Volume 1, Number 1, 2025
Formerly called *Runner*

Activate

HPEC
Health & Physical Education Council
The Alberta Teachers' Association

The Journal of the Health and Physical Education Council of the Alberta Teachers' Association

Inclusive Physical Education and Wellness

Unlocking the Potential of Physical Education

Traditional Indigenous Games

On the cover: Alex Mertens, a student at Mount Royal University, in Calgary.

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The Alberta Teachers' Association

Activate

Volume 1, Number 1, 2025

Inclusive Physical Education and Wellness

Contents

Editor's Message

Lisa Taylor

Thank you for picking up this issue of the journal of the Health and Physical Education Council (HPEC) of the Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA).

While each and every issue of our journal is special, this one is extra special. You may have noticed that the journal is now called **Activate**. We have intentionally and purposefully moved from **Runner** toward a more inclusive name that welcomes everyone. You can read more about this name change later in this issue.

The cover of this issue is also extra special. It features Alex Mertens, a student at Mount Royal University, in Calgary. One of Alex's goals is to support the physical literacy journeys of people with disabilities. Her personal statements include "I can do it," "I can do anything, just in my own unique way" and "I can do anything, even though I'm in a wheelchair." Alex is truly a champion of physical literacy who inspires all those around her. For great ideas for adapting physical activities, check out Alex Scoop Fitness (https://thealexscoop.com/fitness/).

The theme of this issue of **Activate** is "Inclusive Physical Education and Wellness," which aligns with the topic of HPEC's One Day in May professional development opportunity, held May 9 at Red Deer Polytechnic.

In the pages that follow, you will find articles on a range of topics from teachers, school leaders and scholars across Alberta, Canada and even the world. As a result, this issue includes expertise regarding our specific context, as well as new ideas to challenge your thinking and new practices to try out. HPEC is committed to bringing you the best work we can access, written by authors who have dedicated their time, effort and energy to share their knowledge with **Activate** readers.

Dean Dudley, a colleague in Australia, shares the potential of physical education to develop the whole child through physical literacy. You will also read about including traditional Indigenous games in your practice, shared by Brad Mainse, who has taught physical education across Canada. Josie Sorensen and Ryan Fahey discuss the impact of a school vaping-reduction program, and Jasmyn Kennedy, Kerry Bernes, Annelise Lyseng, Jonathan Roque and Karissa Horne focus on career inspiration for Grade 8 girls. John Cadman, Douglas Gleddie, Hayley Morrison and Lauren Sulz share the importance of student voice and choice in outdoor education, and Nancy Luyckfassel will inspire you to think more about how to foster teacher resilience. Finally, Tracy Lockwood shares how the Mini Legends Program can support elementary generalists in developing physical literacy with students.

It is an honour to be the editor of **Activate** and to be part of the HPEC community. I want to share my gratitude for the authors who have vulnerably and generously shared here. Thank you for inspiring HPEC members to continue to be leaders in health and physical education. Additionally, I want to thank the HPEC executive and our colleagues at the ATA for their support in renaming this journal, as well as all the scholars and HPEC members who shared their perspectives on the journal's name.

President's Message

Jonathan Dick

I am so excited to be serving HPEC members in the capacity of president this school year and next. Serving on the HPEC executive for almost a decade and having the opportunity to lead, learn and laugh with many of you has been one of the most rewarding experiences of my career.

I am honoured to deliver the first president's message in our newly named journal, **Activate.** I would like to thank our editor, Lisa Taylor, as well as our HPEC executive, who recognized that the journal's old name, **Runner,** was not the most inclusive name for a publication designed to reach out to readers of all abilities. This constant drive to be better makes me feel lucky to work with so many amazing people on the HPEC executive.

As I continue through my 20th year of teaching, I am reflecting more than ever before. I have been pondering two things related to teaching health and physical education: what really brings me joy and what I am truly grateful for.

I have come to realize how much happiness I get out of seeing young people being active in the community. More specifically, seeing young people at a park or the YMCA organizing and participating in their own pickup games brings a huge smile to my face.

This makes me realize the importance of free play in a supervised physical education setting. Free play allows students to choose their own activities and their own groups of people to participate with, and it teaches them that a teacher will not always be there to organize activities for them. I encourage you all to incorporate free play into your physical education planning.

When I think about the teaching profession and, more specifically, teaching health and physical education, I am grateful for so many things. I very much believe that teaching our young people is one of the most rewarding professions—at times the most difficult and the most frustrating, yes, but also the most rewarding. My reflections have made me realize how thankful I am for the people and the learning opportunities in this career.

Teachers continue to have many opportunities to grow and develop their craft—whether through formal conferences (which sometimes carry the bonus of being in warm locations), professional development sessions offered by the school division, articles or books, or even informal discussions with colleagues over a coffee or an adult beverage. Our profession allows us to be lifelong learners and to continually better ourselves—this I am so thankful for. I encourage our members to take part in learning opportunities any chance they get.

More than the learning opportunities, I am grateful for the people, as without the people, the opportunities would not exist. The incredible people who are involved in and support our education system are what makes it what it is. I am always amazed by people who are willing to share their expertise with their peers. Creating, organizing and implementing PD opportunities is not always easy, as it is typically done during a teacher's own time outside school. I commend and say a huge thank you to anyone and everyone who goes the extra mile to help others, in whatever form that may be.

This brings me to this issue of **Activate.** I am happy to be part of a specialist council that provides an annual publication for its members and allows members to read, learn and grow through information provided by their peers, experts and other people interested in making health and physical education as positive as possible.

As I read through the articles, I am grateful for those who have taken the time to impart their knowledge. I hope you find one or two things in each article to take back to your own teaching. I hope **Activate** will help you continue to do the great things you do daily and find even more ways to provide truly inclusive and active spaces for your students.

Thank you all so much for everything you do to promote and implement quality health and physical education programs in your area, as well as for continuing to be lifelong learners. I hope to have a chance to meet, learn and socialize with you all at HPEC events.

Activate: Renaming the HPEC Journal to Actualize Equity and Challenge Ableism in Health and Physical Education

Lisa Taylor and Hayley Morrison

In May 2024, we attended the Physical and Health Education Canada (PHE Canada) Research Forum—an annual conference that brings together health and physical education researchers from across Canada.

The keynote speaker was Danielle Peers, an associate professor in the University of Alberta's Faculty of Kinesiology, Sport, and Recreation and a Tier 2 Canada Research Chair in Disability and Movement Cultures. Peers shared their work on addressing ableism in movement-related approaches and spaces,[1] the disservice done to disabled people when ableism is not addressed,[2] and the historical discrimination toward disabled people in Canada.

Inspired by this presentation, we decided to send Peers an e-mail to express our gratitude and invite them to publish an article in the HPEC journal. Of particular interest was their research on the problematic nature of championing exceptional examples (such as Terry Fox or Paralympians) with the intent to inspire disabled people to become active. (Disabled people may perceive the accomplishments of such people as being next to impossible for themselves and may, therefore, be discouraged rather than inspired.) In their work, Peers discusses the disability narratives and creation stories that have an impact on the lives of disabled people and that reproduce ableist actions and belief systems.[3]

While writing to Peers, who predominantly uses a wheelchair for mobility, we quickly recognized the problem with our invitation to contribute to our journal. The name of our journal—Runner—was inherently ableist and portrayed movement as one-dimensional, which did not reflect the beliefs of HPEC.

This realization sparked an important conversation that was then brought to the attention of the HPEC executive.

How the Journal Was Renamed

A week after the PHE Canada Research Forum, HPEC held its annual general meeting. A motion was proposed to rename the journal, for purposes of equity and inclusion, and was unanimously supported by the attending members. Members also agreed that equity, diversity, inclusion and accessibility scholars in Alberta should be contacted for their perspectives.

In summer and fall 2024, following input from scholars, HPEC sent a list of name options to members across the province, via Google Forms, for their input.

The scholars and the HPEC members both selected Activate as their first choice to replace Runner.

This issue is the first of many issues of Activate. We want the journal to activate discussion among the HPEC community and teachers seeking new knowledge and experiences with health and physical education. We want to activate critical thinking and our rights as individuals to explore different ways of moving and being in the world. We hope that Activate can act as a home for sharing and engaging with evidence-based information, while continuing to share classroom-ready strategies and discussion on emerging topics and trends in health and physical education to improve and support teaching practice.

The Importance of Changing a Name

One HPEC member indicated that the name of HPEC's journal should be left unchanged, given the following that Runner had gained over the course of the 55 volumes published since its establishment in 1962.

We would argue that the journal's name should reflect the different perspectives and views in the HPEC

community—here and now. While challenging long-standing structures and names is inconvenient, it is also necessary. Without change, people may be excluded rather than included in a place that aims to support a sense of belonging among its members and the broader community.

Ableism is embedded and ingrained in society, including our own (in)actions. We consider changing the name of our journal to be an important action toward the "anti-ableism" called for by Peers, Eales and Goodwin (2022, 44):

> Even if one explicitly desires not to be ableist, it is exceedingly difficult to recognize and extract ableism from so many of our taken-for-granted practices and models that were built upon ableist foundations. . . . Rather than simply attempting to cleanse disablist discrimination from the field's governing values, anti-ableism is a commitment to actively critique and act against supremacist assumptions, actions, models, and structures in every part of our professional and personal lives. Whereas attempts at non-ableism (and the resulting enlightened ableism) can be understood as attempts to not be (seen as) part of the disability oppression problem, anti-ableism is a commitment to transforming and dismantling the foundations of that oppression. It is a commitment to creating more just, inclusive—and importantly—affirming movement practices and worlds.

We look forward to working with the HPEC community to continue this journey and our commitment to transform and dismantle ableist foundations in our field.

Closing Thoughts

We want to thank the scholars and HPEC members who contributed to renaming our journal, as well as the HPEC executive and members who moved this motion forward at our 2024 annual general meeting.

We are excited to see **Activate,** the journal of HPEC, foster equity and inclusion for everyone.

Notes

1. Campbell (2001, 44) defines **ᵃbleism** as "a network of beliefs, processes and practices that produce a particular kind of self and body (the corporeal standard) that is projected as the perfect, species-typical and therefore essential and fully human. Disability, then, is cast as a diminished state of being human."

2. Throughout this article, we use the term **disᵃbled peᵒple** to represent our set of beliefs that people are disabled by social forces, rather than by individual traits. For further discussion on disability language, see Peers, Spencer-Cavaliere and Eales (2014).

3. We encourage you to read the work of Peers and colleagues (Peers 2009, 2012; Peers, Eales and Goodwin 2022; Peers, Spencer-Cavaliere and Eales 2014).

