the action team was a physical example of the central role that the school plays in promoting physical activity infrastructure (Siedentop, 1996). The development of the action team throughout the year further emphasized the need for infrastructure to promote accessibility for all, have persistent leadership, and offer challenging activities that increase opportunities for physical activity participation. In particular, opinions and ideas from parents on the action team indicated that they felt that accessibility and consistent leadership were extremely important factors. This was consistent with the suggestions set out by Epstein and colleagues (2002) for promoting collaborative partnerships through volunteering, decision-making, and collaborating with the community.

The school had many benefits arising from the action team, particularly through the focus on physical activity and health. The action team was the only committee in the school that encouraged healthy and active living. Although some school-wide physical activities, such as winter tubing and swimming lessons, did exist, this committee provided a centralized manner to implement activities that focused on collaboration between the school and family, while highlighting community resources. Based on our experiences, action team members felt that future action teams could work more closely with the governing board and school councils to continually create fun days, excursions and holistic approaches that include healthy and active living situations (e.g., Cale & Harris, 1997; Ringuet & Trost, 2001; Stone

et al., 1998). Likewise, the action team could communicate better with classroom teachers to provide opportunities for cross-curricular learning experiences that could branch off from activities similar to the apple tree or health calendars.

The action team created opportunities to create school-to-home and school-to-community links. Specifically, the initiatives designed by the action team aimed to provide tangible examples of how the school, home, and community can work together with respect to healthy and active living. For example, the family bike outing initiative created a practical chance for the local police to promote bike safety to the students prior to the event. Likewise, the family skate night made families aware of the facilities in a nearby community for activities such as gymnastics, weightlifting, swimming, and biking. Thus, the initiatives designed by the action team reinforced the notion that there are a multitude of healthy and active living opportunities available to suit the preferences and needs of all families.

In addition, the action team's initiatives were described in informal conversations with parents, teachers, and administrators as an excellent way to increase school and class spirit. Following many of the initiatives, and in particular the family physical education nights, students and parents were excited and inquiring about the next initiatives. This was similar with the apple tree monthly competition for a free physical education period. This created a novel opportunity for students to work together within their classrooms towards a common goal. In general, as noted earlier, action team members thought that such initiatives seem to have improved interest and participation when they were shorter in duration. However, there is still a need to further explore the effect of shorter versus longer initiatives (Biddle and colleagues, 2004). In contrast to the implementation of the individual initiatives, the implementation of the action team as a whole functioned efficiently for its first year.

Thus, similar to Epstein and colleagues (2002) guidelines, an opportunity exists for committees such as the action team to develop over several years.

With the initiation of Quebec's Healthy Schools Approach, the action team for healthy and active living could be viewed as a stepping stone for implementing a much larger scale approach. Much of the focus of the Healthy Schools Approach centers on collaboration between family, schools, and community, whereas Epstein and colleagues' (2002) framework provides a practical medium for implementing the Healthy Schools and similar approaches. For this study, the action team began the initial processes of creating a committee and designing school-based health and well-being initiatives with the potential of sustaining the committee to the following year. The interview with the principal revealed that he felt that sustaining the action team would take effort. However, he felt that through the use of Epstein and colleagues' (2002) framework, particularly with community collaboration, the committee may have an increased chance of being sustained in the school. Furthermore, action team members, the principal, and the school board liaison felt the Healthy Schools Approach could be implemented by creating additional liaisons with the school board and slowly implementing additional aspects of the approach over three to five years.

Community

The role of community in this study was restricted to the use of community facilities. Specifically, Laurie, Sandy, and Brenda were knowledgeable about nearby community facilities, thus they communicated with arena and the City Parks and Recreation department. The action team felt that these two facilities were representative of community programs that families could use regularly and that the school could use on an occasional basis. In addition, open-ended questionnaires with action team members and the principal emphasized the importance of both community involvement for families and physical

activity involvement within the community. In particular, integrating the community encompassed choosing nearby facilities for initiatives and canvassing local businesses for sponsorship. Additionally, the principal highlighted that future action teams could bring more community members into the school to work with students.

At the end of the school year, the action team discussed the potential to expand the community links beyond the use of facilities only. For instance, community sponsors such as a local grocery store could be solicited to provide water and fruit for rewards for the health tree or as snacks during the physical education family nights. In addition, the action team discussed inviting community members outside of the school to participate in the action team (Potvin et al., 2003). This extended to having speakers from local sports teams or health centers come to the school to speak to students. Several action team members along with the principal highlighted that these ideas could be used in conjunction with existing school ideas or projects occurring within classrooms. Unfortunately, during the months of January and June the action team did not link any initiatives to existing school activities or events. Action team members reflected that this could be achieved and added in during future years once the initiatives were established within the school culture.

