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Classroom Teachers and the Challenges of Delivering Quality Physical Education

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ABSTRACT The authors investigated the quality of physical education at 2 elementary schools—1 in which generalist instructors taught physical education and 1 in which a physical education specialist delivered a schoolwide program. Set within the context of increasingly marginalized public school physical education, the discussion incorporates ethnographic data that illustrate the differences in program quality at both schools. The authors present notional support for physical education and practical challenges faced by classroom teachers at the generalist school. Features of the specialist program illustrate how children benefit from educationally sound and well-planned programs.

Key words: classroom teachers, elementary physical education, quality instruction, specialist teachers

Imagine an elementary school gymnasium without winners defeating losers, where children excitedly run through doors that open to a carefully constructed wonderland of tasks and challenges designed to enhance their physical, social, emotional and cognitive development. Imagine groups of girls and boys striving to negotiate their growing bodies through movement successes and failures; imagine that these children, despite their widely variable physical and social maturity levels, play well together, cooperate fairly, communicate respectfully, and exit the gym with smiles on their faces, happy to return to their classrooms but ever so eager for the next opportunity to have “gym” class. Now, imagine this never happens. . . . (Halas, 2004)

Speaking on behalf of the International Council for Sports Science and Physical Education in spring 2000, Hardman and Marshall drew attention to an inescapable reality: Physical education, as a curricular subject, was facing a comprehensive threat to its existence. Hardman and Marshall’s (2001) international survey research highlighted the deteriorating state of physical education in schools worldwide. From one jurisdiction to the next, status reports on physical education highlighted decreased time in the curriculum; inadequate financial, material, and personnel resources; low subject status and esteem; and marginalization by school authorities. Is it a problem that the quality and quantity of the premier physical activity delivery system for the overwhelming majority of our children is limited just as adequate physical activity

is unequivocally recognized as a requirement for children’s health (Health Canada, 2002; U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 1996)?

In North America, the incidence of childhood obesity, Type II diabetes, and the early onset of cardiovascular disease caused by physical inactivity is rising at alarming rates (Ogden, Flegal, Carroll, & Johnson, 2002; Riddoch & Boreham, 2000; Tremblay & Willms, 2000). For the first time, North American children face a future in which experts expect that diminished opportunities for physical activity, both in and outside of the school day, will result in significant health problems (Janzen, 2003/2004). Yet, in spite of warnings from physical educators that “high quality physical education programs are needed now more than ever as sedentary computer-based pursuits continue to occupy students’ leisure time” (Goodwin, Fitzpatrick, & Craigon, 1996, p. 4), a majority of schools in the United States and Canada continue to present physical education as a low priority in the school curriculum. Given the holistic benefits of the physical activity experience, how have the fundamental movement needs of our children become so neglected?

One could argue that our schools were transformed in the early 1990’s as a result of hegemonic control exerted by extranational corporations, that is, privatization through globalization (e.g., Barlow & Robertson, 1994; Klein, 2000) at the dawn of the Information Age (Marshall, 1999). Ideologically driven tax reform commanded funding cuts to public school education.¹ Concurrently, schools were faced with pressure to develop on-time delivery of skilled graduates for the new economy (Kohn, 2003). School districts rewrote education policy to prioritize time and money for teaching basics (language arts, mathematics, science, social studies) and computer skills. Spirited quests to place computer hardware in every classroom forced school boards to reallocate money from programs such as

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music and physical education (Klein, 2000). With less financial support provided by senior levels of government, *specialist subjects* (music, physical education, drama, art) were conveniently relabeled as nonessential curriculum.

Moe Mackendrick, former president of the Canadian Association of Health, Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance, summarized that trend by stating that,

Physical education is not seen as a priority . . . in the '90's. It is under severe attack and faces competition for time within the school curriculum. Often physical education is being taught by generalist teachers with little or no preparation in physical education methods. Additionally, budget cutbacks are impacting negatively on the time and resources required to teach a quality physical education programme. (Hardman & Marshall, 2000, p. 1)

In Ontario, Canada's largest and very wealthy province, Premier Mike Harris's Progressive Conservative government ushered in a Common Sense Revolution that included education reform supported by budget cuts. Within a few years, 22% fewer schools in Ontario reported employing a physical education teacher (Janzen, 2003). In 2001–2002, 68% of schools reported that they did not have a physical education teacher, whereas a mere 18% reported that they had a full-time physical education specialist (Janzen, 2003).

In the United States, superintendents of education acknowledged the need for teacher expertise and preparation as a precursor to quality physical education (Sallis, McKenzie, Kolody, & Curtis, 1996). Notwithstanding that recognition, the National Association for Sport and Physical Education's (NASPE, 2001) "Shape of the Nation Report" indicates that many physical education programs are not taught by qualified teachers. In only three provinces in Canada—Manitoba (the focus of this study), Quebec, and Prince Edward Island—physical education specialists are hired in a majority of the primary schools. The shifting educational discourse has privileged a new bottom line, and it does not guarantee the provision of quality physical education taught by specialist teachers in North American schools.

Demise of Quality Physical Education: A Trivial Problem . . . or One That Warrants Consideration?