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Hayley Morrison (she/her), PhD, is an associate professor in the Faculty of Education at the University of Alberta, in Edmonton. She teaches health and physical education curriculum and pedagogy courses for preservice teachers, as well as graduate courses in educational research and inclusive health and physical education. Her teaching and research are interconnected, as she aims to support educative and inclusive experiences at all levels of teaching and learning in health and physical education. Her research areas include inclusive and adaptive physical education; preservice teacher education; and physical literacy, health education and wellness. She is the incoming chair of Alberta Teacher Educators of Physical and Health Education (ATEPHE).

Unlocking the Potential of Physical Education: Insights from 25 Years of Best-Evidence Research

Dean Dudley

In the bustling day-to-day work of teachers, where every lesson counts toward shaping young minds, physical education (PE) often stands out as the curriculum simply for physical activity, games and sports.

But is PE merely about sweating it out on the field, or does it have a deeper impact on students' holistic development?

In our recent systematic review and meta-analysis (Dudley et al 2022), my colleagues and I delved into this question, uncovering intriguing insights that could reshape how we view and implement PE in schools.

The study, which spanned 135 research endeavours from over 20 countries and included more than 42,500 students, aimed to evaluate the effects of various PE lessons and interventions on students' psychomotor, cognitive, affective and social development.

What we found was paradigm shifting: PE interventions wielded significant influence across all four domains. Beyond being a platform for physical activity, PE emerged as an incredibly powerful mechanism for enhancing multifaceted learning and development.

Building on Bailey's (2006) qualitative synthesis, our meta-analysis reinforces the idea that PE is not limited to physical prowess. Rather, its benefits extend to the cognitive, affective and social domains. These findings align with assertions by researchers such as Barnett et al (2022), Cairney et al (2019) and Dudley et al (2020), underlining the pivotal role of instructional techniques in driving these outcomes.

Digging deeper, our study analyzed the relative effect sizes within each domain, uncovering nuances that could guide future PE interventions. Interestingly, interventions targeting psychomotor and affective outcomes boasted larger effect sizes than cognitive and social interventions. This suggests a potential bias in resource allocation within PE programs, which warrants rethinking about where investments should be directed.

Moreover, our study revealed the diversity in intervention effectiveness within each domain. For instance, in previous literature, strategies based on physical activity were touted for their impact on cognitive development; in our meta-analysis, games-based approaches emerged as more impactful. This calls for a re-evaluation of pedagogical strategies to optimize the cognitive benefits of PE.

Furthermore, certain pedagogically driven interventions, such as creating a mastery environment and sport education,[1] consistently outperformed others across multiple domains. Game-based approaches, such as Teaching Games for Understanding (TGfU), also performed well across multiple domains.

David Baxter and I have written about the pedagogical challenges and opportunities these teaching strategies present for PE teachers (Dudley and Baxter 2009, 2013). Further work in ensuring the fidelity of TGfU in teaching practice is increasingly being called for in the research (Hastie and Casey 2014). However, our meta-analysis underscores the need for a strategic approach to PE instruction, moving beyond merely promoting physical activity.

The implications of these findings are profound and are consistent with Whitehead's (2019) ideas of physical literacy development. They challenge the notion that PE's sole purpose is to promote physical activity and highlight its potential as a catalyst for comprehensive student development.

As educators, we must embrace the holistic view of learning envisioned through physical literacy and

practised via PE (Dudley 2015). This will allow us to leverage diverse interventions to nurture cognitive, affective, social and psychomotor growth in our students.

Our meta-analysis not only reinforces the importance of PE but also calls for a paradigm shift in how we approach PE teaching. By identifying effective intervention strategies and understanding their impact across domains, we can move closer to realizing a quality physical education (QPE) agenda that nurtures students' holistic development.

As we embark on this journey, let us remember that the art of teaching, even in PE, lies in deliberate intervention aimed at fostering cognitive, affective, social and psychomotor growth in our students. Let us harness the power of PE to shape not just athletes but well-rounded students poised for success in all facets of life.

Note

1. For an analysis of work on creating a mastery environment, see Braithwaite, Spray and Warburton (2011). For an analysis of work in the field of sport education, see Hastie, de Ojeda and Luquin (2011).

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Traditional Indigenous Games: Something for Everyone

Brad Mainse

Atii! Let's go!

I have been somewhat of a travelling physical education (PE) teacher, if such a thing exists. Not by any genius or organized plan, I spent 20 years teaching in remote First Nations communities across Canada—in all three territories and four provinces (Ontario, British Columbia, Saskatchewan and Manitoba).

What a unique journey!

In this article, I share my experiences and the power of engaging students in traditional Indigenous games. My hope is that you will be inspired to embrace traditional games in your context.

The Start of My Journey

My journey in PE began early, in Grade 3. When asked what I wanted to be when I grew up, I naturally replied that I wanted to be a gym teacher. I had a deep obsession with sports (all sports!) at a very young age.

With time, my engagement with sports grew and intensified. Anything I tried, I loved, and that love always turned into a drive to excel.

My passion for PE lies deep in my spirit, and introducing youth to various sports, skills and biomechanics is what I enjoy most in my career.

There is something for everyone!

The Teacher Becomes the Student

When I moved to Baker Lake, Nunavut, early in my career, I presumed that I would continue this journey of teaching and introducing youth to sport. Little did I know that my path of continued learning was just beginning. I became the student, and my Grade 5 students became the teachers.

Inuit and Dene games were a big part of the culture, and I had never been introduced to them. I remember listening carefully to the rules, letting my students demonstrate, and trying to perform and execute each game properly. The more games and challenges I learned, the more in awe I became.

There was something for everyone—for all body types, fitness levels and interests!

Similar to track and field, Arctic sports and traditional games encompass a wide variety of activities that require various athletic components, including fine and gross motor skills, agility, jumping, bounding, stretching, power, endurance, flexibility, focus, concentration, hand–eye coordination, patience, full-body control and manipulation, strategy, mental strength, and even a degree of pain tolerance.

In time, I learned a variety of traditional games shared by Indigenous cultures across Canada—activities that have been passed down through generations.

Teaching Traditional Games

In many northern and remote communities in Canada, traditional games are required as part of a balanced and inclusive PE curriculum. Many kids also learn traditional games from family and friends as they grow up.

Throughout my years teaching in those communities, I generally devoted a total of one month (split up throughout the school year) to Arctic sports and traditional games. Most of the activities were Inuit and Dene games, but fun and exciting challenges from other great cultures were also included.

One month might seem like a lot. However, consider the amount of time in PE curricula devoted to track and field and other sports that are not traditional to many cultures. Traditional games for students in Northern Canada are a priority.

I have learned that it is important to instill the deep importance of traditional games and challenges simply because there truly is something for everyone!

The Seven Common Teachings

When students are learning and competing in Arctic sports and traditional games, the seven common teachings

are vitally important.[1] These guiding principles, passed down in Indigenous cultures, are as follows:

- Love
- Respect
- Courage
- Honesty
- Wisdom
- Humility
- Truth

The terminology may vary from one culture to another, but the ideas are the same.

We sometimes take these principles for granted in education. However, when youth hear them, respect them, live them and speak them, our classrooms become a more respectful and positive space for learning. Every parent, principal, teacher and student should value the principles.

The tricky part of sports (and education in general) is getting youth to understand and accept their own skills and learning level and to respect those of their peers. Too many youth focus on their peers (either positively or negatively) and lack the focus on their own improvement.

My first formal learning of the seven common teachings occurred during my first year of teaching, at Wabaseemoong First Nations School, in an Ojibway community in northern Ontario.

I spent the following eight years teaching in Baker Lake. During that time, Nunavut developed a culturally specific curriculum and introduced it to all schools and staff across the territory. This curriculum incorporated the Inuit version of the common teachings, with eight guiding principles referred to as Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit (IQ). In addition, Tunngasugit was established to incorporate traditional Inuit knowledge into everyday practices.[2]

In a balanced PE or outdoor education program, we need participants who value these core teachings in hopes of creating a fun, fair and positive learning environment.

There is something for everyone to improve!

A Time of Reflection

Let's fast-forward to 2021.

I was living in the heart of Yukon—a beautiful community called Carmacks.

Each year, I continued to dedicate a total of one month of PE to Arctic sports and traditional games. The youth loved to learn and try new challenges and set new records, and I continued to learn new games to add to my tool box of teachings.

However, I was unaware that my health was deteriorating. In time, I was diagnosed with colorectal cancer. During the COVID-19 pandemic, I had to return home (Seeley's Bay and Bob's Lake, Ontario) for two rounds of chemo, radiation, two surgeries, ongoing isolation (thank you, COVID!), and extensive periods of recovery.

Endless hours, days and weeks in bed give a person a lot of time to reflect—to think, **What now? What's next?** The positive energy and attitude I had exemplified for years for my students now had to be turned inward to better my own health and wellness. This was easier said than done sometimes, as I truly learned the deeper aspects of mental health and wellness. I told myself, "It's time to live what you preach, Coach. No excuses. Just do it. Get 'er done. Life's too short. If not now, when?"

There's something there for everyone!

Bringing Traditional Games to Other Communities

My health now is better. However, I will have lifetime health challenges and am unable to return to full-time work.

So what now?

My passion has always been sport and athletics, as well as coaching, officiating and fostering excellence in youth. During my 20-year career, I also developed a passion for Arctic sports and traditional games.

I began to think, **If I can't teach full-time, why not try offering school presentations based on my unique travels and learnings from across Northern Canada?** I already knew that kids would love the program, and I'd mastered the craft of presenting and instructing.

In time, I started my personal business. I called it B-RAD Athletics as a tribute to some students in Baker Lake, who gave me the name B-Rad.

In addition to officiating and holding coaching clinics for basketball, badminton and volleyball, I've developed a presentation for schools that introduces students and teachers to Arctic sports and traditional games.

What is different now is my student population. Instead of teaching students in Northern Canada, I now work with students in Southern Canada. What remains, regardless of geography, is the ongoing interest in bringing in perspectives and learnings from Indigenous cultures.

I have found that incorporating Indigenous cultures in PE is often overlooked. Sport is a great avenue for introducing youth to Indigenous cultures and aspects of fitness consistent with mainstream PE teachings.

Traditional games naturally cross over or can be easily adapted. For example, many traditional games and challenges are similar to events in track and field.

Many traditional games are either individual or one-on-one, though there are team events, as well. Popular Inuit games are the one-foot high kick, the two-foot high kick, the arm pull, the head pull, the foot pull and the stick pull. Some of the more challenging activities are the airplane carry, the knuckle hop, the swing kick and the one-hand reach. Videos of these games can be found on YouTube.