Sustainability

The success of the action team for healthy and active living was dependent upon a group of passionate and innovative individuals, alongside a school community of excited students, teachers, and families. At the end of the year, action team members felt that in order to sustain the committee into the upcoming school year, one or two individuals would be necessary to structure the committee for the following year. Consistent with Epstein and colleagues' (2002) guidelines, action team members also agreed that it would be necessary to

recruit additional parent or community volunteers. This overlap of action team members would allow for key members to learn and transfer ideas and knowledge to future years.

A large contributor to sustaining the action team was the member evaluations about the effectiveness of the partnerships established between the school, family, and community. A major part of evaluation centered on discussion between members following meetings and initiatives. In particular, these discussions focused on understanding how effectively Epstein and colleagues' (2002) six types of involvement were used within the Terry Fox action team. Thus, evaluation occurred in a cyclical nature following the planning and implementation of initiatives. The action team felt this process allowed each initiative to be planned according to member opinions and participant feedback.

Epstein and colleagues (2002) suggest that action teams form yearly action plans in order to build and maintain partnerships between families, schools, and communities. At the end of the school year, the action team met with the principal and a school board liaison to discuss potential goals for the following school year. For instance, one goal included linking the current action team and initiatives with the introduction of the Healthy Schools Approach. Specifically, an outline was created in order to continue the existing initiatives and improve the relationships between the stakeholders involved in student health. Thus, the sustainability of the action team was reliant upon action team members, administration, and health needs as established by the school and school boards.

Action Research for Healthy and Active Living in Schools

Action research is fitting for educational settings and in particular the establishment of goal-oriented committees that take action to improve practices and programs (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). A major advantage of using action research is the ability to conduct research in a naturalistic setting. Members of the action team were excited to take part in this study as

they did not feel that they were taking part in a study at all. On several occasions, members commented that participating on the action team was enjoyable and of great benefit for the school. Thus, this type of research extends beyond academic settings and into practical settings for educators and school community members. The value of this research in an educational setting extends previous research suggesting that action research can help to improve and better understand existing structures (e.g., Reason, 2004; Rossman and Rallis, 2003; Strand et al., 2003).

An additional advantage of using action research is the development of collaborative efforts between the researcher and the participants in the study. Instead of having one researcher to plan, implement, and evaluate a study, a group of people have an equal and respected input into the design of the study. For this study, I initially chose the rationale for the study. However, the design and implementation of the action team and its initiatives were a result of collaborative efforts between six individuals. As well, this type of research allows planning, implementing, and evaluating to occur in a cyclical nature. Thus, it was necessary for action team members to communicate regularly in order to continually facilitate and make enjoyable the collaborative processes of planning, implementing, and evaluating. Lastly, action research provides an innovative and practical medium for implementing a theoretical health-related approach. The use of action research in this study facilitated collaborative efforts between members with similar values for creating healthy and active living initiatives for students and families. This common interest initiated a change for health and well-being within the school that was supported by administrators, teachers, and families.

Summary of the Study and Conclusion

Physical activity interventions have received increasing attention over the past years, and in particular the school setting has been pegged as a central location for promoting healthy and active lifestyles for children. The majority of research in school settings has been done during school hours, during physical education or immediately after school (e.g., Cale et al., 2006; Stone et al., 1998). As well, physical activity interventions in school settings have predominantly focused on single determinants of families, schools, or community influences. Fortunately, recent physical activity interventions have begun to examine how these influences work together (e.g. Biddle et al., 2004; Epstein et al., 2002). Furthermore, this existing body of research has largely examined the outcome effects of increasing the occurrence of physical activity, fit children, and healthy lifestyle habits over varied periods of time (e.g., Stone et al., 1998). With outcomes being emphasized in research to date, a need exists to gather information and reflect upon the complex process of implementing physical activity or health-related interventions (e.g., Cale & Harris, 2006; Harrington et al., 2005). Thus, the purpose of this study was to describe and evaluate the process of implementing an elementary school-based action team dedicated to increasing physical activity and healthy living opportunities for students. To facilitate this intervention, Epstein and colleagues' (2002) partnership framework was used to create partnerships between the school, home, and community.

