Physical Activity and Student Focus in the Primary Grades

by

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Abstract

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The purpose of this paper is to explore the correlation of student physical activity and its impact on student focus in the academic classroom and the influencing role of School Administration and Stakeholders.

Important historical and current empirical studies on physical activity are used to explore their impact on student focus, achievement and well-being. The author shares his own experiences and observations, and explores how research validates his teaching of the Ontario Physical Education and Health curriculum. These resources are used to integrate the physical education curriculum with other academic subjects, to motivate student engagement and success.

The conclusion, in a majority of the research, shows a positive correlation between physical activity and academic achievement. The participation of Schools, Schools Board, School Council, Administrators and Educators are integral in achieving this success.
Acknowledgements

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A very important acknowledgement is reserved for Louis Attias, a teaching colleague, whose valuable feedback, generous advice and friendship shape the kind of professional I am today.
I am motivated and privileged to be working in an incredible community of students and parents, who, along with School Council, support the initiatives that are mentioned in my research.

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Chapter 1 - Introduction

I sit in my office at 7:28 on a frigidly cold Wednesday morning in early January. I am inspired by the stillness of the nature that surrounds the school as I scurry from the parking lot, carrying my laptop bag and knapsack in each hand, to the back entrance. The warm school vestibule greets me. I climb the stairwell to the second floor and open the door to my office. The bubbly voice of the school secretary announces: “Staff, we will have an indoor entry because of the cold temperature outside”. The hustle and bustle of students unfolds as they fill the hallways with wild chatter, lugging about albeit slowly, bundled in snow pants, winter coats, gloves, scarves, hats and boots. This in itself is a great workout for primary aged students in Grades one, two and three.

I teach Physical Education and Health at this elementary primary school in the York Region District School Board. I was privileged to help open up the new school, as a member of the teaching staff, back in 2007, at the request of the newly assigned Principal. Prior to this role, I taught Grade one and Grade four homeroom. I enjoyed teaching homeroom, but was constantly aware of the limits imposed by the four walls of a classroom on student motivation, learning, health and well-being. I was challenged by students who could not focus on assigned tasks and assignments for extended periods of time while sitting at their desks. I reflect on my childhood at that age and what most motivated me while at school; gym class and playing outside come to mind immediately. Play and movement were integral parts of my inspiration as a student and now as an adult, I am passionate in my belief that learning and physical activity are interconnected and mutually beneficial in the elementary grades. There is much empirical evidence that illustrates why this relationship is integral to the physical and academic
development of a student and I will humbly attempt to validate this research.

**Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this paper is to explore the correlation of student physical activity and its impact on student focus in the academic classroom and the influencing role of School Administration and Stakeholders.

I will look into some important historical and current empirical studies on physical activity and their impact on student focus, achievement and well-being. I will share many of my own experiences and observations, and explore how the research validates my teaching resources of the Ontario Physical Education and Health curriculum. These resources may be used to integrate the physical education curriculum with other academic subjects, to motivate student engagement and success.

Reflecting back, my teaching career began in a Grade one homeroom French Immersion class in September of 2005. The class was evenly divided among female and male students. What stands out most, during that first experience teaching homeroom, was the diverse learning styles of my students and, more pointedly, the difference in focus and motivation among the males and females while completing seat work and during carpet time.

The majority of female students listened attentively to instructions and followed the required tasks. Most males were easily distracted and showed a lack of interest in the topics
discussed. As a result, the male contingent in the grade one class found it difficult completing the required tasks correctly. Student engagement was the issue.

I noticed a similar inattentiveness and lack of focus among the Grade four students of my homeroom class the following school year in September of 2006. Although these factors of inattentiveness and focus were more prevalent in the boys of my Grade one class, I found that it existed more equally among both boys and girls of the grade four homeroom class I taught in my second year at that same school.

My development as a reflective practitioner began to form and my search for improved student success in the classroom guided my teaching and my own world-view. Lack of student focus and engagement and my own experience of academic success, linked to a physically active lifestyle, piqued my interest in researching how physical activity could impact student focus and motivation. I am particularly interested in how physical activity may influence primary school students due to the lack of research among this age group.
Chapter 2 - Research studies on increased physical activity and student achievement

Physical Activity – “A way of life?”

I began to analyze my students and my teaching through this new reflective lens. Even when not in class teaching, I was teaching. I absorbed my own experiences and the details of my life in this search to better understand my class and the students I taught.

On October 6, 2005, Education Minister Gerard Kennedy announced that every elementary student would take part in a minimum of 20 minutes of daily physical activity as part of the Ontario government’s Healthy School program. In addition to this, Deputy Minister Ben Levine issued a Policy / Program Memorandum to schools and school boards outlining the details of this initiative. The Memorandum states that:

Physical activity is essential for the proper growth and development of children and youth. Providing elementary students with opportunities to be physically active and have a positive impact on their physical, mental, and social well-being. In particular, physical activity is likely to have an impact on student achievement, readiness to learn, behaviour, and self-esteem. Positive experiences with physical activity at a young age also help lay the foundation for healthy, productive lives. (Government of Ontario, 2005)
Reading this Memorandum back in 2007 resonated with me on many levels. It spoke to my own experiences and beliefs and the primacy of physical activity in my life and how it continues to guide my success and discipline my professional and personal goals and aspirations. The wording in the Memorandum provided my teaching and reflective practice, the necessary catalyst to challenge classroom inattentiveness and focus, with a healthy dose of physical activity. How hard could that be?

It was at about this time that I began thinking of furthering my knowledge on the correlation between physical activity and student focus. I applied for a Masters in Education at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE). I did not formally apply, for entry into the program, until early in 2008. I read about and became inspired by Vygotsky’s theoretical positions on the interaction between learning and development as follows:

1. Vygotsky’s first theoretical position states that a child’s development is independent of learning. A child’s physical, mental, and social maturity are prerequisites for learning.

2. In Vygotsky’s second theoretical position, he states that the learning process is habit formation, much like a reflex, and that it is inseparable from a child’s development process.

3. Vygotsky’s third theoretical position is grounded in Franz Kofka’s theory that development is based on two inherently different but related processes; maturation, which depends on the development of the nervous system and then, learning, which also
depends on the developmental process. (Vygotsky, 1978).

Reflecting on Vygotsky’s postulations on the interaction between learning and development, I was struck by how much sense it made. A child’s physical, mental, and social development is logically dependent on that child’s maturity. Vygotsky’s thinking is grounded in the ideas embodied by Franz Kofka and the Gestalt school; learning embodies an intellectual order that makes it possible to transfer general principles discovered in one task to a variety of other tasks. For Kofka, the development process was larger than the learning process. One step forward in learning prompted two steps forward in a child’s development.

I began thinking that applying these ideas, using the Ontario curriculum for physical education as a guide, would positively influence student learning in other academic subjects. Developing student co-ordination and musculature would benefit student learning in the classroom. Vygotsky’s theoretical positions, on development and learning, postulated in his zone of proximal development (ZPD) concept became self-evident as the approach I would use to engage students in the classroom. According to Vygotsky, a child’s development is achieved as a result of already completed developmental cycles. The zone of proximal development proposes that the distance between the actual developmental level of a child is determined by that of a child’s independent problem solving skills and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving skills under adult guidance, scaffolding, or in collaboration with more capable peers. Vygotsky’s theory on child development was revolutionary at the time of his life in the early 1900’s; learning was mediated by the society one inhabits. (Vygotsky, 1978).
There is something limiting in Vygotsky’s theoretical notion that an individuals’ ability to learn is largely determined by one’s social world. This theory is in line with the philosophy of social determinism. It implies that we, as individuals, do not have a choice in determining our learning or development. Learning and development is linked solely to our social environment. The theory discounts other non-social and biological factors, such as individual genetic make-up and physical environment, in the learning and development process. Imagine how teachers might go about assessing students if they judged them by this deterministic approach? Johnny will always be a C+ student because he grew up in a family that lives in that part of town. What a crazy notion indeed.

My newly found desire to explore how physical activity might influence student focus and engagement, in a homeroom class, took an interesting turn in early 2007. A new school was being built and, the newly appointed principal asked that I join the assembled team in this exciting venture. I felt honoured at the possibility of a new beginning and at the prospect of continuing the teaching journey exploring physical activity and student engagement. This is exactly what happened.

After being summoned to the principal’s office at the school I was at, in February of 2007, I was asked if I would consider joining her in the opening of the new school the following school year. The principal offered me two teaching options at this new school: a Grade three homeroom class or teaching Physical Education and Health to the primary grades. Knowing what you know about me so far, I am sure you have no trouble guessing what role I eagerly chose while sporting an immense, banana like grin from ear to ear.
It was as if a force propelled me in a direction; that germinated while teaching homeroom, in search of how best to motivate and engage students. I felt like I was in the midst of something and that unseen forces were propelling me towards a goal. It was spiritual. The Paulo Coelho quote, “And when you want something, all the universe conspires in helping you to achieve it” (Coelho, P. 1980), kept flashing in my mind.