There is something for everyone!

The Presentation

My school presentation usually takes the form of a one-hour session, though some schools request shorter or longer sessions (based on gym schedules and availability). I can take one to three classes (20–60 students) per session, with the support of teachers.

I design the activities based on age and skill level. Activities in the lower grades involve more basic skills and fundamentals of fitness. As the grades progress, so do the skills and fitness levels. My career as a PE teacher spanned pre-K to 12, so I am comfortable teaching this program to children and youth of all ages.

There is definitely something for everyone!

I have found success in teaching traditional games through two methods.

In the first method, we teach and learn together as a group. This method is often best for the younger grades.

In the second method, I demonstrate the activities first. Then, students break into small groups and rotate through stations. Each station takes about four minutes. This allows students to participate with their friends at their own pace. As we all know, when students feel comfortable, they are more likely to try something new, learn and have fun.

Principals and teachers love this approach. Teachers can stand back, observe, participate, wonder and interact with the kids in a different atmosphere from usual. The feedback from students, teachers and principals is always extremely positive.

There is something for everyone—teachers included!

I was honoured to present a session on Arctic sports and traditional games at the Physical and Health Education Canada (PHE Canada) 2024 national conference in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. I have also presented in Ontario, Manitoba and Mexico.

I look forward to expanding my presentation across Canada.

Final Thoughts

What I share through B-RAD Athletics is based on my years of teaching in various schools, school divisions and boards, and provinces and territories across Canada.

Continually learning new curricula, as well as new cultures and games passed down through the generations, has been an experience I am so very appreciative to have had. The ability to move freely between numerous remote communities across Canada and to gain this broad experience and knowledge from many cultures has moulded me into the PE teacher I am today.

I am forever thankful to the cultures, Elders, educators, parents, youth and communities that have guided me and allowed me to learn and teach with them—specifically, the Ojibway, Inuit, Dene, Cowichan, Gwich'in, Inuvialuit, Cree and Northern Tutchone.

As I learn more in my travels across Canada, I am eager and excited to see where this journey takes me and, to the best of my knowledge and learnings, remain respectful to all cultures in my teachings.

There truly is something for everyone!

I hope this article has given you some perspective and has inspired you to seek out traditional games for your own PE program.

If my presentation sounds like something you would like to bring into your school, please connect with me at b_radathletics@yahoo.com. I would love to share my program with your school or community.

Thank you. Miigwech. Ma'na. Marsi. Musi Cho. Ma'Ho. Miyaweyihtamowin Ninaskomtin.

Notes

1. See www.southernnetwork.org/site/seven-teachings.
2. See www.tunngasugitinc.ca/about/inuit-qaujimajatuqangit-traditional-inuit-values/.

Brad Mainse spent 20 years coaching and teaching health and physical education in First Nations communities across Canada. This unique experience introduced him to a broad variety of provincial and territorial curricula, school programs, facilities, and cultures, as well as to traditional games popular among regional cultures. As a coach, he has attended the Arctic Winter Games, the Canada Winter Games and the North American Indigenous Games, as well as countless regional, provincial and territorial events in sports such as badminton, basketball, volleyball, lacrosse, and track and field. Through B-RAD Athletics, he offers officiating services and coaching clinics for various sports, as well as presentations on traditional Indigenous games. He can be reached at b_radathletics@yahoo.com.

The Impact of a School Vaping-Reduction Program on Students, Teachers and the School Community

Josie Sorensen and Ryan Fahey

This article demonstrates the importance of implementing wellness programs in schools—in this case, a vaping-reduction program.

Wellness programs are essential for creating a thriving school community in which both staff and students feel supported, motivated and appreciated.

A vaping-reduction program can not only educate students about the harmful effects of vaping but also empower them to make greater changes in the school and even the community.

Programs like this also provide opportunities for teachers (particularly new teachers) to grow professionally, collaborate and learn how to ask for support.

Background

In fall 2023, I (Josie) was offered the role of health champion in our school. I'm a huge advocate for personal wellness and have always been an active person, so I said yes. This also allowed me to take on a lead role in the school as a newer teacher.

About a month into the school year, my principal asked me if I would also serve as the teacher representative for the Students Together Moving to Prevent Tobacco Use (STOMP) program our school had implemented the year prior.

I was hesitant to accept this responsibility. Between health championing, coaching, leading another wellness initiative in our division and, of course, teaching, I was already feeling overwhelmed. However, looking back on the amazing opportunities that came out of STOMP, for both my students and me, I'm so grateful I said yes.

Getting Started with STOMP

An initiative of Physical and Health Education Canada (PHE Canada), STOMP began as a multiyear (2021–24) pilot project that aimed to reduce Grades 7–12 students' commercial tobacco and vaping use through a comprehensive approach that considered students' unique characteristics, norms and needs.[1]

For the first step in my journey with STOMP, my principal connected me with one of the most supportive, enthusiastic and friendly people I have ever met—Ryan Fahey, the STOMP program lead. After our first virtual meeting, I felt reassured that I would not be alone in facilitating STOMP at our school.

I also learned that STOMP is so much more than just a vaping-reduction program. STOMP provides a step-by-step tool kit for schools that outlines everything from recruiting students to creating a tangible action plan to accessing evidence-informed resources through the STOMP hub.

The Benefits of Implementing STOMP at Our School

In addition to educating students about the harmful effects of vaping, implementing STOMP at our school and establishing a STOMP Student Action Team promoted student leadership and facilitated networking with people in our community and across Canada.

SIRCLE

Through STOMP, our students and staff were given the opportunity to collaborate with researchers at the University of Alberta's SIRCLE Research Lab.[2]

SIRCLE delivers and analyzes school-based programs throughout Canada that promote holistic health.

We participated in numerous focus groups, and our students were given the chance to act as co-researchers in a student-led arts-based research project. They loved getting a sneak peek into what research is all about and were excited to see their names on university-level research.

Student Survey

An early initiative of our STOMP Student Action Team was surveying students to see what the vaping culture was like at our school.

Out of 188 responses, 32.4 per cent of students said they had vaped before, and 25.1 per cent of those students said they were introduced to vaping by peers.

These results were alarming, as they showed that the vaping prevalence in our school was higher than the national average of 30 per cent, as reported by Statistics Canada's 2022 Canadian Tobacco and Nicotine Survey.[3]

The survey also asked students why they vaped (or why they thought other students vaped). Responses included the following:

- Misinformation that vaping is safer than smoking
- Peer pressure to fit in and "look cool"
- Flavoured products that taste like candy
- Stress relief and coping with mental health issues

The survey also asked students how we could reduce vaping in our school. Many responses said that students needed more education and more discussion with their peers about the harmful effects of vaping. One student said, "Let the students use their voice to encourage other students to stop vaping."

Our STOMP Student Action Team realized that to effectively reduce vaping at our school, we needed to let the information come from students themselves. While peer pressure can have negative effects on youth, it can also bring about positive effects (Coyle et al 2016).

Research Contest

Based on our survey results and the STOMP approach, we decided to hold a contest open to all students at our school.

Students would research the harmful effects of vaping (as well as commercial tobacco use) and then create a slideshow presentation of their findings. The contest spanned March and April 2024 so that it would overlap with spring break, giving students more time to work on their presentations. We advertised the contest through school announcements and posters. Students could work by themselves or in pairs. The top three presentations would win a cash prize (from our STOMP funds).

Wellness programs that use a whole-school approach foster feelings of connection and belonging. The contest not only engaged our entire student population but also allowed our school administration and staff to play crucial roles in supporting our vaping-reduction program.

Using the contest as a vehicle, teachers integrated vaping reduction into the curriculum. Many of our health and physical education teachers used the contest as a project in their classes. We also created a panel of teacher judges to anonymously evaluate the presentations, which was an effective way to get our staff involved in STOMP and help them learn more about vaping from the student perspective.

The support from our administration and staff enhanced student motivation and participation in the contest. The combined effort from staff and students helped ensure that the vaping-reduction message was impactful and that it spread to our wider community.

We received 33 submissions for the contest: 5 from Grade 12, 4 from Grade 11, 13 from Grade 10, and 11 from Grade 9. We shared the winning presentations with the whole school and planned to bring the presentations to our junior high feeder schools.

Many students commented that they enjoyed this contest because it allowed them to learn more about the harmful effects of vaping and commercial tobacco use while collaborating with their peers. Many asked us to hold the contest again the following school year.

After the contest, our STOMP Student Action Team reflected on how this peer-driven approach was more effective than a teacher-led approach would have been in both getting students to participate and making the vaping-reduction message resonate.

When students understand the risks of vaping, they become advocates for their own health and are able to help friends avoid or quit vaping. Wellness programs like this also help students lead and support their peers, building a healthier school environment.

Other Impacts of STOMP

Implementing STOMP at our school had other impacts, including my professional growth, an award for one of my students and the creation of a student club to address larger issues related to student wellness.

My Professional Growth

The STOMP program led to many professional development opportunities that have been great for my teaching career.

Ryan connected me with health-care professionals in Alberta and across Canada. I met with them virtually several times during the school year to share my experiences with STOMP and pick up tips and resources.

In May 2024, I had the amazing opportunity to present with Ryan at the PHE National Conference, in Saskatoon. In our session, we shared our successes in implementing STOMP. I also benefited from attending the other outstanding sessions and networking. As a new teacher, I felt listened to and supported by the experienced teachers I connected with.

Ryan and Josie at the 2024 PHE National Conference

A slide from Josie and Ryan's presentation at the 2024 PHE National Conference

A Student Success Story

STOMP also led to one of my proudest moments as a teacher.

Through PHE Canada, I learned about Children First Canada's Future Is NOW! Awards, which celebrate young changemakers across Canada.[4] When Ryan sent me an e-mail about this award, I immediately thought of my student Brendan McFatridge.

Brendan was a member of our STOMP Student Action Team. He single-handedly raised over $5,000 for our vaping-reduction program by reaching out to various businesses in our community and asking for their support. It was his hope that, with that money, we would continue the STOMP program after he graduated.

In March 2024, I nominated Brendan for a Future Is NOW! Award. In April, we found out that he had been selected as one of 10 outstanding young leaders and changemakers to receive the prestigious award.[5]

Brendan travelled to Toronto for a few days to meet with the other winners and nominees. During this experience, he also had the opportunity to meet people in his dream career (surgeon). Additionally, he was given a remote summer internship with Children First Canada, which allowed him to job shadow surgeons at the same time.