Participants were an action team comprised of three parents, several teachers, and community members from an elementary school. Part of this team included two physical education teachers, one of them being the researcher. Additionally, students and families in the school community participated in the initiatives designed by the action team. The action team was selected through the recruitment of members via newsletters, a website, and word

of mouth. Over a five month period, the action team worked together to plan, implement, and evaluate four different initiatives including family physical education nights and health calendars.

This study was designed using an action research approach that allowed a group of people, including the researcher, to design and implement the course of the study in a naturalistic setting. Three data collection methods were used to document and evaluate the process of implementing the action team and initiatives in this study: observations and reflections, written documents such as newsletters, and open-ended questionnaires with the action team participants. Observations and reflections were based on the daily conversations and meetings I had with the action team members and students within the school. As a follow-up to the informal conversations that occurred regularly, action team members filled and open-ended questionnaire that elicited their perceptions about the use of Epstein and colleagues' framework in the current project and the functioning of the health and wellness committee.

The results of this study were presented using three main topics determined by the action team members. These three topics were the *organization of the action team*, *implementation of the initiatives* and the *value of the action team and initiatives for participants*. The topic titled *organization of the action team* included description about the recruitment of members, progression of meetings, methods of communication, and the decision-making procedures. This topic also highlighted the development of the members into a collaborative action team with links to resources within and beyond the school. The topic *implementation of the initiatives* involved the procedures used to plan and run the initiatives. This included how the initiatives were selected, the steps taken to organize the initiatives, and how volunteers were recruited to implement the activities. Lastly, the *value of the action team and initiatives for*

participants topic integrated member perceptions, feelings, and ideas about how the action team and its initiatives were beneficial for families, schools, and communities. More precisely, this topic centered on the concept of action team sustainability and how this would be achieved at Terry Fox Elementary School.

The results suggest that an action team based on Epstein and colleagues' (2002) guidelines may be suitable for creating opportunities for healthy and active living in an elementary school setting. In particular, families, students, teachers, and administration believed that the action team initiatives added to the school environment, school spirit, and value of the family as an essential component in the school. Likewise, the action team members felt that the health and wellness committee they represented was a valued component in the school culture that could be further developed and improved on in future years. Finally, and perhaps more importantly, students in the school further echoed the views of the adults and stressed their enjoyment and willingness to participate in action team designed initiatives.

Practical Implications

The current study has implications for elementary teachers, physical education teachers, families, students, and administrators as it deals with a practical and innovative method to increasing healthy and active living opportunities within a school setting. In particular, the current study provides description of real trial and tribulations experienced by an action team implementing healthy and active living initiatives in a naturalistic setting. Specifically, this study could motivate present and future teachers by learning about the preparation, implementation, and commitment required to start and develop a health-oriented committee within a school. In addition, existing and potential committees may gain insight into methods for developing partnerships between families, schools, and

communities in order to work towards a goal of creating healthy and active living opportunities.

Specifically, the description of organizing, implementing, and in turn, valuing of action teams, may help schools to see how a small-scale committee can act as a stepping stone for pursuing larger health and physical activity-centered infrastructure such as Quebec's Healthy Schools Approach or a coordinated school health approach. In turn, these experiences may lead to increased leadership within the school. Thus, the current study may help with the establishment of an action team that brings families, schools, and communities together through healthy and active living.

In addition, the current study may encourage teachers and administrators to reflect on the value of including the family and community in conjunction with school-based healthy and active lifestyle activities. Family enjoyment and perceived importance about participating in physical activities together may encourage schools and/or committees to create activities that encourage cooperation, inclusion, low cost, easy organization, a variety of lifetime activities, and transferability to the home and community. Likewise, similar committees may be developed over several years and continually stress the importance of creating additional collaborations between the family, school, and community. In turn, action teams may become part of the cultural mosaic of the school and be an anticipated and expected pursuit year after year.

Future Directions

The current study was designed using action research guidelines, where the researcher was a participant in an action team in a naturalistic setting. This type of research is practitioner-oriented and has benefits for teachers with different degrees of experience and objectives. For example, teachers can incorporate several principles of action research as part

of their reflective practice as a means of improving their effectiveness without necessarily being involved in a “formal” research project.

As an extension of this study, future work could also examine the student perceptions about the healthy and active living initiatives planned by the action team. Specifically, more student input may be gathered about the impact of the action team on the students and in turn, the entire school. The use of focus groups may also provide further insight into the potential leadership opportunities that exist for students involved in the action team or a similar student committee. Likewise, it might be interesting to explore the academic effects that may come about from student participation in a healthy and active living committee.