The loss of elementary physical education specialists with degree training who provided developmentally appropriate, safe, and effective instruction in the physical, affective, and cognitive domains has taken place with little or no investigation of the impact on student learning or well-being. Physical education research clearly documents the benefits of sound motor skill and fitness development at the primary levels (e.g., improved self-confidence and self-esteem; see Bunker, 1991; Coop & Rotella, 1991) and improved health caused by adequate physical activity (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1996), as well as positive social and emotional outcomes arising from a pedagogically sensitive physical play experience (e.g., improving social skills and learning to play fairly; see

Solomon, 1997; Gibbons, Ebbeck, & Weiss, 1995). Yet, very little research has identified the impact of instruction that is provided by inadequately trained generalist teachers who lack the appropriate qualifications specific to physical education environments.

In their international survey, Hardman and Marshall (2001) described some generalist physical education teachers as *remote-control teachers* (drop students off and return at the end of the lesson, leaving them to do "their own thing") who are not properly trained, provide haphazard lessons or supervised play, or are unprepared to meet "the expectations and responsibilities associated with delivering" new curriculum (Luke, 1999, as cited in Hardman & Marshall, 2001). In many cases, classroom teachers with athletic expertise are recruited to teach physical education although little or no evidence suggests that good athletes make good teachers. Is this a problem? In this 2005 International Year of Sport and Physical Education, do students still have a fundamental right (UNESCO, 1978) to receive instruction from teachers with adequate levels of specialization?

Providing a physical education specialist does not guarantee delivery of a quality program. In fact, the emergence of a strong body of qualitative research in the physical education literature has described, often in poignant detail, the abject failure of physical education to engage students positively in physical education class (e.g., see Carlson, 1995; Champagne & Halas, 2003; Ennis et al., 1997; Fitzpatrick, 2001; Hopple & Graham, 1995; Humbert, 1995; Portman, 1995). Every research study that describes students' positive and negative experiences of physical education provides opportunities to inform our understanding of what constitutes a quality program. New theories emerge that are developed, refined, and often used as curricular resources that inform practice. Teacher training programs challenge preservice students to incorporate a diverse set of pedagogical practices designed to improve the delivery of physical education.

In response to increased government pressure for educational accountability, policy makers have rewritten many physical education curricula to deemphasize the promotion of competitive sports (perceived as meeting the needs of very few students) in favor of health and wellness outcomes for all students (e.g., Manitoba Education & Training, 2002). Physical education teachers are required to translate the new curricula into practice, with the expectation that students will exit our schools as physically educated persons capable of leading healthy, active lives in a North American culture in which physical inactivity is the norm. Janzen (2003/2004) stated emphatically that promoting healthy lifestyles through public school physical education may be the single most effective way for society to meet its obligations to children.

Given the lack of physical education specialists in North American schools, the rise of childhood physical inactivity, and the need for educational accountability regarding recent physical education curricula that promotes impor-

tant health and wellness outcomes, we attempted to understand more fully the effects of teachers working with students in the gymnasium. If the promise of physical education is to be realized, we need to know more about the ecological realities that enable and constrain the delivery of quality programs at the foundation of a child's school (and physical activity) experience, that is, the primary school.

How important are physical education specialists? Can classroom teachers provide quality physical education programs? What is a quality program? Those questions deserve authoritative analysis. Notwithstanding researchers who addressed questions of classroom teacher effectiveness in elementary physical education and effects of teacher training on various outcome variables (e.g., in-class physical activity time, motor skill development; see the *Journal of Teaching in Physical Education's* monograph e.g., Graham, 1991; McKenzie et al., 1995; McKenzie, Marshall, Sallis, & Conway, 2000; Pissanos & Temple, 1990), we used an interpretive approach that enabled the research team to spend time investigating the culture of the learning environment as students and teachers interacted in the classroom and the gymnasium.

When we began this study, we wanted to know what it was like for classroom teachers with varying experience and interest in physical education to perform their day-to-day tasks. We then compared the culture of the physical education program in the generalist school with that of the culture in a specialist school in which a designated physical education specialist directed the overall curricular and extracurricular program. Given the era of cutbacks to physical education specialists, we believed that it was worthwhile to feature a description of what students might have missed when they did not have access to a quality physical education program.

Study Context

As part of a longitudinal investigation into the impact of the quality and quantity of physical education in Manitoba schools (Janzen, Halas, Dixon, Kriellaars, & Doupe, 2002), we undertook interpretive case studies at two elementary schools, including one generalist school in which physical education was taught by each of the classroom teachers at the primary level. Within the context of the worldwide crisis in physical education, Manitoba is viewed as a beacon of hope: Many Manitoba elementary schools employ physical education specialists who are supported by a network of provincial physical education supervisors and leaders who actively develop curricular programs and resources. Although the province is not immune to the pressures affecting programs nationally and internationally (i.e., recent education reform resulted in a loss of active physical education time; see Fitzpatrick, 1998), it is within the contingencies of relatively good public school support for physical education that we present the results of two case studies comparing schools with and without a physical education specialist.