Brendan also appeared in the media to share his story of bravely standing up against bullying and discrimination in hockey and to advocate for LGBTQ+ rights and inclusivity in sports.

STOMP and PHE Canada helped make this all possible.

Sunshine Wellness Club

A big take-away from implementing STOMP at our school was the need to address larger issues related to student wellness, such as mental health and community.

In the 2024/25 school year, our students decided to use the foundation we had built through STOMP to create a student well-being group called the Sunshine Wellness Club.

This club focuses on student wellness through building a sense of belonging and community among students. This is achieved through emphasizing positivity and inclusivity, as well as encouraging students to pursue personal goals and growth.

The club also fosters students' leadership and social skills by having them create and lead their own clubs, such as clubs devoted to books, art and yoga, as well as study groups and university prep.

I am so proud of how my students have grown in their self-confidence and leadership skills through STOMP and our new Sunshine Wellness Club.

How Wellness Programs Can Benefit New Teachers

New teachers may find themselves saying yes to everything and taking on more than they can handle. Coaching, running student clubs, serving on committees—it's easy to keep piling things on their plate.

I hesitated to say yes to becoming involved with STOMP, but I'm glad I did. In addition to the many positive impacts already discussed, STOMP mitigated the burnout and hopelessness I had been feeling the year prior.

One of the biggest lessons I have learned as a new teacher is the importance of putting your ego aside and admitting when you need help. Asking for support can help prevent burnout and help teachers feel fulfilled while also creating a sense of belonging among staff (Nygaard 2019).

Moreover, feeling supported and feeling like they are making a difference in their students' lives can lessen teachers' desire to leave the profession (Skaalvik and Skaalvik 2011).

With support and advice from my amazing colleagues, as well as from PHE Canada, I have learned so much in my first few years of teaching and have been blessed to have had so many fulfilling experiences and opportunities. I am grateful to work with such wonderful teachers and to teach such outstanding students.

Conclusion

My hope is that this article inspires teachers (especially new teachers) to say yes to implementing wellness programs like STOMP in their school.

Implementing wellness programs in schools is an investment in the success of both staff and students and can create long-lasting impacts in the school community. STOMP has brought about opportunities for both my students and me; fostered positive relationships in our school community; and shifted the culture in our school toward prioritizing well-being, empathy, collective responsibility and being proactive. Moreover, focusing together on a target issue (vaping reduction) promoted a sense of belonging and achievement. This was all incredibly rewarding and helped me see how gratifying the profession of teaching truly is.

If you are interested in learning more about STOMP or similar supports, please contact me at josie.sorensen@eics.ab.ca.

Notes

1. For more information about STOMP, see https://phecanada.ca/teaching-tools/stomp.

2. For more information about SIRCLE, see https://katestorey.com.

3. See www23.statcan.gc.ca/imdb/p2SVpl?Function=getSurvey&SDDS=5305.

4. For more information about the Future Is NOW! Awards, see https://childrenfirstcanada.org/the-future-is-now-awards/.

5. See https://childrenfirstcanada.org/award-winner/brendan-mcfatridge/.

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Nygaard, K. 2019. "The Causes of Teacher Burnout and Attrition." Thesis, Concordia University, St Paul. Also available at https://digitalcommons.csp.edu/teacher-education_masters/10 (accessed May 2, 2025).

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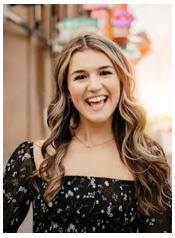

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Ryan Fahey, BA, BEd, CPT, is a programs and resources lead with PHE Canada. He is passionate about wellness, physical education and healthy schools, as well as the intersections between health, education, play and innovation. He has worked provincially, nationally and internationally in various roles in education. Recently, he led PHE Canada's STOMP program and now leads the mobilization of its Blueprint for Action in schools. He is also an established author in the personal growth and well-being space.

Dare to DREAM: Integrating Career Education into Health and Life Skills for Grade 8 Girls

Jasmyn Kennedy, Kerry B Bernes, Annelise M Lyseng, Jonathan L Roque and Karissa L Horne

In Western society, adolescent girls are bombarded with messages from the media, friends and society to fit into a specific mould. These cultural identities and social expectations can both empower and constrict girls (Walton and Fisette 2013). Girls are sensitive to feminine ideals, and not meeting those ideals can be psychologically distressing. Teachers may unwittingly endorse a "hidden curriculum" (p 200) that promotes social expectations and contributes to students' struggles with identity formation. Teachers must recognize this hidden curriculum and empower students to embrace their individuality.

Research suggests that career education can positively affect adolescent girls, by helping them develop personal responsibility and confidence, which are essential for attaining goals and overcoming personal challenges (Carruthers 2006). Career education also empowers girls to overcome obstacles, defy societal expectations and identify meaningful goals.

This article outlines a career education unit for Grade 8 girls. Dare to DREAM—which stood for **dream/discuss, reflect, explore, act** and **(put into) motion**—aimed to encourage girls to self-explore through group work, reflection and written activities. The unit was integrated into the health and life skills curriculum to encourage girls to reflect on meaning, career development and individuality and to underscore independence from social expectations.

Background

This research was built on a comprehensive career needs survey (CCNS) developed by Magnusson and Bernes (2002).

The CCNS was a collaborative initiative between the Southern Alberta Centre of Excellence for Career Development, Faculty of Education, University of Lethbridge; the Chinook Regional Career Transitions for Youth Project; and the South-Western Rural Youth Career Development Project.

The CCNS aimed to collect students' perceptions of their career-development and career-planning needs, as well as perceived gaps in existing services (Magnusson and Bernes 2002; Witko et al 2006). Classroom teachers distributed the survey to students in 54 junior and senior high schools in southern Alberta.

The survey results emphasized important needs for junior and senior high students, including

- finding their interests and abilities,
- discovering their passions,
- acquiring support for their career plans and postsecondary education, and
- obtaining financial information (Magnusson and Bernes 2002).

Additionally, the results suggested that beginning career planning earlier could benefit students' career decision-making.

Given these results, it was apparent that career planning was an integral aspect lacking from students' educational experiences in southern Alberta.

Thus, the Career Coaching Across the Curriculum pilot project was created and implemented (Slomp, Gunn and Bernes 2014). Supported by Alberta Education and the Canadian Career Development Foundation, the project trained 50 preservice teachers in career education.

The project included two components: a career education course delivered over four weeks and a 12-week

internship. The course prepared preservice teachers to implement career education into the K–12 curriculum, and the internship allowed them to integrate their newfound knowledge in southern Alberta schools.

The larger data set has already been published (Slomp, Gunn and Bernes 2014). This article details a specific classroom implementation from the larger study.

Context of the Teaching Environment

Dare to DREAM was implemented with 28 Grade 8 girls (aged 12–14) at a rural school in southwestern Alberta. (Boys and girls were separated for health and life skills classes.)

Many students were from middle-class families whose main income came from the agricultural industry.

The students performed at or above grade-level achievement.

Cross-Curricular Integration

The career education unit was integrated into Alberta's health and life skills curriculum for Grade 8 (Alberta Learning 2002), which includes outcomes related to personal development and career and life planning.

The curriculum includes three general outcomes (wellness choices, relationship choices and life learning choices), each of which has specific outcomes.

The specific outcomes related to this unit are listed below.

Wellness Choices

- "Examine the relationship between choices and resulting consequences" (W-8.1)
- "Develop personal strategies to deal with pressures to have a certain look/lifestyle" (W-8.4)
- "Identify and develop personal resiliency skills" (W-8.11)

Relationship Choices

- "Describe and explain the positive and negative aspects of conformity and dissent as they relate to individuals in a group or on a team" (R-8.8)

Life Learning Choices

- "Determine and develop time management strategies/skills to establish personal balance" (L-8.1)
- "Examine learning priorities, and implement a learning plan" (L-8.2)
- "Identify components of ethical decision making, and apply these concepts to personal decision making" (L-8.3)
- "Begin to develop goals and priorities related to learning and future career paths, based on personal interests, aptitudes and skills" (L-8.4)
- "Update a personal portfolio to show evidence of a range of interests, assets and skills; and relate evidence to knowledge and skills required by various career paths" (L-8.5)
- "Investigate, interpret and evaluate career information and opportunities, using a variety of sources" (L-8.6)

Detailed Description of the Unit

The unit was delivered through eight 30-to-45-minute classes over eight weeks.

Students were encouraged to dream, engage in self-reflection and celebrate their individuality, while fostering relationships, empathy and positive career choices.

The unit involved various career-planning activities, including opening discussions, review of completed activities and exit slips.

At the end of each lesson, students noted three things they had learned about themselves, two areas of confusion or dislike, and one area they wanted to further self-explore.

Lesson 1

In lesson 1, the teacher established strong relationships with the students and introduced the process model of career planning.

The teacher introduced herself and outlined the purpose of the Dare to DREAM unit. She noted that the first lesson would focus on discussing and dreaming.

The teacher displayed pictures of various women. Students wrote down their initial thoughts, noting the women's strength, confidence and unique traits. Afterward, the teacher introduced the women and their life accomplishments, which led to a discussion about whether students had perceived each pictured woman as strong or confident and what made her unique.

Students then reflected on what it meant to be a confident woman. After this reflection, the teacher introduced students to the KWL chart (Appendix A), in which they described their current knowledge (K), what they wanted (W) to know and what they had learned (L) about themselves. This activity accounted for 5 per cent of their grade.

Lesson 2

In lesson 2, students explored their feelings about societal influences, developed self-reflection techniques and recognized the support systems in their lives. The lesson also focused on discussing and reflecting. By participating in the discussion, students earned 5 per cent toward their grade.

To begin, students discussed the pressures they faced, as girls, from the media, school, boys, friends and family. They discussed support systems as presented in the media and popular culture, as well as the support systems available in their own lives.

The teacher shared stories of women who overcame significant obstacles, with help from their support systems.[1] Examples included Helen Keller and Oprah Winfrey.

The teacher then asked students to describe their goals for the future and the reasons behind those goals. The discussion emphasized the importance of engaging in reflection to find meaning before setting goals.

Lesson 3

In lesson 3, students explored meaning in their lives, their relationships and their dreams for the future. This lesson also helped them appreciate the power of public speaking.

In the first part of the lesson, the teacher showed students Martin Luther King Jr's (1963) famous "I Have a Dream" speech. In this speech, King described his vision of a future wherein all Americans would be treated equally, regardless of skin colour or religion.

After watching the speech, students completed the sentence "I have a dream that one day I will . . ." and then described how they aimed to achieve their goals.

This lesson reinforced the dreaming and reflecting stages of career planning.