Further research is needed to explore how effectively an action team uses the resources of its members, the family, the school, and the community. This includes examining more closely Epstein and colleagues’ (2002) six types of involvement in relation to healthy and active lifestyle action teams. For example, volunteering may be explored to find different methods to attract new members to the action team. In addition, research may be extended over an elongated duration to reflect on the development of family, school, and community partnerships through healthy and active living initiatives.

A further extension to this study may include gathering more information on how the action team could more effectively work with existing structures in the school. This may include examining the potential for establishing cross-curricular activities that correspond to material being taught in the classroom or gymnasium. In turn, this study may offer opportunities for further reflection about pedagogical directions that may be taken in health and physical education, particularly through coordinated school health approaches.

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Appendix A

Information about Introductory Action Team Meeting from school newsletter

Terry Fox Health and Wellness Action Team- Let's put the ACT in activity!

We are looking for energetic parents and individuals to be members of the Health and Wellness Committee this year! We will be emphasizing a school-wide importance on being healthy and active students through the creation of 2-3 large initiatives and several smaller ones. Monthly themes that encourage healthy behaviors in the home, school, and community will be starting this week. Each theme will have fun activities during physical education classes, recess, and lunch. Family Physical Education Nights and a student-led Health Fair are just tiny hints of what may be in store for 2007!

If you are interested, you have 4 ways for correspondence: (a) send a note with your child, (b) write in your child's agenda, (c) call the school, or (d) email krista.smeltzer@gmail.com. We will be sending home information to interested participants within the week and plan to briefly meet prior to the holiday break.

Appendix B

Action Team Consent Form

ACTION TEAM CONSENT FORM

Hi! I am a current graduate student in physical education pedagogy at McGill University. Part of my studies involves writing a thesis. I have chosen to study the creation of additional physical activity opportunities for elementary students. I wish to work with the physical education teacher, and a few parents, students, and community members to plan and organize these activities for your child. The school board has approved this study and your principal and physical education teacher have agreed to participate. McGill requires a letter of consent whenever research is conducted on human beings, stating the purpose, procedures, and conditions of the research. This does not imply that the project involves any risk; the intention is simply to assure the respect and confidentiality of the individuals concerned.

The purpose of this study is to implement an action team dedicated to the creation of additional physical activity opportunities for youth. Specifically, I will work with you and an action team of parents, students, the physical education teacher, and community members to plan and implement three physical activity initiatives over the course of the school year. The activities we will create will involve physical activity while emphasizing collaboration between parents, communities, and schools. During meetings, the action team will work together to design the activities that will be enjoyable for all ages and physical activity levels, emphasize fun, and incorporate skills and abilities used in the physical education program. The activities may take place during the school day, after school, or in the evening. I, along with members of the action team, will be present during all initiatives.

During the meetings and initiatives, I will be taking notes about how the action team works together to implement the activities. No grading or evaluation will take place. Your role will be to attend action team meetings to plan initiatives and then implement them. At the end of the initiatives, I will interview you for 30-60 minutes to gather your perspective of being a member of the action team. Your name or identity will not be disclosed at any time and a pseudonym will be provided for the thesis. The data collected from the meetings, initiatives, and open-ended questionnaires will be used to write a graduate thesis. All data collected will be stored in a locked cabinet accessible by only my advisor and I, and it will be destroyed after two years. Meeting agendas will be kept in the physical education teacher's office for future reference.

Your participation in this study is voluntary and not mandatory. You are free to withdraw from participating at any time, for any reason without penalty.

I, _____, have read and understood the above statements. I understand that my child's participation in this study is voluntary and that he/she may withdraw from participating at any time. I understand that the information collected will remain confidential.

(Action team member signature)

(Date)

Please feel free to contact me or my supervisor at any time:

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Appendix C

Open-ended Questionnaire Guide

Opening Questions

1. How did you decide to commit the school to the Health and Wellness Action Team?
2. Overall, how would you describe your experience on the action team?
3. What was your role on the action team? What did you do?

Action Team Questions

1. Did you find the meetings (evening or lunchtime) beneficial?
2. How effective do you feel the action team was in gaining family support and participation?
3. How effective do you feel the action team communicated with families? Teachers? Students? With one another?
4. What do you feel was the role of volunteers?
5. How effective was the action team at using community resources?
6. Were there any unique/positive/negative experiences that yourself and/or the action team experienced this year?