I submitted my official application to the Master’s of Education program at OISE, at the University of Toronto, in late 2008 and was accepted into the Curriculum Studies and Teacher Development program in the fall of 2009 / 2010. I turned my attention to researching the links between physical activity and student engagement. It became a part of my studies and my everyday philosophy.

**Historical research**

I began to delve into researching links to anything and everything to do with physical activity and student focus. I was most interested in primary aged students in Grades one, two and three. This age group ranged from about six to eight years old. The research on physical education and student focus seemed to concentrate on intermediate and high school aged students. The more I looked, the less I found.

I believe the relevant research among students in this age group was lacking because of two factors: First, there are not many professionals, engaged with students of this age group, who focus strictly on teaching physical education as a means to achieving increased student engagement in the academic classroom; and Secondly, students in this age group are developing
at a rapid pace: physically, emotionally, and mentally. This, coupled with the wide gap of varying physical and mental abilities, due to the differing pace of physical and mental development, poses difficulties for establishing universal measures for researching this age group. That being said, there is a great deal of research on physical activity and student engagement among students in the junior and intermediate elementary levels that may be used to extrapolate conclusions that may be applied to primary students in Ontario.

Many studies have been conducted on children to determine whether training in perceptual motor skills, such as balance and eye-hand coordination improves academic and cognitive performance. A review of 180 controlled studies concluded that any effects on academic or intellectual functioning were very small and not commensurate with the time devoted to the training (Buenen, 1994).

Research studies have made attempts to show the importance of physical activity in the healthy development of children. Claims of academic benefits of physical education have been made over decades, most of them based on shallow scientific evidence. Schools that created programs with more emphasis on Physical Activity as part of the curriculum yielded the following results:

**Vanves, France Study**

In one study, begun in 1951, an elementary school in Vanves, France, the school day was divided so that four hours were devoted to academics and one to two hours of the day to physical education, art, music, and supervised study (Bailey, 1976). A group
of 30 students were followed, during a period of three years, for this experiment. The results of the study show that an emphasis on Physical Education and the Arts improved health, fitness, discipline, and enthusiasm among students, alongside an increase in academic performance surpassed by that of students in a controlled class environment. It is difficult to attribute any improvements to physical education, because the program also included daily naps and vitamin supplements. The methods and rigor of the study have been questioned (Shephard, 1996).

The Vanves project stimulated other research that promoted daily physical activity in elementary schools. This research was groundbreaking because it attempted to link regular physical activity with positive student academic performance. The research does not focus specifically on primary grade students but students in the elementary grades. Again, there is no known research, at the time, focusing on this specific age group.

**Trois-Rivières, Québec Study**

Another study, conducted in Trois-Rivières, Québec, was a six year longitudinal study, following the same students from Grades one to Grade six. The purpose of the study was to show that increased physical activity, during the primary years, would enhance fitness and cardiovascular health among this experimental group later in their adult lives (Trudeau, 2000, p.208).

During this time frame, an experimental group of 272 students received 5 hours of
Physical Education each week while the control group of 274 students received the required 40 minutes of Physical Education, mandated by the Ministry of Education during that era in Québec (Trudeau et al., 2008). The study took place between 1970 and 1977 (Locke, 2003, p. 167). Trudeau (2000) states that the experimental program resulted in a substantial increase of physical activity, muscle strength, oxygen intake, and field performance among the experimental group.

It is interesting to note that primary schools in Québec (Trois-Rivières study) are defined as elementary schools from Grades one to Grade six. (Gouvernement du Québec, 2014). In the Ontario education system, the elementary school, Grades one through eight, is subdivided into three categories; primary (Grades one to three), junior (Grades four through six), and intermediate (Grades seven and eight).

**Spark Study**

Another interesting study I came across in my research is project Spark, conducted among 759 Grade five and six students in California. The study was designed to increase physical activity during Physical Education (PE) classes and outside of school. Subgroups of children were taught PE by either a professional physical educator, a trained homeroom teacher, or in the normal program.

The professional physical educators, the trained teachers, and normal programs offered, respectively, 80, 65, and 38 minutes per week of PE. As expected, those taught by the professional educators achieved greater fitness
(cardiovascular and muscle endurance). Also, the groups taught by professional physical educators and trained teachers had smaller declines in academic performance despite allocating more time to PE (Trudeau & Shepard, 2008, p. 2).

The primary finding of project Spark is that spending more time being physically active in Physical Education class did not have detrimental effects on a student’s academic scores or standardized tests. Standardized test scores were used as a measure, as opposed to grades received in class by the homeroom teacher, because of the implied bias of teacher grading. (Kolody, et al., 2009).

The three studies presented above are conclusive in showing that an increase in physical activity among students in the elementary grades does not negatively affect their academic grades. What is inconclusive is whether there is an increase in student focus in the classroom and student engagement in the academic subjects being taught linked to the increase in physical activity time. The challenge becomes setting a measure that will provide researchers a clear indication of what increased student focus and engagement look like.

Reflecting on my experience teaching physical education, most students are excited at the prospect of heading to the gymnasium to move. Very few students aged six, seven, and eight, are willing to pass up an opportunity to diffuse their excess energy through physical activity. Knowing that student excitement is ever present, in relation to PE time, gives me flexible control over students and their motivation. I am able to dangle
the proverbial “PE carrot” to prompt student focus and engagement. “If we work together and focus on the activity at hand, there will be time at the end of class to head to gym to play.” This reward based motivational tool is one method teachers may use to motivate student focus during short bursts of time. This method requires teachers to convince students, through prompts and coaxing, into setting goals and working for a reward. This may be successful in the short term. The long-term academic goal is to inspire students to become independent, engaged, focused learners.

Can increased physical activity, during the school day, play a part in this motivation and engagement?

**The South Australia Study**

The first legitimate controlled study, on physical activity and its effects on the health of primary students, was conducted in Adelaide, South Australia in September of 1978 in a randomized trial involving over 500 grade five students, around 10 years old, among seven primary schools. The initial study lasted 14 weeks and involved two intervention groups, one of which maintained a relatively inactive school routine. The initial assessment included, as stated by Dwyer (1983, p.308), “selected coronary heart disease (CHD) risk factors - endurance, fitness, body fat, blood pressure, plasma cholesterol, triglycerides and HDL cholesterol - as well as measures of academic performance, and psychological functioning.”

The seven schools involved implemented daily physical activity as a regular part
of the school day as a result of the findings. A second phase ensued in 1980, among a sample of students in five of the seven schools. The difference, in this second phase of the study, was that students had the benefit of exposure to two years of daily physical activity adopted by their schools. The findings paralleled the first phase of the study, showing an improved body mass index score among all Grade five students participating in the study. Academic scores among students did not show any marked improvement or decrease in achievement. The increase in physical activity did not conclusively contribute or take away from student academic success in the classroom (Dwyer et al., 1983, p. 312).

The trend, in many of these early studies, confirms that an increase in physical activity does not compromise student academic performance. It can be implied that increasing physical activity among students during the course of the school day positively correlates to homeroom teachers delivering the curriculum more effectively.

**The British Columbia Study**

The next study, conducted in British Columbia in 2002, set out to investigate whether or not an increase in physical activity among Grades four and Grade five students influenced student academic performance. The study also explored the impact differences between boys and girls when physical activity was increased during the school day. British Columbia intervention schools use a model called Action Schools. Action Schools is a socio-ecological best practices physical activity model that aims to positively influence a child’s health. The idea was to allow classroom teachers an
opportunity to provide students additional time engaged in physical activity, in addition to the British Columbia ministry mandated guideline of 80 minutes of physical activity a week set out in the curriculum (Ahamed, 2007, p. 372).

The findings demonstrate that student academic performance was not compromised through an increase in physical activity during the school day. In addition, boys at this grade level were more active than girls during the daily opportunities provided to be physically active.

Please refer to the following table, found in Trudeau (2008), comparing the above research outlined so far. It provides a nice visual and comparison of the findings on physical activity and student achievement.

**Table 1**

Quasi-experimental studies examining the influence of sport, physical education or physical activity upon academic achievement.
The research outlined above provides a good starting point for understanding students in the middle to higher elementary grades and the importance of physical activity as a vital component to their academic learning. The research also speaks to the increased health benefits students experience following an increase in physical activity time at their schools.

Another important aspect, present in the research analyzed above, is the primacy of trained physical education teachers who understand the curriculum and how best to deliver it effectively. Many physical education teachers I know live a physically active, healthy lifestyle and bring that passion to their teaching. I believe that the subject you teach must align with your...
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life philosophy. To that point, how can one expect homeroom teachers, who don’t all follow a physically active lifestyle and who aren’t well-trained as a physical education professional, be expected to adequately address their school’s and their classroom’s approach to physical activity.

I will continue exploring some current research on physical activity at school and show how it is becoming increasingly evident that the only way to combat the growing increase of child obesity is through a disciplined, school based program of physical education.