The teacher then led students in a guided imagery exercise in which they visualized their lives five and ten years into the future. (Appendix B contains a script for the visualization.) After this exercise, students wrote down their memories of their dreams and their thoughts and feelings about what they had imagined. They then shared their experiences with a partner. This activity accounted for 10 per cent of their grade.

At the end of this lesson, students updated their KWL charts.

Lesson 4

Lesson 4 promoted students' understanding and acceptance of themselves while creating positive group dynamics in the classroom.

First, students told their pride stories to their classmates. In groups of three, they took turns sharing an experience in which they felt a strong sense of pride in their accomplishments. This activity was worth 5 per cent of their grade.

After each student shared a pride story, the group members generated words that described that student's talents and personal attributes.

Each student then taped a piece of paper to her back. Students walked around the classroom and wrote three to five words on every student's paper. These words described students' positive characteristics, based on their pride stories or general life experiences. After several minutes, students removed their papers and looked at the words their peers had written about them.

The class then discussed the students' feedback, feelings and areas of personal meaning that had been evoked by these activities. This was worth 10 per cent of their grade.

Lesson 5

Lesson 5 helped students reflect on life meaning to realize what their passions, interests and values were.

The teacher led students in a discussion about life changes and indicated that they would learn more about themselves as they grew older and gained experience. They were told that although some of their personal characteristics would remain relatively stable over time, others would change with age, experience and influence from others.

Students then completed a values inventory to identify the values that most resonated with them. The teacher placed sheets of paper labelled with various values, interests and beliefs around the classroom. Students walked around the room and made note of those that were meaningful to them.

Students were then given UC Berkeley Career Center's Planning Your Future: The Party Game,[2] which is based on Holland's (1997) themes. Holland's themes are a set of occupational categories mapped onto six personality characteristics:

- Realistic
- Investigative
- Conventional
- Artistic
- Enterprising
- Social

Students read the profiles of six groups of people at a party. They then selected the three profiles that most appealed to them and identified associated careers. This activity was worth 5 per cent of their grade.

Finally, students incorporated both activities into the development of self-portraits. The teacher introduced the self-portrait as an assignment that would encourage students to celebrate their lives and their unique qualities. Students completed the self-portrait worksheet (Appendix C). At the bottom of the worksheet, they described one work-related experience and one personal experience to connect their personal meaning with satisfaction in the work world. This activity was worth 10 per cent of their grade.

Lesson 6

Lesson 6 focused on encouraging students to design plans for their hopes, dreams and aspirations.

Students considered the activities they had completed and described their favourite. They were then placed in groups with peers they had not yet worked with.

The crux of this lesson was the 99-Year-Old Question activity. Students were asked to imagine that they were 99 years old and had met their teacher on the street. In the scenario, everything in their lives had gone according to plan. They were to describe to their teacher what they had done in their lives and what accomplishments they were most proud of.

To encourage responses, the teacher asked students whether they had worked, whether they had travelled, what their most memorable experiences were and so on. Students wrote down their responses. They were instructed to engage in self-reflection through their writing and describe what made their life accomplishments important, how those goals made them feel and, in general, how they would achieve happiness. This activity was worth 10 per cent of their grade.

Then, the teacher introduced vision boards. A vision board is a poster or visual representation of one's primary goals, interests and values.

Students' vision boards were to include representations of personal meaning and life goals, as well as self-affirming phrases that would inspire and encourage students to keep on track with their goals (for example, "I am thankful for . . ." and "I know that I can . . ."). Students could draw, write and paste pictures on their boards to personalize them. This activity was worth 15 per cent of their grade.

This assignment was introduced to students during lesson 6, with the understanding that although class time would not be allotted to the vision boards until lesson 7, they could begin working on them early.

At the end of this lesson, students were assigned an activity for homework—Pick Your Perfect Profession. They were asked to research five careers they were interested in pursuing, rate them in terms of popularity, and then research the required training and commitments. They were to work on this assignment during their spare time before lesson 7.

Lesson 7

Lesson 7 enabled students to connect their self-knowledge to the evaluation of potential careers through the Pick Your Perfect Profession activity. They were asked to describe how the activity had gone. In particular, they were asked whether they had found a career of interest to them. This activity was worth 15 per cent of their grade.

Students were given class time to work on this activity and their vision boards.

They also worked in pairs to conduct research and discuss their passions, interests and dreams. They then created professional portfolios to highlight their research.

In lesson 8, students would present their career-planning experiences to the class. At the end of lesson 7, they each signed up for a time to present.

Lesson 8

Lesson 8 was a culminating lesson to wrap up the unit.

In this lesson, students presented their career-planning experiences to the rest of the class. The presentation was worth 10 per cent of their grade.

Students expressed their personal meaning, topics of interest, values, beliefs, dreams, passions and goals through media such as vision boards, collages, poems, stories, videos and dramatic skits. This meant that each student's presentation was unique.

Each student was given three to five minutes to present, so that everyone had time to share.

The presentations were graded based on creativity, uniqueness and integration of class material (such as the 99-Year-Old Question responses, support systems, media influences, community building and pride stories).

The teacher concluded the unit by thanking students for their efforts and wishing them good luck in the future.

Evaluating the Unit's Effectiveness

At the end of the unit, students completed an anonymous evaluation form.

The aim was to assess students' satisfaction with the unit and highlight areas they liked and areas they thought needed improvement.

The form asked students about the following:

- Their participation in the activities

- Their perception of the helpfulness of the activities
- What they liked most about the unit and what could be improved
- Their perception of the unit's adherence to four learning objectives

Part 1 of the form asked students to indicate whether they had completed each of the six activities in the unit.

Part 2 asked students to rate the helpfulness of each activity by circling a happy face (**great**), a neutral face (**good**) or a sad face (**not good at all**). This part also included two open-ended questions:

- What did you like about this career-planning unit?
- How could this career-planning unit be made better?

In part 3, students indicated whether they agreed that the unit had achieved the following objectives:

- This unit plan helped me to learn a lot about myself.
- This unit plan helped me to learn a lot about careers.
- This unit plan made me excited about what I could do with my life.
- This unit plan made me want to learn more about different careers.

Students were asked to circle a sad face (**I don't agree**), a neutral face (**I'm not sure**) or a happy face (**I agree**).

Results

Tables 1, 2 and 3 present the results of the evaluation.

TABLE 1. Completion of the Activities

Activity	I didn't do it	I did it
I Have a Dream	0 (0.0%)	27 (100.0%)
Visualization	2 (7.4%)	25 (92.6%)
Pride stories/positive words	0 (0.0%)	27 (100.0%)
Self-portrait	6 (22.2%)	21 (77.8%)
Career research	4 (14.8%)	23 (85.2%)
Vision board/final project	4 (14.8%)	23 (85.2%)

Note: On average, 90.1% of students participated in the activities.

TABLE 2. Perceived Helpfulness of the Activities

Activity	Not good at all	Good	Great
I Have a Dream	2 (7.4%)	14 (51.9%)	11 (40.7%)
Visualization	0 (0.0%)	12 (48.0%)	13 (52.0%)
Pride stories/ positive words	1 (3.7%)	12 (44.4%)	14 (51.9%)
Self-portrait	1 (4.8%)	17 (81.0%)	3 (14.3%)
Career research	1 (4.3%)	7 (30.4%)	15 (65.2%)
Vision board/ final project	0 (0.0%)	9 (39.1%)	14 (60.9%)

Note: On average, 96.6% of students rated the activities as *good* or *great*. Due to rounding, totals may not add up to exactly 100%.

TABLE 3. Perceived Effectiveness of the Unit

	I don't agree	I'm not sure	I agree
This unit plan helped me to learn a lot about myself.	1 (3.7%)	3 (11.1%)	23 (85.2%)
This unit plan helped me to learn a lot about careers.	1 (3.7%)	4 (14.8%)	22 (81.5%)
This unit plan made me excited about what I could do with my life.	0 (0.0%)	1 (3.7%)	26 (96.3%)
This unit plan made me want to learn more about different careers.	1 (3.7%)	8 (29.6%)	18 (66.7%)

Note: On average, 82.4% of students agreed that all outcomes had been met.

Discussion

On average, 96.6 per cent of the students rated the activities as **good** or **great**, and 82.4 per cent agreed that all the learning outcomes had been met.

The most helpful activities, as perceived by students, were the vision board and the visualization exercise. Many of their open-ended responses about what they liked about the unit fell into three themes:

- Students enjoyed learning more about themselves and the future.
- Students enjoyed the camaraderie and community they experienced through sharing stories with their classmates.
- Students particularly enjoyed the vision board and positive words activities. Several students said that the

positive words exercise made them feel better about themselves and more valued by their classmates.

The primary objectives of the unit were to encourage students to learn more about themselves and to encourage them to connect their self-knowledge to potential career opportunities. It appears that those objectives were met.

The teacher felt that she had successfully established strong student–teacher relationships and, thereby, created a safe and welcoming environment. Consequently, the students were comfortable exploring their personal meaning, developing friendships, dreaming about their futures and gaining a better understanding of themselves.

In addition, the dynamics of having only girls in the classroom helped make students feel safer, less judged and less competitive. In their responses, two students indicated that they enjoyed being separated from the boys and spending time with the other girls.

The unit's success should also be attributed to the quality of the career-planning activities the teacher implemented. Students were given ample opportunities to explore their interests, goals and values and to share them with their peers.

The unit focused on girls and women, but including boys in the lessons could be valuable. A pilot project aimed at promoting education and gender equality for girls found that including boys resulted in significant outcomes and provided an opportunity to change male perceptions of caregiving, domestic roles and education (Baric 2013). Additionally, toward the end of the project, the boys and girls developed stronger relationships. Including boys in this career education unit would allow them to learn about the issues women and girls face; understand their roles as allies; and reflect on their own meaning, values and goals.

The teacher shared examples of female role models who had successfully overcome barriers and who had benefited from their support systems. The goal of highlighting these role models was to inspire girls to dream big and be optimistic about the future. Therefore, role models of all genders who support women could be featured.

For example, in a mixed-gender classroom, the teacher could highlight male allies who have supported and encouraged women and explore the qualities those men possess, such as the courage to challenge stereotypes about women and to redefine masculinity.

A similar approach could be taken for students undergoing gender exploration or transition who have been placed in an all-girls classroom. To be more inclusive and accepting of all gender identities, the teacher could feature people who have undergone gender transition and who continue to play a role in supporting women.

A crucial aspect of the unit was the Pick Your Perfect Profession activity, which encouraged students to explore careers, dream about the future and create vision boards.