Using ethnographic research methods (i.e., fieldwork observations, interviews, document analysis), we began our report by focusing on the quality of physical education for Grade 1–3 students at Prairie School, which was located in a small, rural community within an hour's drive of a larger urban center in Manitoba. The school demographics included permanent rural dwellers and more transient families who were attracted to the area because of its close proximity to the city, coupled with the advantages of lower municipal taxation rates.

Prairie School was a combined elementary and secondary school that had been described as "an inner city school in the country." Of the 160 children who made up the school population, 80% to 85% rode the bus to and from school, and as many as 3 to 4 students transferred in or out of the elementary school each month. An outstanding feature of the school was its close-knit staff, which was highly dedicated to the students, many of whom had special needs and/or had experienced neglect and abuse. All classroom teachers were responsible for teaching physical education to their students; as is typical in many rural school divisions, these teachers did not have access to a physical education consultant.

We used ethnographic data collected from interviews with three teachers, 11 students, three parents, and the principal, as well as observations of physical education classes (approximately 1 day per week over 6 months, or 23 school visits) to provide an interpretation of the supports, barriers, and constraints that these classroom teachers faced when delivering physical education. Using Patton's (1990) guidelines for data analysis, we presented a number of common themes related to the research questions.² In the final section, we juxtaposed the Prairie School situation next to that of Sunrise School, which had a designated physical education specialist. We therefore hoped to illustrate how the quality of planning and instruction does affect student learning. We concluded the discussion by providing possible solutions for schools without specialists.

Supports to Providing a Quality Program: Physical Education Is Important

A foundation of any education program must be a belief in its value. To that end, the teachers, parents, students, and principal at Prairie School expressed an appreciation for the importance of physical education. In terms of benefits, the social and physical skill development that arises through play was highlighted by the teachers and parents and noted by the students. Playing fair, learning to get along and help others, and learning how to be physically active and lead healthy lifestyles were mentioned as valuable contributions of the physical education class. Contrary to a common perception that physical education lacks relevance as an educational subject (Hardman & Marshall, 2001), teachers at Prairie School perceived it as integral to the overall development of children.

When asked what school would be like without physical education, the Grade 3 teacher responded that

Their [the students'] cooperative play would be weak. I think that would probably be what I would notice [if there was not a gym class] is that they would have a hard time playing group games, you know, even in tag, how to decide who's it, those are the types of skills we're working at, working together, how to play fair, how to deal with a dispute. Those types of things.

Similarly, a parent expressed the belief that physical education involved "teammanship" and "working with others," which was "bound to increase confidence." The teachers' attempts to help students develop their social skills in the affective domain were recognized by 2 students: 1 student who, when asked what she learned in physical education replied, "Um, to play with other kids" and the 2nd student, when asked to describe gymnasium in three words said, "We listen. We have fun. And we cooperate."

Regarding physical health benefits, when asked what they learned in "gym" and why it was good for them, 1 student replied that it "gives your heart exercise and energy and makes your muscles strong"; another student commented that it "gets your body all stretched out." A 3rd student added a cautionary word about the lack of physical activity: "... if you get too weak then you won't be able to do anything, really." The teachers, parents, and principal also recognized physical development as an important goal of physical education, and the carryover effect of learning skills in physical education was particularly emphasized. When we asked what they perceived as the purpose of physical education, one teacher replied,

I just really think it's an important thing for kids to be able to get out and move around. . . . they become more aware of their bodies, their movements. I think with grade three's especially, their motor skills are developing more finely and they're starting to fine tune and so they can start challenging themselves trying harder things, newer things, more skills.

Another teacher stressed the importance of teaching students how to be physically fit because "If they don't get it in the school, a lot of them won't get it at home." That sentiment was reinforced by some parents who worried that their children might not be active enough at home and looked to the school for help in this area. One parent explained, "It's not that you are relying on the school to be doing that, but it would be nice to know that they [children] are being physically active at school." Another parent reflected on patterns of sedentary living.

It's easy to get into a habit of coming home and perhaps dropping in front of the television, or you know, that's not fit. And then it's good to see them using their bodies and getting active, enjoying themselves. . . .

Parent support is a key determinant of children's engagement in physical activity (O'Loughlin, Paradis, Kischuk, Barnett, & Renaud, 1999), so the positive response from parents regarding the importance of physical education and its ben-

efits to students beyond the school day was encouraging. Classroom teachers valued the contribution of physical education to the social and physical development of their students. The principal spoke of physical education as providing "lifelong skills" related to physical fitness and health.

In the presence of the positive affirmations by parents, teachers, and the principal, a question arises: Is a belief in the value of physical education enough to guarantee the delivery of a quality program that leads to the achievement of learning outcomes? As a guide to our ongoing analysis, we incorporated the National Association for Sport and Physical Education's (NASPE, 1995) definition of a physically educated person as a means to evaluate program effectiveness. According to NASPE standards, a *physically educated* person is one who

1. has learned skills necessary to perform a variety of physical activities;
2. is physically fit;
3. participates regularly in physical activity;
4. knows the implications of and the benefits from involvement in physical activities; and
5. values physical activity and its contribution to a healthful lifestyle.

Having examined briefly what students, teachers, parents, and principal reported about the importance of physical and social development through physical education, in the following section we explored some of the barriers that prevent the physical education program from meeting those outcomes.