Current Research

The current research on increased physical activity and student engagement is minimal but provides good insight into the benefits of increased physical activity on student focus.

North Carolina Study

One study I find particularly interesting was conducted in North Carolina, among elementary school students in grades three and four during a three month period in 2006. The purpose of the study was to analyze student response to on-task behaviour after short bouts of in class physical activity, called “Energizers”, during the course of the school day. Teachers were trained on how to deliver these “Energizers”, during a forty-five minute training session. Training emphasized the importance of physical activity for children. Energizer activities were conducted twice during the school day among the grade three and four students. The study concluded, based on strict and controlled observation results, that classroom based physical activity programs were effective in improving student on-task behaviour. Observation of the intervention group, further
concluded, that students who were most off task, before the classroom based physical activity, benefited more than those grade three and grade four students who were on task (Mahar, 2011, p. S63). I included a table, shown below, providing the research results of the above study of on-task behaviour.

Percentage (SD) on-task behavior among third and fourth grade students ($n = 62$) and among least on-task students ($n = 10$) during baseline and intervention periods.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Baseline Period</th>
<th>Intervention Period</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prebreak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Participants</td>
<td>71.3 (16.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Least On-task Students</td>
<td>57.0 (15.6)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


There is other research that supports studies, in the elementary school sphere, where an increase in physical education time, physical activity time in the classroom, and recess outside do not hinder a student’s academic performance in the classroom.

\textbf{Dill Research Study}

The Dill research study used was a longitudinal study, following the Early
Childhood Longitudinal Survey kindergarten Class of 1998-1999. The study does not allude to any special training teachers received to provide additional PE time. Additional recess time does not require any special training. Teacher education programs do not adequately address providing students additional physical activity time.

Dill (2011), states that time spent in recess and PE is unlikely to affect student test scores. This may be because gains in student concentration compensate for the time spent in physical activities (p. 898). Recess and PE can affect school children’s academic achievement in two different ways: active time during the school day reduces the class time available for academic learning but these breaks may improve classroom behaviour, increasing young student’s comprehension (Dill, p. 897).

**Slovenian Research Study**

I came across a bit of research on the difference in effectiveness of the PE curriculum delivered by PE professionals, in Slovenia, versus generalist teachers (homeroom teachers) among the primary grades (grades one, two, and three). There were 146 classes from 66 Slovenian primary schools involved. The research was funded by the ministry of education of sport of the republic of Slovenia. The results show that planning and delivery of PE lessons by PE specialist teachers in comparison to generalist teachers resulted in a relative improvement of physical fitness for the students involved. Quality PE is important because the evidence shows that participation in regular and intensive physical activity should start before the pubertal growth spurt to achieve the maximum
development of bone as well as muscle mass. Specialist PE teachers deliver more effective PE lessons of higher intensity and have a stronger positive effect on children’s motor development (Starc & Strel, 2012, p. 5).

I am a strong believer in enhancing student’s understanding of physical literacy through ongoing training at the school board level, supported by the Ministry of Education. The truth of the matter is that funding is limited for such support, especially in an era of budget deficits. Many elementary schools do not have the privilege of a physical education professional engaging and teaching students physical education and health.

The importance of Physical Education Professionals

I digress a bit from linking student engagement in the classroom with increased physical activity time during the school day because of my belief in the importance of delivering quality physical activity time to students supported by physical education professionals. Physical education professionals should engage homeroom teachers in ongoing professional development to support student achievement. During the Physical Activity, Cognitive Function and Academic Achievement Conference in November of 2011, two large gaps were identified in the research linking increased physical activity to academic achievement; identifying the dose and type of PA needed to optimally benefit academic performance. This speaks to the ongoing challenges schools and school boards face with limited resources, budgets, and time to advocate for an efficient type of physical activity, through professional development, that best suits the needs of students in the classroom. Much of the current research implies that physical activity influences
multiple pathways including physiological, neurological, psychological, and social factors that may lead to improved academic achievement (Howie, 2012, p. 166).

**Development of fine motor skills and coordination**

Promoting physical activity, in conjunction with a healthy diet, are two essential components of my work as a physical education professional. Although there is a great deal of research on physical activity and its impact on student focus and engagement in the classroom, much of it is inconclusive due to divergent methodologies and sample groups. I believe that physical activity plays a very important role in student engagement in the classroom, both academically and socially. Among primary grade students in Ontario, physical education class is essential in their physical development and growth as it complements their academic work in class and is a necessary development of their fine motor and coordination skills. An example of this is how students in grade one hold a pencil for writing. Many students have great difficulty gripping a pencil correctly and applying the appropriate pressure during a writing task. This is due to the lack of muscle development and coordination skills. Development of overall gross and fine motor skills is required for student strength when writing. Teachers may work on developing a child’s shoulder and arm muscles to gain control of the writing process and steady the arm and hand. Promoting the development of the whole child in physical activity especially in the primary grades, allows students time to succeed and gain an appreciation of both academic and non-academic subjects. Academic growth requires the development of certain muscle groups for writing and thinking. Research supports these statements. Research must be used constructively, by leaders in schools and the community, to include physical activity as the cornerstone of primary school student learning and development. The benefits of physical activity will not only
promote focus and student engagement in the classroom, but also establish in early childhood a healthy lifestyle; a routine that is important to establish when students are in their initial stages of physical and mental development. The offshoot benefits of establishing a healthy lifestyle will have positive outcomes for students, their families, and the community at large leading to a better quality of life into adulthood. These benefits will ultimately increase health, endurance and create positive alternatives to dealing with the increasing issues surrounding mental illness.

The importance of good leadership

The Physical Education curriculum supports teacher and leadership philosophies integrating physical activity into the school day. This can only become a reality in schools where leadership understands the short and long-term benefits of physical activity for students and ultimately, the community. I don’t see this as a primary mandate by most leaders. There is an intense focus on academic success through inquiry-based philosophies that elicit student learning that are question intensive and scenario based. Leaders are being directed by procedures created by school boards that are pressured to compete locally and internationally in academic education. Subsequently, Educators work with outdated policies that do not cater to the needs of students growing up in today’s world and having to deal with life’s complexities.

The challenges students face today are very different from the challenges faced five, ten or even fifteen years ago. Technological developments, media, and the resultant shift in the composition of what the nuclear family looks like and represents has created a new world view for most students, parents, and their families. Priorities have shifted. Technology has made time
move quickly. The capital requirements to support all our wants have taken away the focus from what our bodies need to sustain physical and mental health. The world is moving too fast.Parents and educators are burdened to provide children the knowledge and life skill prerequisites for attaining success that they don’t even understand. Students must learn what success looks like and that it is not always grounded in financial gain and material reward. Community involvement and governmental support are integral to this understanding.

I recently read an article on the Finnish educational model, in The Atlantic, and was struck by the comments of Finland’s Minister of Education and Science, Krista Kiuru, on the importance of small class sizes, strong support for struggling students, and a focus on developing more than strictly student academic skills. She called this a student’s know-how. Krista Kiuru states:

Academics aren’t all kids need. Kids need so much more. School should be where we teach the meaning of life, where kids learn community skills and know that they are needed. We like to think that school is also important for developing a good self-image and a strong sensitivity to other people’s feelings...and understanding it matters to take care of others. We definitely want to incorporate all those things in education. (Gross, 2014)

The above statement is supported by Finland’s stellar results in the 2013 PIAAC (Programme for International Assessment of Adult Competencies) and is based on the philosophy of providing an equal education for all. This means that a quality education is free and available to all in Finland. Teachers are highly trained and all must have a Masters degree to teach. (Gross, 2014) The point here is that student success in the classroom, academically, can
only be achieved by developing non-academic skills, physical literacy, vocational and hands-on skills that are practical and real. I call these skills “quality of life” skills.

Using the Ontario Physical and Health Education Association resource

Physical development is a prerequisite for academic success.

The OPHEA document is used to guide student Health and Physical Education lessons. OPHEA is a non-for-profit organization, founded in 1921, with the purpose of supporting the health and learning of children and youth in Ontario. The organization is led by a vision that all kids value and enjoy lifelong benefits of healthy, active living. OPHEA’s reach includes educators and leaders in all of Ontario’s 72 English and French school boards and 5000 schools. Health professionals from Ontario’s 36 public health units, community health centers, and recreation departments deliver and promote health and physical activity in multiple settings that include communities and workplaces. (OPHEA, 2014) Leaders in sports and recreation, child-care, and research organizations use OPHEA resources to support their initiatives. The OPHEA document supports Ontario’s Health and Physical Education curriculum that was revised in 2010. The revised Ontario Health and Physical Education curriculum is based on the vision that the knowledge and skills acquired in the program will benefit students throughout their lives and help them thrive in an ever-changing world by enabling them to acquire physical and health literacy, and to develop the comprehension, capacity, and commitment needed to lead healthy, active lives and to promote active, healthy living.