The most common feedback from students was that future versions of the unit should require less homework. One student wrote, "I found it really hard to [have] to do extra work at home because I am very busy. . . . If it was all in school, I would have enjoyed it more." This concern may have been connected to the notion that health and life skills is not a core academic course. Students may have felt that if they were to do homework, it should be for mainstream academic courses.

A couple students mentioned that they would have appreciated more time to work on their vision boards and share stories. The teacher also felt that eight 30-to-45-minute classes was insufficient for students to truly consider their dreams, desires, personal meaning and obstacles. Thus, teachers implementing this unit might consider extending the unit to 10 classes.

Conclusion

Career-planning activities and a safe classroom environment enabled Grade 8 girls in a health and life skills class to understand themselves, their goals and how they could achieve those goals.

The career education unit also addressed social pressures that adolescent girls may experience and sought to underscore the importance of social support. It had positive emotional outcomes for students, as they connected with their classmates and supported one another throughout the career-planning process.

Future research should investigate whether this unit would also benefit adolescent boys or adolescents exploring their gender.

Appendix A: KWL Chart

K What I already know	W What I want to know	L What I have learned

Appendix B: Script for the Visualization Exercise

Close your eyes. Take five calming breaths, in and out through your nose. Relax, forget about your day, the fight you may have had with your mom or best friend, and focus on you.

I want you to visualize your favourite place. It may be your home, school, work or playing your favourite sport.

Think about how you feel when you are in your favourite place. Why do you love it so much? How does it make you feel? What is the importance of that place?

Continue to think about your happy place. Now, if you were five years older, what would that place look like? How would it differ? Would someone else be with you? Would it be located in a different city? What would the rest of your day look like? Are you getting ready for work, school or do you have the day off? Are you vacationing with friends or family? Are you getting ready to write your final paper of your university career?

What would you be doing 10 years from now? Are you happy? Did you meet your goals of becoming a successful businesswoman, doctor, lawyer, teacher or nurse? Are you still working toward your dreams coming true? Is it your wedding day?

Appendix C: Self-Portrait Worksheet

Outcomes What do I want to achieve?	Meaningfulness How is this meaningful to me?	Activities What activities have I done in the past? What activities will I do in the future?	Tools/techniques What tools and techniques do I need to reach my goals?

A work-related experience that is related to my goals:

A personal experience that is related to my goals:

Notes

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1. The stories were taken from Biography Online (www.biographyonline.net/people/women-who-changed-world.html) and Snyder (2013).

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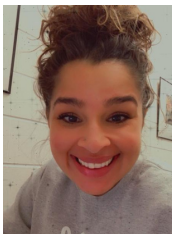

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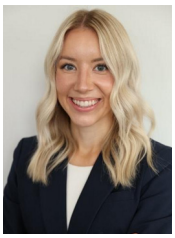

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Student Voice and Choice in Outdoor Education: One Teacher's Attempt to Incorporate Democratic Principles

John Cadman, Douglas Gleddie, Hayley Morrison and Lauren Sulz

Formal voting procedures may seem out of place in middle school outdoor education (OE). In my (John's) OE classes, holding a vote was an emergent strategy. However, it worked so well that I plan to incorporate it again next year.

My reasons for incorporating democratic principles in my OE class were influenced by a recent course in Meaningful Physical Education (PE):

- A democratic classroom supports meaningful experiences and student engagement (Fletcher and Ní Chróinín 2022).
- For experiences to be meaningful for them, students must be involved in creating and planning those experiences (Beni 2021).
- The process of creating, planning, presenting and deciding on experiences fosters a rich environment for social interaction, challenge and personally relevant learning (Beni, Fletcher and Ní Chróinín 2017).
- Meaning-making emerges when experiences are relevant and embedded in students' lives (Beni 2021; Kretchmar 2000, 2008; Roberts and Welton 2022; Vasily 2020).

The goal of this article is to share my attempts to incorporate student voice and choice in OE to make the subject personally relevant to students in my school. In this way, I hoped to borrow from Meaningful PE principles and move my program toward Meaningful OE in order to promote student joy in the outdoors.

Context

At my school, OE is part of how we approach learning and is now mandatory for junior high students.

In the past, OE was an elective course. Students either opted into OE or avoided it—their choice.

In my OE electives, I prioritized teaching students to cook, camp, hike and appreciate nature. Most of the courses built toward a final trip, where students could put their learned skills into practice. The result was a corps of students who were confident and capable learners outside.

However, all students at my school went on two school trips per year with their core teachers. Many of those trips featured outdoor programming related to science or the humanities and took advantage of tenting as a means of housing students away from the school. Therefore, all students, at some point, needed to be confident and capable outdoor learners.

This realization led to all students at my school having to take OE for half the year in Grades 7, 8 and 9.

I have since transitioned from teaching OE as an elective to teaching OE full-time. While this is a dream come true, it has also challenged my traditional approach to teaching OE.

The main challenge is that many students do not camp or hike. While many are eager to learn those skills, a number of them will not find those activities meaningful or educational (Jewett 1983). Therefore, I feel that the previous framework of building toward a backpacking trip will not help all my students find experiences in OE meaningful.

I do not need, nor does the curriculum require, all students to become campers. However, I do believe that meaningful outdoor experiences have the power to enhance students' lives.

Therefore, I needed to find a way to make OE personally relevant to a now broadened group of students in my school.

The Benefits of Outdoor Experiences

The benefits of spending time outdoors are numerous and can include improvements to health, both mentally and physically (Hartig et al 2014; Louv 2011; Mason et al 2022; Mutz and Müller 2016; Pritchard et al 2020). Time outdoors lowers stress (Corraliza, Collado and Bethelmy 2012); reduces anger and aggression (Younan et al 2016); and improves relationship skills (Chawla 2015). Further, people who feel connected to or a sense of oneness with nature will do more to protect it (Mackay and Schmitt 2019; Pritchard et al 2020).

As an outdoor educator, I have many compelling reasons to help students find meaningful experiences outdoors. Meaningful PE strives to have students engage in a lifetime of movement experiences because they find them joyful (Beni, Fletcher and Ní Chróinín 2017). Similarly, OE should strive to have students engage in a lifetime of joyful outdoor experiences.

I hope that by finding joy in the outdoors, my students will lead active outdoor lives, which will benefit both their own health and wellness and that of our shared environment.

Meaningful PE

Proponents of Meaningful PE argue that PE experiences have the power to enhance students' lives when meaningfulness is the focus (Beni, Fletcher and Ní Chróinín 2017; Kretchmar 2008). This is a departure from the traditional teaching of PE.

In traditional PE teaching, the focus tends to be skill acquisition, performance outcomes and repeated practice. More important, traditional PE tends to place the teacher in charge of instructional decisions, including class management, learner accountability and learner engagement (Metzler 2017).

By contrast, the features of Meaningful PE are as follows (Beni, Fletcher and Ní Chróinín 2019):

- Social interaction
- Fun
- Challenge
- Motor competence
- Personally relevant learning

This shifts the focus away from a standardized outcome toward a more individualized conception of what makes PE and movement meaningful. These five features of Meaningful PE serve as a framework for planning and prioritizing meaningful movement experiences for students (Beni 2021).

Fletcher and Ní Chróinín (2022) add two key pedagogical principles to the concept of Meaningful PE:

- The use of democratic principles (student voice and choice)
- Reflective practice

From Meaningful PE to Meaningful OE

One goal of Alberta's environmental and outdoor education curriculum is a "commitment to action" to "develop lifestyle strategies that foster contact with the natural world, encourage responsibility for [the] local and global environment and encourage living in harmony with others"(Alberta Education 1990, 4)—in other words, an active and responsible lifestyle in the outdoors.

Kretchmar (2000) posits that if students are to adopt an active lifestyle, they must find movement experiences meaningful. Similarly, I would argue that if students are to adopt an active lifestyle in the outdoors, they must find outdoor experiences meaningful.

Meaningful PE promotes student health and wellness by seeking to instill in students the joy of movement through focusing on meaningful experiences, possibly leading to continued movement throughout their lives. Similarly, OE should emphasize meaningful outdoor experiences as a means to instill in students lifelong active participation in the outdoors.

It then follows that meaningful time outdoors can be a "commitment to action" for students to both live an active outdoor lifestyle and be invested in responsible and sustainable relationships with the natural world.

In my commitment to applying the features of Meaningful PE to OE, and keeping in mind the purpose of OE, I have focused on two of the features: social interaction and personally relevant learning.

Planning an Urban Outdoor Experience

Most of our OE trips take place in urban environments, because that is where students spend their school week. OE experiences in city parks and natural spaces are accessible to them on a regular basis.

I created an activity in which students engaged in urban trip planning for an outdoor experience and presented the trip to the class. They would eventually vote on which trip we would actually undertake.

Students selected teams and were given a budget, a basic outline of the day and necessary information to include in

their presentation. The goal was for them to develop meaningful experiences as a shared responsibility (Beni 2021), within the parameters and the budget set before them. Students in my six classes engaged in this autonomy-supportive activity (Sibthorp et al 2008), creating eight or nine trips per class.

Not all the trip plans were fantastic, and most needed more detail and further planning. But many were creative and accessed natural areas or recreation facilities (such as a climbing gym) close to students' home communities. Some trips were based on extracurricular activities that members of the group were involved in.

The mode of travel for the trips varied. Some opted for biking, and some for walking. Others wished to take public transit—a skill all my students had been learning. Students did the research on how to get to and from the activities in their own city. They learned to use tools such as Google Maps and the Calgary Transit trip planner (which would also serve them well outside of school). Many students were surprised to see the number of transit options from the school to their home and how long it might take to get home using transit.

The following are examples of trips my students planned:

- Cycling to Fish Creek Park to cook, play outdoor games and enjoy the creek
- Taking public transit to an indoor climbing gym to learn to climb
- Using public transit to access a large urban natural area and hike, cook and play group games
- Walking to an outdoor rink to skate, make hot chocolate and have fun
- Going skiing during community ski days at a local ski resort

All groups presented their trip plans to their classmates to market their idea ahead of the vote.

Both the trip planning and the presentations proved to be rich opportunities for students to interact and practise their communication skills.

Voting in OE? Of Course!

Each of my six OE classes planned eight or nine trips, so we needed to determine the one trip we would actually undertake in that class. I decided to do so through a class vote.

Upon the suggestion of a Grade 9 humanities teacher, I opted to use a ranked ballot (MPR News 2009). This style of voting would prevent the simple popularity contest that first-past-the-post voting might encourage.

We watched two short videos—one on ranked ballots (MPR News 2013) and one on instant runoff elections (KQED News 2018)—so students could see how their choices could inform the final decision.