Barriers and Constraints to a Quality Program

Lack of Training and Knowledge Effects on Developmentally Appropriate Teaching

All of the classroom teachers promptly acknowledged their inadequate specialist training and the resulting lack of knowledge. One teacher simply said that she was not certain what she was doing because "I'm not a phys. ed. person." That uncertainty was echoed by the other teachers. A second teacher concurred that the hardest part of teaching physical education was her lack of knowledge, admitting that "It would be much better for the kids, I think, if we had a phys. ed. specialist who kind of knew their stuff a bit more." A third teacher described her struggle in terms of planning and knowledge of sports, activities, and games, stating that her understanding was "fairly limited so it's trying to collect enough information to be able to run the program the way it should be done."

Regarding classroom teachers having to teach physical education, the principal empathized with the concerns expressed by the teachers.

I really feel sorry for them because we wouldn't ask teachers to teach music, for example, with no training and, but yet, we do with phys. ed. I think there's more games, rather than structured activities. I'd like to see more. Like, it's more each

teacher does his or her own thing. It doesn't really build up. What I'd like to see more is for example, mini-volleyball and then see it, like, different skills added each year rather than we just play volleyball.

The principal noted that teachers were limited in their ability to provide lessons that were developmentally appropriate and varied in terms of an effective scope and sequence of curricular content. As a consequence, there was evidence that some students became discouraged by their experiences in the gym, as captured in the following field-note observation of a Grade 3 class paired up to play volleyball:

None of the kids (with the exception of one or two) seem to know how to volley/bump, yet those were the instructions. Near the end of class, one pair of very small girls are allowed to both play on the same side of the net. They had been trying all through class, but could not hit it over the net. At one point, the teacher does say, "the net should probably be lower."

The girls' progress might have been enhanced if the teacher had been more familiar with developmentally appropriate skill progressions to encourage incremental successes for that particular activity. In the absence of preservice training in physical education and the support of a physical education consultant to provide guidance, the students were left to adapt to inadequate instruction as best they could and often fell short of achieving the skills necessary to perform a variety of physical activities (NASPE, 1995).

Gender

Parents and teachers also identified gender as problematic in the physical education classes and, as our field notes and interview transcripts illustrate, teacher practices may have unwittingly reinforced stereotypical constructs of boys as being aggressive and good at sports and girls as being inherently less skilled and more passive. For example, the following field observation captures an interaction between a girl and a boy in one of the class activities.

The teacher divides them [the class] into their groups of four, and the one boy and girl who are left over play at the net nearest me. The boy is very agile and is easily able to maneuver the ball around the girl, who tries to block at first. She seems shy and is not aggressive at all with her blocking attempts. The boy basically scores point after point, and eventually the girl gives up and just stands limply between the boy and the net, arms at her sides.

Patterns of inactivity can begin at an early age, and as theories of learned helplessness indicate (Martinek & Griffith, 1994) the more students experience failure in performing a physical task, the more determined they may become to avoid the activity. In the scenario described in the preceding paragraph, the situation might have been avoided if the teacher had placed students with similar skills in similar groups, or if the students had been exposed to a cooperative-learning environment (e.g., see Dyson, 2002), the better

skilled boy might have been able to assist his lesser skilled classmate. The example demonstrates how inappropriately designed physical education experiences may socialize young girls (and lesser skilled boys) off the playing court.

During interviews, we also asked the students to describe how the boys and girls played together in gym class as well as at recess. Many responses pointed to a separation of games according to gender. When asked if girls liked playing soccer in gym class, a Grade 1 girl responded that she did not like to play soccer "cause it's always wasting our time, and we don't get to play any games." Similarly, the following series of conversations illustrate how gender was implicated in the choice of activities inside the gym and on the playground:

Researcher: What would you prefer to play, instead of soccer?

Student: Um, dodgeball.

Researcher: Dodgeball? Okay. Do you think you play the gym class activities as much as the boys do?

Student: We usually play house outside and . . . babies, girl's stuff.

As researchers, we observed more interaction between the Grade 3 girls and boys at recess (as compared with Grade 1 students) and asked one of the Grade 3 girls to explain their participation.

Researcher: I would like to know what you like to do at recess.

Student: Well, like sometimes we, I play on the swing with Jane (a pseudonym) and we play Daddy, so we chase the boys around.

However, the Grade 3 girls did not like playing the "boys' games" in gym class.

Researcher: So would you say in your class that in the gym or outside the gym, when you are playing a game, do you think that the boys participate as much as the girls? Is it about equal?

Student: No, the girls don't participate 'cause we don't like the game. Like, they are more boyish.

Although many environmental influences socialize children to think in terms of "girls' games" and "boys' games," one factor that we observed in the physical education class may be the practice of separating girls from boys. For example, during throwing, the pairings were girl-girl and boy-boy. In some classes, the teacher organized the activities by gender; boys played one type of game while the girls played another type. One girl who mentioned that the boys' sports were hockey, soccer, and basketball and a girls' sport was Dr. Dodgeball concluded that ". . . sometimes it's fun doing boys' sports." The practice of separating groups by gender as opposed to factors such as skill can normalize gender differences as natural, thus reinforcing the idea that girls and boys are different when it comes to physical activity.