The OPHEA document is divided into three strands and addresses Active Living,
Movement Competence, and Healthy Living. It also contains a set of Living Skills that are touched upon in each strand. Topics addressed in the active living strand include active participation, physical fitness and safety. The movement competence strand explores movement strategies, skills and concepts. The Healthy Living strand focuses on the connection between the choices we make for our bodies and how it affects their functioning. The Living Skills integrated in the curriculum emphasize such skills as self-monitoring, self-awareness, decision-making, developing relationships and social skills. Living Skills also explores new information and emerging topics such as HIV / AIDS, bullying, mental health, dental health, hygiene, cyber safety, gender identity, sexual orientation, stigma, and stereotypes. (OPHEA, 2014)

The 2010 revision also provides educators with a slew of supports that includes topic examples, teacher prompts and student responses. These supports help reinforce understanding for teachers who are teaching the various domains within the curriculum and empower students to take control of their own learning. (H & PE, 2010)

The 2010 Health and Physical Education curriculum addresses a broad range of health topics that include gender identity, same sex relationships and sexual relations. These topics are discussed in the context of how personal and family values, in multicultural and multi faith beliefs, help shape decision-making. It is important to teach kids about healthy eating, safety, physical activity and substance use and addictions. The Healthy Living component of the curriculum includes teaching students to make healthy choices, working on their personal skills and understanding health concepts. Some of these health concepts include talking about sexual
health. In the primary grades, the Healthy Living focus is on having students take responsibility for their own safety at home, at school and in the community. They learn how to stand up for themselves and how to get help in situations of abuse. Students also learn to apply and understand basic concepts related to healthy food choices, healthy relationships, diversity, substance use and potentially addictive behaviours. They learn the names of body parts, they begin to understand how their body parts work and develop and acquire and understanding of some of the factors that contribute to healthy physical and emotional development. (H & PE 2010)

The 2010 Physical Education and Health curriculum emphasizes the use of appropriate terminology and use of proper names for body parts. It aims to ensure that students are learning accurate information about their bodies, with an underlying understanding of inclusion, acceptance, and equity for all students. (H & PE 2010)

During a school leadership meeting, at the primary French Immersion school where I work, Grade one, Grade two, and Grade three Lead teachers alluded to the importance of oral communication as a focus when developing vocabulary. The emphasis on subjects, where writing plays a big part, was downplayed in favor of the social interaction among students in the new language (French) being learned. The reason that our discussion took on this flavor was because of the shift in how students relate to the world. Writing is impractical if it has no immediate practical use to them. Having a conversation with another student makes the learning real. Physical activity promotes this type of learning through play and movement. Promoting
physical activity is a social activity. Primary students have the opportunity to engage with other students in their age group, find common interests, and explore their likes, dislikes, limits and strengths.

The Ontario Physical Education curriculum is a good starting point for teachers to promote awareness of physical literacy among students. The Ontario Physical and Health Education Association (OPHEA) resources available online aligns with the Ontario curriculum nicely and provide a variety of units and lesson plans that may be easily adapted to fit individual school needs for physical activity and health programs. Many of the lessons have cross curriculum connections and may be used to integrate learning in other subject areas.

I use the OPHEA program to deliver curriculum and guide student learning throughout the school year. Each class is different. Every student is unique. I adapt the lessons to fit the needs of classes and students. I have classes that are more capable at certain skills than others. For example, some students have more difficulty throwing and catching a ball than others. Although this kind of skill may seem elementary and down right ridiculous, at the primary school level, it is extremely important, and can help in the development of strength for such fine motor skills as holding a pencil properly for the writing process in the classroom. The hand eye coordination skills required to catch and throw a ball can also present a significant challenge to students at six or seven years old. It comes automatically to many of us, but to a child, during the developmental years, must think first of holding the ball to be thrown, then throwing the ball, with enough strength and accuracy, to reach the partner he is passing the ball to. Lastly, the
student must prepare to catch the ball, at the right moment, as it is thrown back, clasping both hands around the ball with enough force to ensure proper grip of the ball so that it does not fall out of his hands during the skill. This, assuming the ball is thrown back properly to him by his partner. How many of us think about the steps involved when throwing and catching a ball? I would venture a guess and say no one who already knows how to throw a ball. There was a time, before we knew how to throw and catch a ball that we did think about each step in the attainment of such an important skill. This is how students think and grasp new concepts.

I think that the link between physical activity and classroom engagement and success is self evident in the last two examples. A student’s physical development contributes to their academic success through an acquisition of the coordination and strength necessary for skills such as writing. Physical activity is an ideal environment to develop the social skills of fair play and communication with fellow peers and increase self-confidence.

The OPHEA document works hand in hand to support the 2010 Ontario Physical Education and Health curriculum and includes units, lessons, and numerous examples to guide student learning and complement teacher instruction. The OPHEA document and the Ontario Physical Education and Health curriculum align nicely with much of the research analyzed at the beginning of the chapter.

Physical Education Resources

A few of the organizations providing support for physical education specialists, school
Physical Activity & Student Focus in Primary Grades

leaders, and families include Physical and Health Education Canada (PHE Canada), The Ontario Physical and Health Education Association (OPHEA) discussed above, ParticipACTION Canada and Canadian Sport for Life (CS4L).

Physical and Health Education Canada (PHE Canada) supports schools in providing quality daily physical education and healthy school communities through a range of programs, resources and initiatives. The organization was founded in 1933 and is supported by membership that includes educators working in the school system, administrators who support them and university professors engaged in pre-service teacher training and in research in physical and health education. Their website may be found at http://www.phecanada.ca/ (Physical and Health Education Canada, 2014).

ParticiPACTION Canada is a not-for-profit organization and the national voice of physical activity and sport participation in Canada. Founded in 1971, partiPACTIO/N’s strategic goal is to ensure that physical activity is a priority on the national agenda. It is composed of leaders from business, education, entertainment, media, the social service, government, health care, physical activity, and sports and recreation research. There are many resources for parents and educators that include a toolkit with great after school activity ideas and various health and physical activity guidelines by age group. The Canadian physical activity guideline per age group is a great reference guide for parents and educators. The guidelines outline how active individuals in varying age groups need to be for visible health benefits. The guideline example for children aged five to eleven require them to accumulate 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity daily. (Appendix 2) The guidelines developed by the
Canadian Society for Exercise Physiology (CSEP), a voluntary organization that is a resource and voice for exercise physiology and health and fitness, and provide leadership in research, education and practice to improve health outcomes for Canadians. There is a wealth of evidenced based research on their website linked to exercise physiology, and health and fitness that educators and parents can use. The participACTION website and its resources may be found at http://www.participaction.com/ (ParticipACTION, 2014). Resources for the Canadian Society for Exercise and Physiology (CSEP) may be found at http://www.csep.ca/ (Canadian Society for Exercise and Physiology, 2014).

Canadian Sport for Life (CS4L) is a movement to improve the quality of sport and physical activity in Canada. CS4L links sport, education, recreation and health and aligns community, provincial, and national programming. There are many great resources to be found on their website to support educators, coaches, parents, athletes with disabilities, health practitioners, and recreation professionals. CS4L gained momentum in 2005 after the publication of a resource paper on long-term athlete development. The vision behind the organization is to reshape how athletes are trained at all levels in Canada from children to adults. The resources to support physical activity and learning may be found at http://canadiansportforlife.ca/ (Canadian Sports for Life, 2014).

The above research shows that increased physical activity for students, during the school day, does not negatively impact academic performance. Much of the research indicates that there is benefit to increased physical activity and free playtime during the school day, including an increase in focus linked to motivation. Student motivation and self confidence appears to be
linked to the knowledge that physical activity is a reward for task completion of academic tasks in class. Among the primary grades, increased physical activity provides students the opportunity to develop fine motor and coordination skills necessary for academic success. There is the added benefit of learning how to interact with peers while engaged in physical activity and play. These are skills that are transferable and applicable in a classroom setting when collaborating with other students on projects and activities. The research discussed is heavily focused on students aged nine years old and up. The research also measures different variables to arrive at similar conclusions relating to increased student focus and engagement in the classroom. Now that the research conclusively proves that increased physical activity time does not negatively affect student academic performance; how can policy makers and stakeholders implement a program of consistent physical activity in schools and motivate families while students are not in school to lead a physical and healthy lifestyle?

This question is answered below as I delve through an exploration of supports that ensure successful school board implementation of physical activity and how various policies influence students at the school level. I will demonstrate how increased physical activity, taught by trained physical education professionals complements student learning leading to improve self-confidence and academic learning.
Chapter 3: School administration and stakeholder influences

The “fun” factor

The research in the above section is undeniably strong. The benefits of physically active students lead to increase motivation in the classroom. In order for the research to be taken seriously, school boards and schools must prioritize and implement the findings with clear supportive directives from the Ministry of Education in the Province of Ontario. There is some progress in the area of physical activity at schools. The supports are available and may be found in the physical education and health curriculum documents for all grades. This, unfortunately, does not guarantee appropriate implementation of physical activity during the course of the school day due to many factors. Impeding factors may include a lack of qualified professionals to ensure programs and activities are in place for students to engage in physical activity that is fun.