On voting day, I posted a list of the trips in the classroom, which now served as a polling station. Three voting stations were set up at the back, and students took turns ranking their first to fourth choices. They then deposited their ballots in a (hastily constructed) ballot box.

In my first-term classes, I took the ballots home over the weekend to tabulate them. However, students informed me that they wanted to be part of that process—democracy in action! As a result, in my second-term classes, we tabulated the results directly after voting. Selected students announced the first choice marked on each ballot as they began the count. They then passed the ballot to a verification group that ensured the results were recorded accurately and kept a running tally on the whiteboard.

At times, the excitement and tension in the room were palpable. Only one class vote was decided by first choice alone. This meant that students got a real-life demonstration of how their second, third and fourth choices influenced the results.

The winners (across the six classes) were two climbing trips, one swimming trip (using public transit) and three cycling trips (including forest and river time and some cooking).

Final Thoughts

Perhaps my approach to OE is a little unorthodox or, at least, nontraditional.

In our OE experiences, we stayed within the city, used public transit and even did some activities indoors (at pools or climbing gyms).

Rickinson et al (2004) define **outdoor education** as the acquisition of knowledge and skills derived from active engagement in activities set in outdoor environments, outside the traditional school environment. However, I feel that indoor OE activities need better framing (Roberts and Welton 2022). For example, indoor climbing can lead to outdoor climbing, and swimming at a pool can lead to canoeing or other outdoor water activities.

Looking to next year, I feel that student-built trips are a must-do activity. Student engagement was high during the planning and presenting. The trips in all the classes saw only a few students absent, including swimming,

which in the past has had a 20 per cent no-show rate in PE among the higher grades. The activity level on all the trips was high, as was the level of enjoyment for students, teachers and parent volunteers.

I think it is so important that students learn that the city can be a source of nature and time outside. Even waiting for a bus proved to be fun, as students invented games to play on the grass nearby.

In the future, I will do a couple things differently. First, I will intentionally build student capacity to take on a "leader-of-the-day" role (Sibthorp et al 2008, 139) if their trip is chosen. Second, to fully capture the learning, I will add a more substantive form of reflection post-trip (Roberts and Welton 2022).

Having students plan and vote on OE trips was an experiment on my part to engage students and create meaningful outdoor experiences. At points, I was learning alongside my students, which made this experience meaningful for me too. I encourage you, even if it seems a bit messy, to try something similar with your classes.

Note

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What Matters Most: Five Ways to Increase Resilience for Teachers

Nancy Luyckfassel

In this article, I share my personal experiences and the resilience strategies I learned as I worked through three of the most difficult years of my life. I hope you will gain insights and strategies you can incorporate into your own life and share with students, colleagues, family and friends.

Life Experiences That Led to My Focus on Resilience

For an elementary school principal, December is always a busy time filled with special activities, extra excitement and, of course, all the usual business. It's not unusual for teachers to feel rundown at that time of year, but we often push through, knowing that the break is on the horizon and we will have the time we need to take care of ourselves.

However, December 2015 was different for me.

Normally an active and healthy 45-year-old, I found myself barely able to make it through the school day. I moved slowly, became breathless after small amounts of activity and coughed incessantly.

I returned home each evening more deeply exhausted than I had ever remembered being. I would try to fight the fatigue but would often fall asleep in front of the TV before 8 PM.

Once in bed, I found the nights offered no reprieve, as drenching sweats and coughing fits interrupted my sleep and had me getting out of bed often to get a lozenge, prop myself up to a sitting position or, on the worst nights, change into a fresh, dry pair of pyjamas.

My five-foot-nine frame, always lean and fit, had withered as I'd dropped more than 10 pounds since the start of the school year.

I rationalized the cause of my symptoms—stress, perimenopause, my new gluten-free diet, a school filled with germs. But when things didn't improve after several weeks, I made an appointment with my family doctor.

That appointment led to X-rays and an early-morning call back to the doctor's office the next day. It wasn't good news. A large mass was visible on my chest, and my doctor said the words I'd dreaded hearing: "It looks like cancer. Possibly lymphoma." I would need a CT scan and a referral to Edmonton's Cross Cancer Institute—most likely for chemotherapy and radiation.

The next weeks became busy in a new way, as I balanced medical appointments (CT scan, PET scan, lymph node biopsy) with teaching, being a principal and getting ready for Christmas.

On December 22, I met with my oncologist, who explained that I had precursor T-cell lymphoblastic lymphoma, stage III BX, 8 on the aggressiveness scale, with an anterior mediastinal mass in my chest that was 25 × 14 × 5 centimetres—the size of a flattened football. It was wrapped around 70 per cent of my heart and pushing on my lungs.

He laid out the treatment plan, the possible side effects and the long-term damage my body would sustain. If all went well, he predicted that I would have a five-year survival rate of 50 per cent.

I endured six cycles of in-patient chemotherapy treatments (each lasting three to five days), which resulted in a variety of side effects: hair loss, steroid weight gain, mouth sores, nausea and nerve damage, to name a few. That was followed by 12 months of maintenance chemotherapy (a monthly chemotherapy infusion and 18 days of oral chemotherapy).

All of that was worth it, though. In June 2017, I was given the best result a cancer patient could hope for—NED (no evidence of disease).

During those two years, in addition to my own cancer journey, I watched my parents travel theirs. My dad, having endured multiple cancer diagnoses and treatments over his lifetime, passed away in fall 2016, and my mom, diagnosed with multiple myeloma in early 2016, passed in spring 2018.

Five Resilience Strategies

Through this trying and difficult time and in the months that followed, I did lots of reading, writing and reflecting.

I knew that I'd changed in monumental ways over those three years, and I'd developed a resilience that I wanted to maintain and nurture in order to keep myself on track and living a healthier, more calm and happy life.

The following five strategies have contributed significantly to building and maintaining my own resilience:

- Practising mindfulness
- Developing self-awareness
- Cultivating purpose and perspective
- Engaging in self-care
- Building strong social connections

My hope is that these strategies serve as a simple reminder that what matters most can change your life and cost almost nothing.

Practising Mindfulness

Mindfulness plays a crucial role in resilience.

First, mindfulness helps us develop a nonjudgmental awareness of our thoughts and emotions. This awareness allows for a more balanced and objective view of challenging situations, reducing the tendency to catastrophize or ruminate on negative experiences (Siegel 2010).

Second, regular mindfulness practice has been shown to reduce stress and anxiety by promoting relaxation and emotional regulation (Baer 2014). By learning to observe our thoughts and feelings without becoming overly attached to them, we can maintain composure in the face of adversity.

When I get wrapped up in the stress of the day and my mind is reeling over the things I need to do, the people I have to answer to and all that seems out of my control, I quietly whisper to myself, "Be where your feet are. Be here, right now."

Developing Self-Awareness

Understanding our strengths and weaknesses, our emotions, and our motivations is fundamental to building resilience.

Understanding our strengths allows us to leverage our talents and abilities when facing challenges. This knowledge builds our confidence and self-efficacy—crucial components of resilience (Rath 2007). By recognizing and making use of our strengths, we can approach difficulties with a sense of competence and optimism.

Emotional intelligence—the ability to recognize, understand and manage our own and others' emotions—is equally important (Goleman and Davidson 2017). People with high emotional intelligence are better equipped to navigate interpersonal conflicts, manage stress and maintain a positive outlook in the face of adversity (Babatunde, Sunday and Adeshina 2023).

An essential component of self-awareness is the capacity for forgiveness, toward both ourselves and others. Self-forgiveness allows us to move past our mistakes and shortcomings, reducing self-blame and promoting emotional healing (Enright 2015). Similarly, forgiving others can release negative emotions and resentment (Kim, Payne and Tracy 2022). Cultivating a forgiving attitude helps us become more emotionally resilient by promoting a compassionate and understanding approach to human fallibility, including our own.

To help myself work through forgiveness, I use Worthington's (2001) REACH acronym, where **R** stands for **recall the hurt**, **E** for **empathize**, **A** for **altruistic gift**, **C** for **commit to forgiveness** and **H** for **hold on to forgiveness**. This process sometimes occurs mentally, sometimes through a conversation with a confidant and often through writing in a personal journal.

Cultivating Purpose and Perspective

A clear sense of purpose gives us direction and motivation, especially during difficult times. When we have a strong why behind our actions, we are more likely to persevere through obstacles and setbacks (Seligman 2011). Purpose can come from various sources, including our values, goals, and commitment to a cause or group.

Hope, the belief that positive change is possible, is a crucial component of resilience (Snyder 2000). When we are hopeful, we approach challenges in a more proactive way. Cultivating hope involves setting realistic goals, developing multiple pathways to achieve those goals and maintaining the motivation to pursue them.

Gratitude, the practice of recognizing and appreciating the positive aspects of our lives, contributes to resilience by fostering a balanced perspective (Emmons 2013). Regularly expressing gratitude has been linked to increased optimism, life satisfaction and overall well-being. By acknowledging the good in our lives (no matter how simple or small), we can maintain a more positive outlook even in the face of adversity.

Each morning, before I get out of bed, I list the many reasons I'm grateful for the day I'm about to start. Using the sentence stem "I get to . . ." helps me frame any

situation as an opportunity to be grateful for. This practice puts a smile on my face and calms my heart as I begin the day.

Engaging in Self-Care

Self-care is fundamental to maintaining the physical and mental energy we need for coping with stress (Neff 2011).

Proper nutrition plays a vital role in supporting both physical and mental health. A balanced diet rich in nutrients provides the energy and resources we need in order to cope with stress and maintain cognitive function (Amen 2012). On the other hand, poor nutrition can exacerbate the negative effects of stress on the body and the mind.

Regular exercise is one of the best habits we can focus on to build resilience (Ratey and Hagerman 2013). As readers of this journal know well, physical activity not only improves overall health but also reduces stress, enhances mood and boosts self-esteem. Exercise can be a healthy coping mechanism and a source of personal achievement, further contributing to resilience.

Adequate rest and sleep are essential for recovery and cognitive function (Walker 2017). Chronic sleep deprivation can impair our decision-making, emotional regulation and stress management—all crucial aspects of resilience. Prioritizing sleep and incorporating restful activities into our days are important components of self-care.

I like to think of my body and mind as a battery that needs good nutrition, exercise and rest in order to recharge—to be at its best. When I don't have time for a full recharge, I do little things to boost myself mentally, emotionally and physically—such as taking a quick walk, looking at photos of people and moments that bring me joy, or putting on some good music and singing and dancing it out.