Current research illustrates unequivocally how gender equity needs to be a major focus in quality physical education programs (e.g., see Ennis, 1999; Humbert, 1995; LeDrew, 1997). Specialist teachers can be trained to construct physi-

cal activity experiences that are meaningful and relevant to boys and girls (Lock, Minarik, & Omata, 1999) and do not privilege the boys. A physical education specialist has training in physiological and sociological gender influences and may have a deeper understanding of when it is and is not appropriate for boys and girls to play together. Gender-equity training promotes the need for teachers to recognize and interrupt stereotypical gender patterns that encourage girls to be less active than boys, thus discouraging girls from participating actively in regular physical activity (NASPE, 1995). That type of pedagogical intervention was absent in our observations of the classroom teachers.

Safety

Developmentally inappropriate lessons are not only educationally unsound but also can produce unsafe conditions, however unintentional. In one of the gym classes that we observed, the children were using adult-sized nets for goals and were swinging from the upper crossbars. Suddenly, one of the heavy metal nets toppled over and the children were trapped underneath. Although no one was injured, the incident raises concern regarding the inappropriate use of large equipment. During a running game in another class, a student struck his leg on a bench that was covered by volleyball nets. Metal hockey nets and volleyball standards became obstacles for students to negotiate as they ran around the gym. Another accident occurred when a student stood up from sitting on a chair located between two sets of bleachers. As she stepped out from between the bleachers, a passing student crashed into her. Situations such as those would have been diminished or eliminated had the teachers been trained to identify safety issues unique to a gym setting. A physical education specialist receives training specific to safety and liability issues in the gym, which includes sensitization to minimize potentially dangerous situations.

In the United States and Canada, updated policy documents clearly identify safe practices for all activities in the gymnasium (e.g., Manitoba Physical Education Teachers' Association, 2001). Moreover, teachers are legally responsible for ensuring that safe conditions are provided in their physical education classes. Unfortunately, many classroom teachers may not be aware of their responsibilities nor realize potential hazards that are inherent to physical activity environments. Simply stated, safety is an issue that must be addressed proactively in all schools. Generalist teachers may not be trained to minimize safety concerns in the physical education class, thus placing students at risk for injury in their classes.

Planning: Poor Logistics of Gymnasium Sharing

As with many smaller schools located in rural settings, the elementary children at Prairie School shared the gymnasium with the secondary school, which posed logistical problems for lesson planning. Typically, the elementary teachers had little control over the type of equipment that

was already set up from the previous gym class and often were pressed to adapt their lesson plans accordingly. A teacher explained that gym sharing was increasingly problematic during various seasons of the year.

Sometimes, because we share with the high school, during volleyball season, the nets are left up and if I'm planning something that doesn't involve volleyball, which is something that . . . I don't do a lot of volleyball. I usually practice a few skills with volleyball, but my kids aren't strong enough to get the ball over the net so the nets serve me no purpose and they're not taken down, and when they're not taken down that sometimes becomes a problem because it's hard to organize my space.

As one teacher indicated, sharing gym space with the high school is not the only problem but also the fact that other elementary teachers independently use the gym, meaning that each of these teachers must frequently adjust at the last minute. Without a coordinated effort for synchronizing activity units, teachers often were constrained in their efforts to deliver the lesson they had planned. That problem was accentuated because teachers had no access to the gym prior to class to set up, which also reduced students' in-class activity time. The Grade 1 teacher said that the teachers wanted a physical education specialist at their school. She described the problem as "having to set up depending on your activity, and then having to clean up, which doesn't leave you much time. Whereas if you were the gym teacher then you would organize your activities from one class to another."

As the Grade 1 teacher stated, scheduling difficulties would have been minimized if one teacher had been responsible for all classes in the gym. A specialist would have organized classes in a manner that decreased the amount of equipment set up and dismantle time, thus leaving optimal time for physical activity that was planned according to a comprehensive scope and sequence of lesson objectives. At Prairie School, the logistical problems of gym sharing drastically curtailed opportunities for a logical progression of curricular content, thus ensuring that scaffolding from one skill lesson to the next did not happen. In reality, lesson content often was predicated on whatever activity the previous teacher had organized for the students. That approach is not an effective way for teachers to organize education programs nor to enhance children's acquisition of knowledge and skills necessary for leading physically active and healthful lifestyles (NASPE, 1995).

Planning: Who Purchases Equipment?

At Prairie School, gym sharing with the high school not only raised logistical issues but also highlighted the lack of suitable equipment for the elementary students. Although all of the teachers as well as the principal were aware of the lack of developmentally appropriate physical education equipment, they made no concerted effort to address the problem. The teachers often spoke of the lack of suitable equipment and how that deficiency affected skill learning.

Well, because it's a high school gym, I know in the elementary, they usually have those ladders and the frames on the walls. We don't have anything like that to do something a little bit different . . . I find that there's not an awful lot like I say, equipment for the younger kids, or . . . well, first, if we do badminton we'd have to try using big plastic birdies, cause it's easier to hit than a regular birdie. But I think there's two of those, if you could find them.