Robert Bettauer has a few interesting things to say about physical literacy among Canadian youth. Robert Bettauer is a three-time Canadian National tennis champion. He turned pro in 1978, following a collegiate career at Pan American University and was a member of Canada’s Davis Cup team in 1980. Following his retirement, Bettauer coached both Canada’s Davis cup team and its national teams at the Seoul (1988) and Barcelona (1992) Olympic games. He has been a television analyst for two decades and is currently director of tennis development for Tennis Canada and Tennis BC. He states that the tendency that children develop in their youth continue into their adult years. It has been said that this generation of children will be the first generation to have a lower life expectancy than their parents due to a more sedentary life than previous generations. He blames the prevalence of technology and reduced parental
involvement in children’s lives, due to the economic challenges of raising a family in today’s world, as dominant factors influencing children’s sedentary lifestyles. Parents have less time to model proper routines and behaviours to their children. Students are bombarded with cheap, unhealthy, processed, nutritional products and activities driven by technology that promotes a new kind of social interaction that is sedentary. There is a greatly reduced emphasis on proper physical education delivered by trained practitioners in our school systems due to a perceived judgment of priority value and perceived cost of implementation. (TEDx Talks, 2013)

Schools should be the bastions that teach students life balance, in which physical activity plays a strong role in academic and non-academic success. The solution, at the school level, to this lack of physical activity among students, is the proper implementation of physical literacy by trained practitioners. Bettauer states that physical literacy needs to take on the same importance as math, language, and reading. The skills learned to be successful in these academic subjects must be applied with the same rigor when teaching students the success criteria linked to physical literacy. Fundamental movement skills such as running, jumping, and throwing and catching a ball are needed to confidently engage students in playing sports and games involving physical activity. The above skills must be taught in a way that is fun and enjoyable so that students are motivated to learn and participate. Bettauer states that physical literacy is not about creating high performance Olympic athletes, but teaching students to understand their bodies to engage in physical activities to develop their own body awareness through enjoyable routines that are based on developing fundamental movement skills. Each student learns at a different pace and ability. The trained practitioner must keep this in mind when delivering physical literacy to students. (TEDx Talks, 2013)
Teaching students and parents about learning goals and the expectations of physical literacy, as laid out in the Ontario curriculum, is an important role of the Physical Education teacher. I have many conversation and discussions with parents who try to understand what is being taught in Physical Education class. Parents don’t always understand the grading system and consistently laud the various sports clubs their children are involved in after school and on weekends and rejoice in the number of medals and trophies their child has won in these competitive programs. They sometimes find it difficult to understand the purpose of physical literacy taught at the school level and the importance of learning goals without the presence of competitiveness.

Parents are key stakeholders and helping them understand their role in their child’s success requires patience and support.

Bettauer supports the strategy that I use in educating parents by discussing the benefits of physical literacy for students. Physical literacy allows the individual to engage in physical activity across one’s lifespan and benefits the individual and society in the physical and psychological domains. Physically, students develop motor skills and coordination, body awareness and healthy body image, and lifelong fitness associated with long-term health. Psychological benefits include a greater enjoyment of life linked to an understanding of the importance of mobility, an improved concept of the self and an individual’s self esteem, and enhanced academics and creativity. This last point about academics draws from ongoing studies that show that students who are physically fit and healthy do better in academics and are able to
focus better in the classroom. (TEDx Talks, 2013)

There are several social cultural benefits to physical activity. Students learn that consistency and perseverance in any discipline, including physical literacy, nurture the values linking effort and discipline with improvement and growth. Students develop social skills through cooperation with other students. This cooperation and social interaction are skills that are transferable when working in the community and in one’s personal life. These skills are taught in a social atmosphere that promote empathy, trust and respect for all.

The importance of schools in promoting physical activity

Educating students and parents becomes an important part of physical literacy. The following quote by Jeannerod (1997) relays the importance of movement to enhance learning when he states that "...intelligence is not merely a mental phenomenon" and that "the mind cannot be educated without the participation of the body." In the same way, it is the responsibility of the physical education teacher to educate parents and students on the benefits of physical literacy and how it is linked to success in other domains in their lives. I like to refer to studies and research that support findings linking the benefits of physical literacy, student health, and academic success. A recent World Health Organization study, promoting school frameworks for improving the health and well being of students and their academic achievement shows how school-wide programs, to promote healthy behaviours on multiple fronts, have a positive net effect on student health. Kelli Komro, a professor of health outcomes and policy at the University of Florida College of Medicine and associate director of UF’s Institute for Child
Health Policy states, “It is not only the curriculum that helps, but it also takes changing the school environment and the social environment so that it supports health-promoting behaviours, and linking all of this to families and communities to ensure there are coordinated messages”. (Langford, 2014)

I promote health and well being among the student population at my school, alongside another physical education teacher, by engaging students in year long activities that inspire lifestyle routines. Health and well being is an Ontario government initiative with a goal of reducing childhood obesity by 20 percent over five years. Achieving this goal will keep Ontario healthy and is part of the Ontario government’s Action Plan for Health Care (Ontario Ministry of Health and Long Term Care, 2014). Health and well-being initiatives are supported by the Ministry of Education and carried out by Trustees, Directors and School Boards at the school level through inclusion of the initiative in Trustee, Director, Board and School improvement plans. (SIPS, Appendix 1)

Healthy schools include a broad spectrum of opportunities for students to participate, observe, and learn positive health attitudes and behaviours and provides a connected framework for strategies that support the schools’ School improvement plan (SIP) for the year. Other government mandated policies are encompassed in this initiative and include Daily Physical Activity (DPA), Safe Schools, and Bullying Prevention. I will explain these mandated government policies a little later on. Please refer to the school improvement plan (SIP) example provided in Appendix 3.
Four criteria determine healthy schools within school boards:

1. The first one is high quality instruction, which includes age appropriate, up-to-date curriculum instruction about health topics and issues, and promotes the development of life skills together with a sense of personal competence and resilience;

2. The second criterion is a healthy physical environment with clean and adequate facilities that are safe in which students and staff can make healthy choices;

3. The third criterion is a supportive social environment where peer support and positive role models enhance school climate to promote empowerment and social competence and;

4. The fourth criterion is community partnership with access to resources and services available to support students, staff and families.

Schools, with the support of administration, perform a needs assessment, and then develop a comprehensive action plan to address health issues that speak to the needs of the school community. This may include healthy eating, physical activity, bullying prevention, self-esteem, personal safety, injury prevention, tobacco, alcohol and substance use, healthy growth and development, mental health and body image, infection prevention and control, sun safety, healthy environment, and mental health.
The well-being goals in my school’s improvement plan centers around the development of a supportive environment that is safe and promotes healthy choices. The strategies that are in place for achieving this includes:

1. Healthy eating initiatives; to promote an understanding of how food is connected to our bodies and how students feel while engaged in work and play during school hours;

2. Numerous extra curricular activities and clubs, run by teaching staff during recess time, promotes physical movement and activity. These include a walking club, intramural hockey, soccer, and a skipping club;

3. Other health and well-being strategies at our school include the use of community circles to promote respectful interactions inside the classroom and around the school as students may become competitive while engaged in physical activity. Coping and fair play strategies promote awareness of other student’s feelings to build positive social interaction among peers. These strategies include restorative dialogue when resolving conflict;

4. Another high priority category involves increased dialogue about mental health and well being within our school community. Physical activity is inextricably linked to student well-being and mental health. A very recent study in the Journal of Adolescent Health found that adolescents involved in school sports are better protected against stress and
depression by engaging in regular exercise, social bonding and a sense of mastery over a skill. (Fountleroy, 2014)

Daily Vigorous Physical Activity (DVPA) is part of the Ontario government’s Healthy School plan that ensures all students take part in a minimum of 20 minutes of daily physical activity. DVPA was established on October 6, 2005, with a goal of having a positive impact on student achievement, readiness to learn, student behaviour and social well-being. This pronouncement by Gerard Kennedy, the Education Minister at the time, was implemented based on research linking physical activity to increased student achievement.

The safe schools act, in the context of healthy schools and student well-being, is in place at the school board level and is committed to the rights of all students to learn in positive and respectful surroundings, free from harassment and discrimination. Healthy relationships allow students to reach their full potential while engaged in physical activities or academic pursuits in the classroom because they are inclusive, accepting, and respectful of each other.

These are the norms, expectations, and standards of behaviour that reflect a responsible and civil society are the foundations of a caring and safe school climate. A clear focus on anti-bullying supports the development of healthy relationships, educates the school community and encourages timely reporting of bullying incidents so that immediate and appropriate action can be taken.

It is critical that students feel safe within their school environment so that they may freely
and confidently persevere in their physical and mental development. The healthy school’s component of physical activity is a prerequisite for student success within the social, physical and academic domains.