Building Strong Social Connections

Social support is a critical factor in resilience, providing emotional resources, practical assistance and a sense of belonging (Cacioppo and Patrick 2008). We should aim to build and maintain a network that includes four types of people: supporters, connectors, promoters and extenders.

Supporters provide emotional comfort and encouragement during difficult times. These relationships offer a safe space for vulnerability and help us process our experiences (Gottman and Silver 2015). Cultivating supportive relationships involves reciprocity, trust and open communication.

Connectors facilitate access to new opportunities, resources or people. These relationships expand our network and can provide diverse perspectives and solutions to challenges (Grant 2013). Engaging with connectors often requires stepping out of our comfort zone and being open to new experiences.

Promoters advocate for us and champion our growth and success. They are the people who speak well of us to others when we are not in the room. These relationships can boost our confidence and motivate us to pursue our goals, even in the face of setbacks (Dweck 2006).

Extenders challenge and push us to grow beyond our own perceived limitations. These relationships foster personal development and can help us discover untapped potential (Duckworth 2016). When we are with our extenders, we need to be willing to embrace discomfort and look at challenges as opportunities for growth.

My network includes supporters, connectors, promoters and extenders whom I have built relationships with over months, years and (in some cases) decades of interactions. Some I have known most of my life (my sister, the friend who has been by my side since kindergarten). Some have been my supervisors (a principal, an associate superintendent). Some are the colleagues I taught with. Some are the people who pushed me (a university professor, a department head).

Conclusion

I often think of my "cancerversary" as the delineation point that split my life into before and after.

I think about how I was moving through my days—what I was focused on, what I took for granted and how I lived. I have grown in so many ways since then, and I honestly do give daily attention to the five areas I've discussed here—practising mindfulness, developing self-awareness, cultivating purpose and perspective, engaging in self-care, and building strong social connections. In doing so, I continue to build upon my foundation of resilience, which helps me not only move through the tough moments but also appreciate and be grateful for the many amazing, wonderful moments I am blessed to be here to experience.

I hope that reading this has reminded you of a habit you'd like to renew, a habit you'd like to adopt or (best of all) a person you'd like to reach out to.

My dad had a multitude of sayings, and I'd like to leave you with one: "In our jobs, we are fingers in a glass of water—take the finger out and the hole fills in. But in the lives of those we love, we are nails in a fence—take the nail out and the hole is always there."

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Empowering Beginning Physical Education Teachers and Elementary Generalists: The Mini Legends Program

Tracy Lockwood

In my 30 years of working in education and athletics, I've noted a challenge many teachers encounter: how to teach fundamental movement skills in a way that engages every student.

Given the decrease in physical education (PE) specialists in schools across Canada (Lee 2016), elementary generalists can benefit from support in developing students' fundamental movement skills and physical literacy.

This is where the Mini Legends Program comes in. In this article, I introduce Mini Legends and share tips for implementing similar programs in schools. This work can support beginning PE teachers and K–6 generalists, as well as inspire established PE teachers.

About Mini Legends

Athletics Alberta's Mini Legends Program (https://minilegends.ca) is a dynamic track-and-field initiative designed to support K–6 teachers by promoting physical literacy among children and youth.

Since its inception, Mini Legends has been about more than just physical activity. It's also about delivering engaging, curriculum-aligned content that inspires students to love movement.

The goal of Mini Legends is to provide teachers with engaging tools and activities that enhance physical literacy in their classrooms, making learning fun and inclusive for students of every skill level.

Mini Legends follows the Teaching Games for Understanding (TGfU) approach (Werner, Thorpe and Bunker 1996), which uses fun games and activities to foster fundamental movement skills in a playful and engaging way. Traditionally, PE programs have focused on skill-based drills, especially in areas like track and field. By using the TGfU approach, teachers can promote skill development while keeping students active and engaged. This method not only sharpens students' physical abilities but also enhances their tactical understanding and decision-making skills.

For ideas for integrating TGfU into lessons, check out Ophea's PlaySport (https://ophea.net/playsport) and TGfU guide (https://ophea.net/playsport/teaching-games-understanding-tgfu-approach).

Mini Legends offers three program options to enhance student experiences and inspire PE teachers through techniques and activities that can transfer across a variety of lessons and units:

- Coach-facilitated program. A team of experienced coaches delivers up to five developmentally appropriate lessons to K–6 students. These lessons use track-and-field activities to focus on developing fundamental movement skills.
- Mini Legends Mobile Stadium. Imagine transforming your school gym or outdoor space into a buzzing track-and-field event! Mini Legends sets up seven stations with kid-friendly equipment, allowing students to experience activities such as sprinting, long jump, hurdles and javelin. We spend a full day at your school, with two classes rotating through the stations at a time. Each class participates for one hour so that all students can experience the activities throughout the day.
- The Mini Legends Games. This celebratory whole-school track-and-field day builds school spirit and excitement about physical activity. Teachers guide students through various stations set up by the Mini Legends crew. This is a great way for teachers to see how track

and field can be integrated into larger school events and curriculum-based activities.

Mini Legends has grown rapidly across Alberta and beyond. As of spring 2024, our impact had extended to 50 schools and over 13,000 students, which shows how adaptable the program is for any school or classroom environment. Mini Legends has also partnered with Athletics Canada to bring the program nationwide, demonstrating its effectiveness in fostering physical literacy in a wide variety of communities. This success is a testament to our top-notch coaches, who not only are trained in track and field but also bring experience from a variety of coaching backgrounds.

However, this initiative isn't just about bringing in external coaches. It's about empowering teachers to reimagine how they can engage K–6 students in movement and physical literacy development. Through Mini Legends, teachers can gain new strategies, fresh activities and direct support for enhancing their PE programs.

Tips for Developing Your Own Program

If you want to develop your own school-based track-and-field or broader athletics program, here are some tips.

Start Small

Begin by introducing fundamental movement skills (such as running, jumping and throwing) and consider how these activities can form the basis of an exciting schoolwide event.

Check out The PE Specialist's great online resource on how to plan a field day (www.thepespecialist.com/fieldday/).

Access Readily Available Resources and Equipment

Access free or low-cost resources through local community centres or sports organizations.

Mini Legends offers templates for stations, sample activities and low-cost lesson plans that can serve as a foundation for your program. Also check out resources from Kids' Athletics (https://worldathletics.org/kids-athletics) and Little Athletics Australia's (2007) Great Ideas for Group Games.

Use equipment or materials available at your school:

- Pool noodles—for javelin throws or hurdles in obstacle courses
- Chalk—for marking start and finish lines, hopscotch grids, or target zones for throwing activities
- Cones—for setting up running courses, relay races or station boundaries
- Hula hoops—for target practice (with beanbags or foam balls) or agility drills (jumping, hopping or leaping from one hoop to another)
- Jump ropes—for balance or team challenges
- Beanbags—for throwing or catching activities, relay races, or target games
- Plastic cups—for agility drills (stacked) or lightweight hurdles
- Tennis balls—for throwing practice or catching activities
- Gymnastic mats—for landing zones in jumping activities
- Buckets—for target games (with beanbags, balls or other objects)
- Laundry baskets—for target practice or relay races (with beanbags, balls or other objects)

Partner with Local Experts

Reach out to local sports clubs or community organizations for support. Often, these groups are happy to lend equipment, offer coaching advice or help organize events.

Engage Students

Make it fun! Incorporating games, friendly competitions or team-building exercises encourages participation and engagement. Get students excited by hosting regular mini-events, such as relay races or small school track meets.

Closing Thoughts

Teaching K–6 PE can be difficult, especially for those without training in PE. However, by starting small, accessing community resources, and making activities fun and inclusive, teachers can lay the groundwork for a successful school athletics program.

To learn more about how Mini Legends can support your school's PE programming, connect with us at grassroots@athleticsalberta.com.

Let's inspire the next generation together!

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Activate, the journal of the Health and Physical Education Council of the Alberta Teachers' Association, is a professional journal for physical education teachers in Alberta. Authors are encouraged to submit articles of relevance in either a peer review or editorial review process. Topics may include, but are not limited to, personal explorations of significant classroom experiences; descriptions of innovative classroom and school practices; reviews or evaluations of instructional and curricular methods, programs or materials; discussions of trends, issues or policies; and scientific research.

Manuscripts on other themes will also be considered for publication and may be up to 2,500 words long. References to works cited should appear in full in a list at the end of the article using the author–date system. Photographs, line drawings and diagrams are welcome. To ensure quality reproduction, digital photographs should have a minimum of 300 DPI. A caption and photo credit should accompany each photograph. The contributor is responsible for obtaining consent to use a photo image and written parental permission for any image or works by children under 18 years of age.

Manuscripts should be submitted electronically in Word format. A cover page should include the contributor's name, professional position, address, phone number and e-mail address. A Copyright Transfer Agreement must be completed once a submission is accepted.

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Send manuscripts for future issues to Lisa Taylor at hpecjournaleditor@gmail.com.

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HPEC Mission Statement

The Health and Physical Education Council (HPEC), as a professional organization of teachers, advocates for quality health and physical education programs and provides opportunities for professional growth and development of its members. HPEC is committed to providing leadership in creating healthy, active school communities.

HPEC Vision Statement

Alberta teachers will provide quality instruction and programs in health and physical education to promote the development of healthy, active lifestyles in students.

Objectives

The objectives of HPEC shall be to

- improve curriculum, instruction and assessment in health and physical education through increased knowledge, skills and understanding;
- develop, study and propose professional resources and responses to health and physical education issues;
- ensure that teachers have access to meaningful professional development opportunities that meet their needs throughout all stages of their career;
- enhance the expertise of members by promoting an understanding of current research to inform professional practice;
- liaise with other organizations that seek to promote healthy, active lifestyles within school communities;
- further the continuous development and evaluation of standards and guidelines within the profession for personnel, programs and facilities in health and physical education; and
- facilitate broad-based, skilful participation in the planning and implementation of effective, collaborative, ongoing professional development.

Beliefs

HPEC believes that

- a well-delivered health and physical education curriculum supported by quality instruction can change health behaviours of children and youth in K–12;
- health and physical education plays a valued and vital role in providing a quality, balanced education for all children and youth in Alberta schools;
- all students in all grades in Alberta schools should have the right and opportunity to experience sustained, vigorous physical activity through participation in quality daily physical education programs;
- wellness is an outcome of quality health and physical education programs that develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes to assist students to make appropriate choices to live active, healthy lives; and
- comprehensive school health is the framework for the delivery of quality health and physical education programs to promote and develop wellness in Alberta's children and youth.

From the Executive Handbook of the Health and Physical Education Council (*2021*).

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