A lot of our stuff is geared for the high school students so I find, like we have a few basketballs that are for the little kids which is much easier for them to handle because they're just a little bit smaller so you find the motor skills coordination with the small balls is much better than with the large ones, but I think we only have four or five small ones.

The multiple curricular demands on generalist teachers to organize their classrooms are great. The coordination of teacher groups to identify a list of shared equipment needs and then to lobby for a budget for purchasing equipment requires an informed commitment to physical education. Relatively inexpensive equipment needs that could have addressed the problem of having "two birdies for a class of 20" were shuffled to the sidelines as isolated teachers concentrated on delivering other academic demands. Undervaluing the provision of adequate equipment makes it difficult for teachers to encourage students to value physical activity and its contribution to healthful lifestyles (NASPE, 1995).

Planning: Lack of Extracurricular Activities

At Prairie School, budgetary restrictions were exacerbated by the absence of a physical education specialist, which also limited the quality and quantity of extracurricular activities. In a quality physical education program, intramurals and extracurricular activities are considered essential to the overall education program (Canadian Association of Health, Physical Education, and Recreation, 1989). Typically, the physical education specialist leads the physical education program and enlists the help of classroom teachers and outside volunteers to supervise and organize lunch-time and after-school activities. Given that socioeconomic status affects children's ability to access out-of-school recreational and leisure opportunities (O'Loughlin et al., 1999), opportunities for physical development during school time become even more important for poor families.

Many Prairie School students did not have the opportunity to participate in extracurricular activities after school. The staff and an active parent council did their best to provide items that were not covered in the school budget, such as skates and warm outerwear for students in need. Other examples of their efforts included a medieval dance day that they planned for March. The school did attempt to bring in activity specialists in different areas whenever possible (e.g., local "experts" for mini-volleyball). However, because of the school's rural location, most activity specialists had to travel long distances, which increased costs and limited the number of options provided each year.

Although it was distressing to the staff that many students had few opportunities for extracurricular activity aside from that offered at the school, they believed that they were ill-equipped to address students' physical activity needs. Attention was focused first on more basic needs, such as the breakfast program initiated by the principal for students who were not getting proper nutrition at home. The lack of extracurricular programming was acknowledged by teachers, the principal, and parents. The teachers and principal cited the small town and farm demographics of the community as a factor for limited participation. The principal was particularly concerned.

For a lot of children . . . physical education is very important in the sense that we have to give them some experiences that many of them will not get otherwise. A lot of them are, as I said, are neglected. Some have everything: they've got all kinds of classes and everything. But others don't have anything other than what they have at school, which is one of the reasons that we started the skating program.

Parents also acknowledged the lack of extracurricular activities in the community, stating that they often have to drive students to the city for activities. The need for school-based activities was readily recognized.

And I know he [son] would love to get into programs . . . and that's not possible. Even when I was growing up, all that happened through the school. There always seems to be a lot of emphasis on like ice hockey, but there's lots of other things that they can do, aren't there?

With the high school gym dedicated to the extracurricular activities of the secondary students, and in the absence of a teacher designated to build the physical education program, the extracurricular activities offered at Prairie School were limited. When extracurricular programming relies on the voluntary efforts of interested teachers who are not given time or specific responsibility for the program, the physical activity needs of children are not met, particularly for those students growing up in lower income communities. In the absence of a physical education specialist, that aspect of a quality program is underdeveloped and does little toward promoting children's physical fitness, acquisition of skills, and access to opportunities for regular physical activity (NASPE, 1995).

Synopsis: "We're Doing the Best We Can"

Physical education at Prairie School was touted as being important for the physical and affective development of its students, particularly because many of the students were not involved in extracurricular activities in the community. Grade 1 to Grade 3 students were enthusiastic about physical education and, for the most part, highly motivated in the gym. When asked how they felt when going to gym class, students responded: "Happy" and "I feel excited because everybody, we get to run around and stuff." When asked what classes made students excited about coming to school, 1 student replied "Sweet gym," and others pulled at

their clothing with tongues hanging out in mock exhaustion as they exited the gym, making exaggerated statements like "I'm melting!"

That enthusiasm corresponded to a previous research study documenting the positive attitudes toward physical education of elementary students in Manitoba (Manitoba Education and Training, 1995). However, in a survey of Nova Scotia students in Grades 4–6, Rahim and Marriner (1997) found that children had significantly more positive attitudes in physical education programs taught by specialists as opposed to nonspecialists. In the Prairie School, the positive feelings expressed by the students could comfort the classroom teachers who were, as one teacher expressed, "doing the best we can" regarding teaching physical education.

The issues that arose as obstacles to a quality program at Prairie School can be distilled into two main categories: (a) lack of training or knowledge for developmentally appropriate lessons, which also affected issues of safety and gender and (b) lack of planning and informed leadership for the overall program that accounted for the problematic issues of facility quality, program content, organizing and purchasing equipment, and coordinating an extracurricular program. Our findings are comparable with those of a Belgian study (Piéron, Cloes, Delfosse, & Ledent, 1996), in which classroom teachers participating in a pilot study noted that their interest and belief in physical education did not result automatically in successful practice. "Teachers identified difficulties mainly in terms of practical organization (timetables, facilities, availability) but also felt some inadequacy in teaching physical and sports activities" (p. 130).