**Staff initiated extra curricular activities**

I mentioned above that teaching staff members, at our school, run various clubs and extra curricular activities during the school day at recess and lunch. The student response is overwhelming as it provides them an outlet for social interaction and play with other students at school. I lead a walking club in the fall and spring for Grade two and Grade three students. Students interested in participating return signed parental permission forms and anxiously await lunch recess for a walk in the community. I share the required rules and expectations that I have of students, while off school property, and the purpose of the activity. Many homeroom teachers use the walking club as a means to motivate students during classroom activities. Consequences of not meeting expectations in the classroom may include a reprieve from participating in the club on a given day. Many students are highly motivated to engage in the walking club as it provides physical activity that is social, non-judgmental and fun. The purpose of the club is to inspire students to walk as a form of physical activity that is not overly vigorous. Long-term benefits include stress relief and cardiovascular health.

Another program, that I lead, is the intramural boys hockey club for Grade three students during lunch recess. Much like the walking club, it is met with an overwhelming response from students and parents. Both boys and girls participate. The biggest challenge I face with this club is the tension that inevitably arises among students and teams as they compete against each other.
Students are around eight years of age and bring many preconceived ideas about how the sport should be played as they participate in competitive leagues outside of school. Parent expectations of their children that compete in competitive leagues outside of school, may not always align with the expectations of our school boards’ healthy school and well-being policies. As a result, students feel compelled to be competitive which will present itself in the form of inappropriate language, prone to bullying other students mentally and/or physically. Winning at any cost is a learned behavior that motivates many of these students who are extremely competitive. Prior to starting a competitive activity, I emphasize and review the rules of fair play and explain to students that the goal is to learn about being active through participating and playing a variety of sports. Scoring a goal is secondary to one’s participation in the activity. Abiding by the rules, playing a fair game and respecting others, establishes a safe environment to engage in a fun activity while being active.

Teachers need to be aware of bonds created between students outside of the academic classroom, as it will spur student collaboration in other academic activities and create confidence leading to increased class participation. I am always amazed by the power that physical activity wields on student motivation, resulting in social benefits, which include building stronger peer relationships, as they share a common activity and passion. As an educator, I am inspired when I see students take initiative and accountability for their learning.

**School Administration Support and Philosophy**

I am very lucky to be part of a school where the Administration understands the...
importance of physical activity and empowers me, as an Educator, to take the necessary steps to promote physical activity within the school community. Without the support of the Administration, my job guiding student success, through physical activity and movement, would be much more difficult. I believe that this support comes from our common vision and philosophies between educational leadership and student success.

Teaching physical literacy is the ability to empower students to be physically active and academically successful. This vision is embedded in the moral purpose of improved student achievement and well-being. Leadership does this by piquing natural curiosity to inspire a learners’ search for understanding of the world around them. This learning environment supports student awareness of their interests, their successes and enhances confidence. It is this strong instructional leadership that creates the conditions in which all students develop critical thinking capacities and literacy and numeracy skills required to succeed in this 21st Technological Century and contribute positively to the community at large.

The Administration assesses strengths and areas to develop and empower staff that supports student success. This includes a willingness to take risks, collaborate, mentor, problem solve, build relationships with multiple stakeholders while being innovative and creative. Learning is ongoing so that the Administrators can respond to the changing needs of the school community.

The Educational leadership at my school has created successful learning communities through a collective effort that includes staff and School Council. The Educational leadership
deals with difficult situations and finds common ground for the greater good. Integrity, respect, patience and understanding are character traits that successful leaders share in their humble approach to creating a safe and resilient learning environment. They understand the importance of commitment to the school community they serve and support the learning and personal growth of students and staff by being accountable for improved results. Modeling positive attributes associated with a culture of success creates a springboard for community building and development in which authentic relationships are built for all students.

Leadership at my school is exemplified through life long learning by participating in ongoing professional development opportunities and self-reflective practices to provide students with the necessary resources to support their achievement and well-being. These resources are based on a solid knowledge of educational philosophies and learning theories that support student success.

Our school leadership is ultimately responsible for a positive, inclusive climate for learning by providing safe, engaging environments in which student growth is supported through collaboration from various stakeholders, mutual respect, and an access to resources for success. (Fullan, 2003)

The Administration insures that our school has a Physical Education budget to replenish damaged and lost equipment such as balls, hula-hoops and skipping ropes. Most of the money comes from our School Council and school operating budgets. The School Council is made up of parents who run various funding drives, during the school year, to raise money for additional
school support that complement what teachers already have in the classroom. School Council contributes to the school technology budget, classroom resources, grounds maintenance, play structure, and various hopscotch games painted on the schoolyard pavement. The School Council also contributes to a variety of cultural shows and an anti bullying presentation that are School Board approved. The Administration in our school takes an active role in supporting student success through many of the already mentioned initiatives.

I feel privileged to be part of a Leadership team that understands and shares the same vision that our true accomplishment comes from instilling our students with the skills necessary for their success to build a stronger, more stable community.
Chapter 4: Integrating physical activity instruction

The previous chapter explored the various ways that Administrators, School Council and other stakeholders support initiatives that promote student well being and physical literacy. The following chapter will focus on how teachers can support student learning with the initiatives that are already in place.

The school environment where I work still employs some traditional approaches to teaching students physical literacy, while keeping them physically active. Seatwork is still the norm in many academic classrooms and not enough opportunity is provided to learn through movement. The academic classroom can be a very restrictive environment for learning, although strides are being made to change the way we teach children, providing students choice in their learning, including the opportunity to learn through physical movement, is not actively practiced in primary school classrooms. There are many reasons for this. They include a lack of understanding on how to implement a learning environment with movement-based options for students. Lingering traditional individual biases and personal philosophies on what learning should look like also impede implementation. Educators teach based on school curriculum, past experiences and what worked best for them while growing up. We are all limited by the bias of our own experience.

Cross-curricular learning

Teaching students through cross-curricular commonalities is one way that the curriculum may be delivered to reach diverse student needs. In cross-curricular learning, students are provided with opportunities to learn and use related content and/or skills in two or more subjects.
All subjects, including Health and Physical Education, can combine the language curriculum. In Health and Physical Education, students use a range of language skills: they build subject specific vocabulary; they use words and their bodies to communicate feelings and share and interpret information; and they read about current health issues and research information.

I apply a cross-curricular learning method during Physical Education period warm-up exercises with students. While performing different stretches, I apply the number sense strand from Math, having students count in various patterns while holding a stretch. The same can be reviewed while performing static balances from the balance unit in the Physical Education curriculum for primary students.

Creativity and collaboration with Educators teaching other subjects is imperative when teaching students with other subjects in mind. During the manipulation unit of the Physical Education curriculum, I have students bounce balls at various speeds, keeping an even rhythm while moving in a specified direction to reinforce their understanding of beat being taught in music class. The only limits to teaching students in this way are the ones that we impose on ourselves as Educators. The more relevant you make the lesson, the more attentive and engaged the students will be. Learning through movement should be fun. It should not feel like learning. That is the key.

Integrated learning

Another method that teachers may use is integrated learning. In integrated learning, students are provided with opportunities to work towards meeting expectations from two or more
subjects within a single unit, lesson, or activity. By linking expectations from different subject areas, teachers can provide students with multiple opportunities to reinforce and demonstrate their knowledge and skills in a range of settings. There are clear connections between the expectations in Health and Physical Education and those in other subject areas such as Language, Science, and Social Studies. Health and Physical Education may be used to provide students another way of learning and making connections.

Using the integrated learning method, teachers need to ensure that the specific knowledge and skill for each subject are taught. It is for this reason that collaboration between homeroom teachers and rotary teachers is very important. Homeroom teachers may be guided by Physical Education teachers about what students are learning and find constructive ways to reinforce concepts learned in both subject areas. If students are illustrating a number sentence in Mathematics, by jumping or if they are using their bodies to make shapes of letters to spell a word in Language, the teacher should ensure that Health and Physical Education expectations for jumping and landing in control and for building body fitness and flexibility are integrated into the activity.

Integrated learning may also provide students the opportunity to learn and apply skills in a meaningful context, based on their own knowledge and life experience. This will further provide students an opportunity to develop their ability to think and reason and to transfer knowledge from one subject area to another.

Integrated learning and cross-curricular instruction require the teacher to be creative and
collaborate with other teachers to deliver curriculum in a meaningful way to students. Fulfilling curriculum expectations is a challenge with the limited instruction time during the school day. Teaching the important life skills of movement and learning go hand in hand in a world that is ever more competitive.

The role of parents

The last chapter explored the importance of how administrative support for school programs is linked to physical education and healthy living. Parents play a vital role in maintaining their children’s physical fitness and lifelong health.

Correlation studies and reviews of research have concluded that there is significant positive relationship between children’s physical activity and cognitive functioning and that acute bouts of physical activity exert short-term benefits on a child’s cognitive functioning.