Initiative Questions

1. Describe your role in creating the initiatives?
2. Which initiative was your favorite one?
3. What do you feel the school gained from participating in the initiatives?
 - a. The students?
 - b. Families?
 - c. Teachers?
4. How important was it to include activities that the students participated in at school and home?
5. What initiatives do you think could be sustained for next year?

Summary Questions

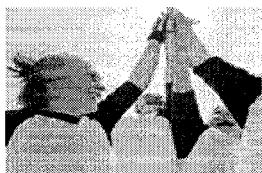
1. Do you think the action team can be continued next year? If yes, what should be done to prepare for next year? What ways would you like to expand the action team?
2. In your opinion, what are the three most important characteristics to running an effective health and wellness action team?
3. In your opinion, what are the three most important characteristics to organizing health and wellness activities?

Concluding Questions

1. What role do you envision the action team to have at Terry Fox?
2. Is there anything else you would like to add?
3. Do you have any questions or concerns?

Appendix D

Project Outline



Increasing Physical Activity Opportunities for Students

McGill University

Krista Smeltzer & Enrique Garcia, PhD

Benefits for the school and physical education program:

- Creating additional physical activity opportunities for physical activity for youth
- Creating collaborative efforts between schools, families, and communities
- Transferring skills from physical education to the home and community
- Assistance for the physical educator with physical activity initiatives beyond the physical education program
- Increased opportunity for family time dedicated to physical activity
- Increased awareness of community physical activity and sport organizations
- Increased opportunity for youth enjoyment of and adherence to physical activity
- Opportunity to increase the comprehensiveness of quality daily physical activity within the school

We need your help to increase physical activity opportunities for youth!

Recently, a 2006 report card was issued for the Active Healthy Kids Canada Report Card on Physical Activity with a mark of D. Canadian children are not participating in enough regular physical activity to meet minimum health benefits. Much of the regular physical activity children receive is from organized physical education. With additional minutes dedicated to physical and health education in Quebec for the upcoming school year, a unique opportunity presents itself.

We are interested in your elementary school, in particular the physical education program and physical educator as potential participants for a master's thesis project. The school was recommended because of a strong physical education program, the size of the school, and the community surrounding the school. **We will be looking for parents, students, and interested community members to participate on the action team. Please read on and if interested send in the attached form.**

This project will aim to use an action team made up of the physical education teacher, 2-3 parents, 2 students, 2 community members, and the researcher to create physical activity opportunities for students. The action team will aim to bridge the gap between the many different people that influence youth participation in physical activity. 2-3 physical activity initiatives will be specifically designed for the students by the action team to use existing skills taught in the physical education program, as well as to use the resources and expertise of the surrounding community. These initiatives have the potential to be implemented school-wide, during school hours, after school, at home, and/or in the community. Each initiative will be based on promoting physical activity for students, as well as creating collaborative practices between school, home, and community members.

Time Commitment:

An energy and time commitment will be required on the part of all action team members, including the physical education teacher. This will allow for collaborative relationships to be formed between all action team members. Participation will mainly be required for action team meetings, implementation of physical activity initiatives, and upkeep of a potential website. Meetings will likely be held every two weeks for an hour at a place that is convenient for the majority of action team members. As previously mentioned, 2-3 initiatives will be planned and implemented by the action team between the months of November and March. These initiatives will likely require some additional time commitment outside of meetings to assist with preparation. Additionally, a formal interview of approximately 1hr will be required of each action team member at the conclusion of the initiatives.

Future Directions:

The use of an action team dedicated to creating physical activity opportunities presents several future directions for the school. In particular with the creation of an action team under the guidance of a researcher, the action team members will have the skills and knowledge to continue the infrastructure into future school years. The action team will also have the potential to work collaboratively with existing school committees to create more cross-curricular initiatives. Lastly, the use of the action team will allow for the continuation of the collaborative relationships created between the action team, family and, community members.

Appendix E

Family Physical Education Night Questionnaire

Hi,

On behalf of the *Health and Wellness Action Team*, it was a pleasure to have your family out for the 1st ever Family PE Night last evening! With such a tremendous turnout on your part, it is something we hope to continue in the future! In order to help us organize future activities, we would greatly appreciate your comments.

1. What activities did your family participate in? How much did they enjoy them?

Activity #1 _____

Enjoyment Level 1 (did not enjoy) 2 3 4 5 (absolutely loved!)