At Prairie School, the teachers' belief in the importance of physical education was an undeniable asset, yet, our data indicate that their efforts to deliver a quality program were constrained by a number of interrelated factors unique to program delivery provided by generalist teachers. Consequently, the development of physically educated students who had the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to achieve healthy, active lifestyles (NASPE, 1995) were not being fully realized at the generalist school.

Quality Daily Physical Education in Theory and in Practice

In the Introduction to this article, Halas (2004) described an imaginary gym class in which readers could visualize the possibilities of a quality physical education program. In the remainder of this article, we report on a program that successfully delivers on that promise. We hoped to accentuate the qualitative differences that exist when teachers (a) are not constrained by a lack of specialist knowledge and training related to physical activity environments and (b) have the opportunity to develop sequentially an overall plan for students' development through physical education. Given the deterioration of physical education in our schools, researchers need to

draw attention to the impact that a specialist teacher can have on student learning.

Sunrise School, the second school in our study, was a small urban elementary school with approximately 150 ethnically diverse students from kindergarten to Grade 6. Sunrise School was situated in a fairly close-knit community of mainly blue-collar workers; approximately 45% of the families were single-parent or blended families. Many students attended daycare before and after school, as well as at lunch, as the daycare facility was located directly across from the school. Sunrise School had a small staff of teachers, including one physical education teacher, Ms. Martin (a pseudonym). Although in her 1st year at Sunrise School, Ms. Martin had taught for 5 years in two rural schools. As with Prairie School, we spent 1 day per week for half a year collecting data through observations, interviews, and document analysis.

A priori, Ms. Martin's personal philosophy of teaching guided her daily interactions with students in the gym. During a number of interviews and conversations with the research team, Ms. Martin clearly articulated a well-developed and thoughtful approach to teaching physical education. Her expressions of theory were observable during her classes, and there was much to learn by watching how she engaged with students in ways that affected their psychosocial and physical development.

As was evident in the commentary provided by parents and educators at Prairie School, physical development is not the only expectation of physical education in schools; teachers increasingly have to deal with all aspects of a child's psychosocial development. As an illustration of how a child's development is facilitated through instruction, we present a short description of Ms. Martin's physical education program. In particular, we explain how, in her 1st year at the school, she implemented an effective program that clearly addressed a number of physical and psychosocial learning outcomes. We have identified four interconnected program features that, when viewed as a whole, produced a highly successful physical education experience for students. Those features emphasized basic movement skills, noncompetitive environments, variety for life-long participation, and positive social development.

Emphasis on Basic Movement Skills

The development of basic movement skills at the elementary school level is considered fundamental to children's acquisition of personal resources that enable children to experience some measure of success in a variety of activities. Bunker (1991) stated that children's motor skills performances in Grades 1 to Grade 3 reflect the types and number of opportunities that they have had to develop them. Although the development of fundamental movement skills should be an overarching goal of all primary physical education programs, the example of Prairie School illustrates how these goals often are not obtained through

effective teaching. That lack of obtained goals was not the case in Ms. Martin's class.

Ms. Martin relied on a colorful, computer-generated yearly plan that she developed to outline, in specific detail, which skills and activities she introduced during the school year. During every gym class, skills were taught in progressions that were developmentally appropriate so that students could achieve at the first level of a skill before moving on to the next more challenging skill progression. Students were able to work through transport, manipulative, and balance skills as outlined in the "Step by Step" resource material that was developed by a neighboring school division. The pace was fast enough so that high achievers were not bored and slow enough so that those with difficulty had time to practice. During skill learning, Ms. Martin circulated through the gym and offered encouragement and corrective feedback. She stressed continually in her verbal pronouncements to the class that "everyone is different and moves at their own pace."

With a keen eye on each student's progress, Ms. Martin watched constantly for students who had any type of difficulty. She noted that there always will be some students who have developmental difficulties or who just need extra help to learn certain skills. To address the needs of individual students, Ms. Martin initiated a basic motor skills class to provide extra instruction and practice. Being asked to attend those classes was not stigmatized within the school, and the students were happy to spend extra time in the gym. They enjoyed the individualized attention, and as a result, often became more confident in their abilities. After one basic motor skills class in which a young girl worked on practicing a variety of patterns in skipping, she excitedly returned to her next physical education class and showed her friends and Ms. Martin how much she had improved by calling out, "Look what I can do! Look what I can do!"

As part of the process of developing confidence, Ms. Martin wanted students to persevere when attempting any new skill. She reminded students constantly to "keep on trying," and the encouragement seemed to effect positive change. In our observations, the rate of students who sat on the gym bench in lieu of participating decreased substantially from September, when we began our fieldwork, to April, when we last visited the school. Viewed from various perspectives, the message to try, try, and try again seemed to have been accepted by the students, including those who were lesser skilled and reluctant. That type of student behavior and commitment to skill learning was not seen in the generalist school.