There is evidence of positive physiological effects of physical activity on the brain that assists in explaining this relationship. Exercise can increase levels of brain growth factor (brain-derived neurotrophic factors). In addition, exercise has been shown to stimulate nerve growth and development in the brain and increase the brain’s resistance to injury. Regular physical activity may reduce plasma noradrenaline (a vasoconstrictor) and bouts of exercise have been shown to increase blood flow to the cortex of the brain. These physiological mechanisms indicate that regular physical activity is likely to provide children with the optimum physiological condition for maximizing learning. (Martin, 2010)
Based on the above research, student participation in organized sports and activities, outside of school, play a very important part in the development of a lifelong routine centering on physical activity. Often times, finding time to involve children in extra curricular activities may be challenging as parents are consumed with work and sometimes have limited financial resources.

A current study states that one in three Canadian children are overweight. Dr. Geoff Ball, Associate Professor in the Department of Pediatrics at the University of Alberta and Director of the Pediatrics Centre for Weight and Health at Stollery Children’s Hospital in Edmonton states that it is sometimes a lack of parental awareness and knowledge and the kinds of choices they are making for their families. Many families in the study believe their families’ obese state is normal and do not have a grasp of what healthy eating is and what a proper food portion size looks like. (Kirkey, 2014)

Educating parents and students about health and physical fitness becomes very critical to the Educator, School and Community. There is a communal responsibility for the well-being of all families and students that are within a school’s realm of influence. The School Council, composed of parents, school administrators and leadership members of school staff may engage families and communities with “parent engagement evenings” during the school year.

The influence of School Council

The Parent Engagement Office was established in Ontario, by the Ministry of Education, to develop and implement parent engagement initiatives that support student achievement and
well-being. The purpose of Ontario’s Parent Engagement Policy is to provide the supports
needed to connect parents at the local level and to help ensure they have the skills, knowledge,
and tools they need to engage fully in their children’s education and in the life of their child’s
school. The School Council engages families through Parent Outreach programs such as local
workshops, presentations, various parental tools that include access to resources, to share
information and strategies related to supporting learning at home and parent engagement at
school. (Ontario, 2010)

The interests and needs of our school community determine themes and topics to be
discussed at the School Council. The evenings provide families information on strategies for
helping children with Math and Literacy to seminars on Mental Health and what parents can do
to support their children with stress and overall mental health. Many of these topics may seem
trivial to the outside observer, but provide families an opportunity to interact with professionals
and other parents whose parenting style is largely formed by their experiences of growing up in
their own families. The challenges and technological diversions of today did not exist back when
many parents were growing up. The support that comes from School Council and parent
engagement initiatives are there to bring about an awareness and provide strategies to parents
that need guidance in these areas.

As a Physical Education teacher at my school, I see first hand my influence on student
physical activity and health. Students bring in medals and trophies won at various tournaments
and leagues, outside of school, to share with me during Physical Education class or during the
day when they see me, as they are proud of their achievement. Students are naturally motivated by their accomplishments outside of school and wish to share them because they identify these activities as being important for their health and well-being. Parents play an important role supporting their children’s physical fitness and health by involving them in extra curricular activities outside of the school day. Many of the students, who share their sports accomplishments with me at school, engage in these activities because they are fun. The “fun” aspect of physical activity is the primary factor that motivates them to want to continue participating. A new study from the Miliken School of Public Health at George Washington University in Washington, D.C., finds that the number one reason that kids drop out of sports is because it is no longer fun. The study focused on factors that make organized sports fun, such as sportsmanship and team rituals. The top rated factors, among the test group, were good sportsmanship, trying hard, and positive coaching. Students and youth are motivated to engage in physical activity that is non-judgmental and social (Bui, 2014). The opportunity to interact with others in their peer group while learning a new game or technique is the best way to learn. These are the concepts and strategies that must be applied, in the academic classroom, to motivate student engagement and learning. Teaching with student engagement as the end goal is when authentic learning begins for both students and teachers.
Chapter 5: Conclusion

I was inspired to research and write this paper as I perceived there to be a disconnect between student academic achievement and student physical activity in the primary grades.

The research focused on this age group remains sparse. The link between physical activity and academic achievement continues to grow. Research, funded by governments, Universities and Colleges is growing because of the increasing obesity numbers among the school age population. Schools and School Boards are responsible for modeling what new life balance should be, in a changing world, and how physical activity may be incorporated into a student’s everyday life to achieve success. The undeniable conclusion, in a majority of the research, shows a positive correlation between physical activity and academic achievement. I believe that a shift in consciousness is necessary to see real change as it needs everyone participating such as; Schools, School Board, School Council, Administrators and Educators. It is a collaborative and communal effort.

I make this statement in the context of an author and speaker I heard talk at a conference for student achievement and well-being back in November of 2012. The speakers name was Jeremy Rifkin, an economic and social theorist, writer, public speaker, political advisor and activist. He spoke about his new book, Leading the Way to a New Industrial Revolution, and the shift in consciousness that must to take place in Education. He spoke about transformational leadership and a focus on lateral power relationships among teachers and students. Education, he says, can only work if it is distributive and collaborative. The top down model no longer applies
if progress is to be achieved (Rifkin, 2008).

It is in this way that physical activity may be incorporated, throughout the curriculum, through a collaboration of ideas among teachers and students to incorporate an integration and authentic learning for all. Jeremy Rifkin’s mission is to prepare students to think and act as part of a shared biosphere. Every activity students engage in; the food they eat, the clothes they wear, the car their family drives, the electricity they use, the energy they exert in keeping physically active and healthy, leaves an ecological footprint that affects the well being of other human beings and other creatures on earth and ultimately alter their quality of life. Rifkin talks about going beyond merely getting students more physically active and implores Educators to help them see how healthy life choices can change their view of themselves within the communities they inhabit. (Rifkin, 2008)

There is no doubt that increased physical activity is beneficial to a students academic achievement. School leadership recognizes the research that is out there and carries out Government mandates to ensure students are active on a daily basis. One of the policies that school leadership must adhere to is that students are active daily. Leadership ensures that teaching staff is accountable for this by including Daily Vigorous Physical Activity (DVPA) time on timetables that must align with Government guidelines. Leadership must push the envelope to ensure that more than the minimum Ministry guidelines are followed. (Daily Vigorous Physical Activity, 2005) Leadership can most understand this if it is part of their personal, individual daily routine. Trained Physical Education specialists play an important role in educating school leadership, students, School Council and the local community towards this
end. There are a multitude of resources, in Ontario, and from abroad that are available to support educators and schools to integrate physical activity into all aspects of the daily curriculum.

The infrastructure and resources are in place to support students, educators, and families to incorporate physical activity into their mental, physical and academic growth. We need consistent modeling by physical education professionals, educators, and parents, supported by community stakeholders, that promotes a quality of life through physical activity and healthy eating. There is inherent risk in promoting a new way of thinking to achieve this end in education.

Critical teaching may at times lead to an “unquiet pedagogy”. John Passmore (1967) warned us that any teacher who takes critical thinking seriously, as democracy requires, “must expect constantly to be embarrassed, to be harassed, by his class, by his headmaster, by parents” (p.219). Are we as teachers and teacher educators prepared to take this needed risk? Or, are we, as Russell (1939) put it, “tempted to set ourselves as little gods “ (p.532) within the haven of institutional bureaucracy? (Portelli, 1994)

It is a beautiful mild day in late spring. Students are dressed and buzz about in front of their classes, knapsacks on their backs, holding various coloured balls, skipping ropes, and toys, anxiously anticipating the ringing of the bell at 2:20 p.m., leading them to the school yard to play. The bell rings, thunderous feet and chatter erupt as the inevitable happens. They burst out freely, moving, running, skipping, jumping and walking. It is what comes naturally to them. Physical activity is in their very being, to be harnessed and used for engaging, motivating, and
learning. It is this student energy that inspires me to learn, teach, and move. “Education must begin with the solution of the teacher-student contradiction, by reconciling the poles of the contradiction so that both are simultaneous teachers and students” (Freire, 1972).
Appendix 1: School Improvement Plan (SIP)
# Ideas and Shared Practices

## Foundations for a Healthy School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Components</th>
<th>High-Quality Instruction and Programs</th>
<th>A Healthy Physical Environment</th>
<th>A Supportive Social Environment</th>
<th>Community Partnerships</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Descriptions</td>
<td>Quality instruction provides students with a wide range of opportunities to learn, practice, and demonstrate knowledge and skills related to living a healthy lifestyle. Programs offered during the instructional day often fall beyond the boundaries for other activities due to limited instructional time. Quality programs also include opportunities for teachers and school administrators to participate in professional learning opportunities.</td>
<td>A safe and healthy physical environment improves the health and well-being of students, and the physical environment includes the school building and grounds, as well as the school and community.</td>
<td>A supportive social environment has a positive impact on students' learning. Many practices within a school foster such an environment. Students, teachers, and parents can benefit from the support provided, which may be formal (e.g., school wide, clubs, sports teams) or informal (e.g., constructed peer interaction or free play).</td>
<td>Community partnerships provide access to resources and services available to support staff, students, and families in the development and implementation of healthy school initiatives. Various organizations can deliver services within the school setting, including public health.</td>
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</table>