Activity #2 _____

Enjoyment Level 1 (did not enjoy) 2 3 4 5 (absolutely loved!)

Activity #3 _____

Enjoyment Level 1 (did not enjoy) 2 3 4 5 (absolutely loved!)

2. What was your family's favourite part about the evening?
3. What was your family's least favourite part about the evening?
4. What would your family add/change about the evening.
5. Any additional comments?

Appendix F

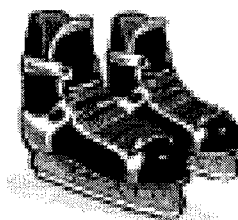
Family Skate Night Participation Form

April 18, 2007

Your students & parents ...

It's time for some more family fun! After the incredible success of our Family Physical Education nights, the Terry Fox Health and Wellness Committee have organized a family skating outing for this month.

Winter is almost over ... so, tie up those laces and get ready to have a blast!
Everyone ... regardless of their skating ability are invited to join us!



Date: Friday, April 27th, 2007

Time: 19h00 to 20h30

Location: Complexe sportif St. Raphael, 750 Jacques-Bizard, Ile Bizard, Quebec

Telephone: (514) 820-5444

Cost: \$2.00/adult & \$1.00/child

The following rules are to be respected at the skating rink ...

- ** Hockey and/or bicycle helmets are mandatory for children under 13 years of age.
- ** ALL children to be supervised by an adult both on & off the ice. No exceptions will be made!

Other pertinent information ...

- ** Coats will be provided for those learning how to skate!
- ** Refreshments are available at the snack bar at your expense.
- ** No alcoholic beverages are permitted on the premises.

Members of the Health and Wellness Committee reserve the right to ask any student and/or adult to leave the ice due to unsafe behaviours.

Please complete the slip below and send it in along with your payment to Ms. S., Ms. Hewitt or Miss. Tracy by Tuesday, April 24th. There are a limited amount of spaces, so get your skating slips in sooner rather than later!

Your Physical Education Team and Health and Wellness Committee

The _____ family will be attending the HEALTH & WELLNESS FAMILY SKATING OUTING on Friday April 27th, 2007 at the Complexe sportif St. Raphael Area on Ile Bizard.

_____ x \$1.00/child + _____ x \$2.00/adult = _____ Total Payment = \$ _____

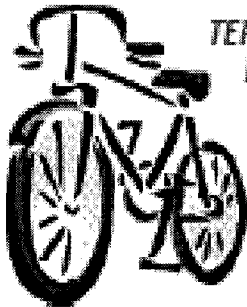
We've enclosed the total payment & participation slip for this family activity & have read the rules regarding children's helmets, supervision and proper behaviours.

Parent/Guardian signature

Date

Appendix G

Family Bike Outing Participation Form



**TERRY FOX ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
HEALTH & WELLNESS FAMILY BIKE RIDE & PICNIC**

WHERE: Bois de l'Île Bizard Nature Park
Pointe aux Carrières Sector
2115, chemin Bord du Lac, Île Bizard

TEL: (514) 280-8517 **WEB SITE:** Bois de l'Île Bizard

WHEN: Saturday, June 9th or Sunday, June 10th (Rain Date)

TIME: 9h00-13h30

DEPARTURE TIME: From Chalet/Beach parking lot entrance at 9h30

DISTANCE: 8.5 kms. - Easy to Slightly Hilly Bike Route

- Pointe aux Carrières Sector to Rapids & Back

- Snacks will be provided for you at the Rapids.

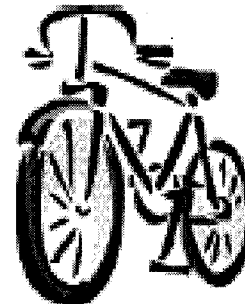
COST: \$7.00 - all day parking fee (at your expense)

Please remember to wear your bike helmets & bring these items with you ... knapsack, sun screen, water bottles, bug repellant, a garbage bag, a family picnic and lots of smiles!

We're looking for volunteers ... if interested please contact Brenda Beaudoin at (514) _____ or via e-mail at artzybrenda@i_____. Thanks.

Send your participation form to Ms. Newin at the phys-ed office, by Wednesday, June 6th. Merci.

Looking forward to seeing you then & there!



John Torunian
Principal, Terry Fox School

Family Name: _____

of Children: _____

of Adults: _____



Signature: _____

Date: _____