### Current Ministry of Education and Ministry of Health Promotion Initiatives
- Daily Physical Activity
- Specialist Teacher
- Swim in School Program
- Vending machines with healthy foods and beverages
- Active and Safe Routes to School (ARH)
- Northern Fruit and Vegetable Purchase Program (NHF)
- Smoke Free Ontario (NHF)
- Smoke Free (NHF)

### Health-Related Topics

#### Healthy Eating
- Establishing a schedule for a healthy eating plan
- Coordinating healthy eating lessons taught in each grade
- Having teachers, school administrators, and student representatives attend a healthy eating conference
- Developing healthy eating guidelines
- Providing healthy eating information through newsletters
- Offering a healthy snacks program
- Establishing a subcommittee of the school council to focus on making healthy foods and beverages a priority in the school
- Offering a breakfast program in conjunction with the local grocery store
- Having a public health nurse or dietitian provide a lunch and learn session for staff and parents on promoting healthy choices and making it easy

#### Physical Activity
- Providing staff training on physical activity during a professional development day
- Developing a comprehensive plan that includes daily physical education for all classes in the school
- Providing programs that include a wide range of physical activities
- Providing physical activity equipment for all classes to use outdoors during recess and lunch breaks
- Converting an unused room in the school into a physical fitness center
- Providing physical activity opportunities for all students
- Organizing intramural programs for the students
- Organizing events that promote physical activity (e.g., a fitness walk)
- Establishing a partnership with a local university to research the impact of the physical activity program on student achievement
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#### Bullying Prevention
- Adapting a school-wide bullying prevention program
- Embedding the program within the school environment and student learning
- Providing new resources that meet the needs of the school
- Creating a plan to address the problem of bullying
- Establishing a diversity task force to provide students with an opportunity to discuss ways to make all students feel welcome in the school
- Creating a resource that all students can feel safe reporting bullying incidents
- Hosting an event for staff and board officials to celebrate students' contributions to preventing bullying
- Partnering with the local youth centre to provide programs in conflict resolution and development of self-esteem
- Providing training on bullying prevention to all staff and students
- Coordinating community volunteers as mentors for students
### Foundations for a Healthy School

#### Components

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Health-Related Topics</th>
<th>High-Quality Instruction and Programs</th>
<th>A Healthy Physical Environment</th>
<th>A Supportive Social Environment</th>
<th>Community Partnerships</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal Safety and Injury Prevention</td>
<td>* Coordinating a school-wide presentation on water safety.</td>
<td>* Inspecting facilities and equipment for safety.</td>
<td>* Tackling peer mediators who are a consistent inside threat outside the school.</td>
<td>* Providing information on a range of safe practices to the home, school, and community on the school website.</td>
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<td>* Planning monthly safety presentations to address specific issues throughout the year (e.g., water safety in May)</td>
<td>* Highlighting safe practices by displaying posters depicting them and installing signs in high-risk areas of the school</td>
<td>* Communicating safety messages at school assemblies and over the PA system.</td>
<td>* Establishing a school committee to identify key safety messages and community partners who can provide support in specific areas.</td>
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<td>* Having students write and perform skits about safe practices to encourage them to use safe practices</td>
<td>* Establishing the parking area as a no-lolling zone.</td>
<td>* Establishing a consistent set of safety procedures and resources.</td>
<td>* Providing students with the resources to work with parents and other family members to develop and implement a fire safety plan for their home.</td>
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<td>Substance Use and Abuse</td>
<td>* Developing consistent messages for implementing a school-wide substance use and abuse program</td>
<td>* Developing guidelines to ensure that materials used and presented in the school are representative of the diverse makeup of the school</td>
<td>* Ensuring that the resources are available for students to enable them to seek help for themselves and others</td>
<td>* Developing and enforcing a school drug policy in collaboration with the public health unit and other community partners.</td>
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<td>* Presenting age-appropriate information on the effects of drug use at an assembly for a specific grade</td>
<td>* Providing students with a safe area where they can discuss concerns with a trusted staff member</td>
<td>* Empowering students to organize and run a smoking cessation program at the school.</td>
<td>* Providing an opportunity for students to spend a day at a regional centre for a presentation on substance use and abuse.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>* Providing in-service training for teachers and administrators on signs of drug use and appropriate responses</td>
<td>* Designing change room facilities with student input, that take into account disability and self-esteem</td>
<td>* Implementing discipline strategies that provide support for students with addictive behaviors</td>
<td>* Offering a parents’ night in collaboration with the police to address issues concerning substance use.</td>
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<td>Healthy Growth and Development</td>
<td>* Participating in a school board project on the implementation of resources on healthy growth and development</td>
<td>* Providing guidelines to ensure that materials used and presented in the school are representative of the diverse makeup of the school</td>
<td>* Ensuring that the resources are available for students to enable them to seek help for themselves and others</td>
<td>* Working cooperatively with community partners to provide adequate services regarding child welfare.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>* Developing a committee to discuss effective teaching methods for encouraging healthy growth and development.</td>
<td>* Providing students with a safe area where they can discuss concerns with a trusted staff member</td>
<td>* Ensuring that the resources are available for students to enable them to seek help for themselves and others</td>
<td>* Providing information to parents about the services in the community that are available to support personal learning.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>* Involving public health nurses to help teach lessons on healthy growth and development</td>
<td>* Developing guidelines to ensure that materials used and presented in the school are representative of the diverse makeup of the school</td>
<td>* Ensuring that the resources are available for students to enable them to seek help for themselves and others</td>
<td>* Providing information to parents about the topics covered in the curriculum prior to the teaching of the unit.</td>
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<td>Mental Health</td>
<td>* Identifying areas of the curriculum where mental health can be taught throughout the year</td>
<td>* Establishing an area in the school for students to participate in physical activity and clubs, especially during the winter months.</td>
<td>* Providing students with information on mental health and an opportunity to plan and organize a committee to address mental health issues in the school</td>
<td>* Establishing a school council committee to discuss and coordinate mental health initiatives in the school and community.</td>
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<td>* Providing staff-in-service training on recognizing signs and symptoms and using appropriate intervention strategies when dealing with issues about mental health</td>
<td>* Developing a resource section in the library for teaching materials with a range of books and materials about mental health</td>
<td>* Sending out a student and/or parent survey to establish the areas of mental health that need to be focused on in the school</td>
<td>* Providing information from community partners in the school newsletter for parents.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>* Providing programming that does not stigmatize mental disorders and that promote positive health behaviors</td>
<td>* Establishing a school-based health centre</td>
<td>* Establishing a protocol to ensure that mental health resources used are consistent with the messages of the school and board</td>
<td>* Providing access to researchers to examine mental health issues and support available in the school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>* Identifying areas of the curriculum that are related to healthy living skills, and introducing health concepts in all areas of the curriculum.</td>
<td>* Providing an information bulletin board in the school to promote monthly health themes, upcoming school events, and community programs</td>
<td>* Establishing a student club made up of representatives from each grade to provide input and suggestions on health-related topics in the school</td>
<td>* Establishing a healthy schools committee made up of the principal, teachers, students, parents, and community partners.</td>
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<td>* Providing a summative assessment task for students that focuses on their ability to make healthy choices in health-related scenarios</td>
<td>* Establishing an information bulletin board in the school to promote monthly health themes, upcoming school events, and community programs</td>
<td>* Establishing a student club made up of representatives from each grade to provide input and suggestions on health-related topics in the school</td>
<td>* Hosting an annual wellness fair with student presentations on health-related topics and with booths and presentations from community partners.</td>
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Appendix 3: Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines for children 5 - 11 YEARS

Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines

FOR CHILDREN - 5 – 11 YEARS

Guidelines

For health benefits, children aged 5-11 years should accumulate at least 60 minutes of moderate- to vigorous-intensity physical activity daily. This should include:

- Vigorous-intensity activities at least 3 days per week.
- Activities that strengthen muscle and bone at least 3 days per week.
- More daily physical activity provides greater health benefits.

Let’s Talk Intensity!

Moderate-intensity physical activities will cause children to sweat a little and to breathe harder. Activities like:

- Bike riding
- Playground activities

Vigorous-intensity physical activities will cause children to sweat and be "out of breath". Activities like:

- Running
- Swimming

Being active for at least 60 minutes daily can help children:

- Improve their health
- Do better in school
- Improve their fitness
- Grow stronger
- Have fun playing with friends
- Feel happier
- Maintain a healthy body weight
- Improve their self-confidence
- Learn new skills

Parents and caregivers can help to plan their child’s daily activity. Kids can:

- Play tag – or freeze-tag
- Go to the playground after school
- Walk, bike, rollerblade or skateboard to school

- Play an active game at recess.
- Go sledding in the park on the weekend.
- Go “puddle hopping” on a rainy day.

60 minutes a day. You can help your child get there!
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