Noncompetitive Environments

The higher participation rates that we observed in the physical education classes might be attributed in part to the noncompetitive environment in the gym. As an example of what LeDrew (1997) called "female-friendly values," Ms. Martin's philosophy was that there are no winners or losers in physical education; everyone is out there for the fun of

being active. During classes and intramural activities, keeping score was not allowed, which initially was difficult for some students to accept. Yet, as time passed in the class, the importance of scorekeeping seemed to diminish in the judgment of the less-convinced students, which suggested that rituals such as competition were not such a difficult habit to break.

As another means to deemphasize competition, Ms. Martin encouraged students to achieve the best that they could and discouraged them from comparing themselves with others. At the end of a game, whether organized in pairs for one-on-one or in teams, the students traded roles, teams traded sides, or everyone moved on together to the next activity. For example, Ms. Martin used a modified tag game that incorporated choral activities and role playing. Students were told to work together to produce an idea, act out the decided-upon idea, and join the opposite team if they were tagged during the game. Consequently, students changed teams frequently and worked in different groups. Lunch-time relay activities and intramural games were played across grade levels, which challenged students to solve problems such as incorporating different skill levels or finding solutions to rule breaking and aggressive participants. Because winning and losing were not identified as important by Ms. Martin, students learned to associate the end of a game not with the outcome but with the chance to play another game or to move to a new activity. As with other nontraditional learning climates (Halas, Champagne, & van Ingen, 2003), Ms. Martin encouraged students to compete with and not against each other.

The cooperative ethos appeared to help downplay the boy-girl gender distinctions that were made in the gym, which was in direct contrast with situations we observed at Prairie School. We believe that that cooperation resulted because Ms. Martin focused on basic movement skills that enabled students to acquire a minimal competence to engage in activities that were organized in a noncompetitive atmosphere. Without the fundamental skill instruction on how to move or the deemphasis on competition that typically distinguished skilled movers from less skilled movers, students were less engaged in the gym. By deemphasizing boy-girl differences, Ms. Martin also communicated the idea that physical activity in the gym is for everyone, regardless of gender and skill. In doing so, Ms. Martin established positive attitudes for lifelong participation at an early age.

Variety for Lifelong Participation

Motor learning research has demonstrated that children with varied experiences learn new skills and acquire sports skills better than do those without those experiences (Schmidt, 1988, as cited in Bunker, 1991). At Sunrise School, students participated in a large variety of activities. Ms. Martin purposefully introduced novelty, which added interest to each lesson plan and challenged students to transfer skills to different contexts. The school provided a

large variety of equipment, including balls of all sizes and forms, noodles, scooters, and so forth. Therefore, Ms. Martin allowed students to practice basic skills by using the type of object that not only fit their skill level but also maintained their interest. For example, Ms. Martin enhanced throwing activities by adding rubber chickens to the mix. She also borrowed equipment from the school division equipment pool, including lacrosse and juggling materials. Ms. Martin held a monthly fitness run accompanied by music, and the children's favorite music was incorporated into group activities, dance, and special activity days held at the school.

Showing a desire to continually add to the physical education program, Ms. Martin began a leadership group for students in Grades 5 and 6. Under her direction, the leadership students introduced a successful spirit day and spirit week. Although some teachers initially were reluctant to interrupt the school day with the new student-led activities, the positive vibes that resonated throughout the school changed their perceptions and positively affected the overall school climate. The leadership group also assisted with the intramural "house" system and refereed lunch-time activities in the gym.

Because of the high number of lower income families within the school district, a majority of the Sunrise School students did not have opportunities for extracurricular activity outside of school. Recognizing that aspect of her students' cultural landscape, Ms. Martin increased the number and variety of intramural and extracurricular school programs. She started after-school basketball and volleyball teams for the higher grade levels and offered unique activities such as a ski day. Overall, Ms. Martin provided variety in her classes and during extracurricular time, a programming feature that was not available at the generalist school. The fact that she did not have to spend as much time correcting papers and preparing lessons across subjects as did the generalist teachers might have enabled her to commit the extra time and energy required to organize before- during- and after-school activities.

Teaching Affectively Through Physical Education

The gym, by nature, is a social place and is qualitatively different from the regular classroom in that children can move freely in larger spaces. Beyond movement skill development and the benefits of physical activity, learning to move in group-oriented environments also provides an appropriate space for teaching social skills (McHugh, 1996). As part of learning in the affective domain, Solomon (1997) provided ideas of how physical education can have a strong influence on character development. By focusing on the social-emotional nature of physical movement, physical education teachers can help students become well-adjusted, self-assured members of society (Tomme & Wendt, 1993).

One reason for Sunrise School's successful program was

that development of social skills was an area of constant attention for Ms. Martin, who recognized that "many students have not been exposed to cooperative values in their environments, whether at home or at school, nor have they had cooperative values positively reinforced." Therefore, she used consistent conflict resolution strategies and proactively raised problem-solving scenarios that promoted the development of social skills. She also was vigilant about how students interacted with each other at all times, especially as noise levels rose in what some teachers referred to as the characteristic chaos of the gym. Ms. Martin, however, believed that lots of noise was a sign that students were enjoying themselves and that they were engaged positively in the class activity. The only time that noise was not encouraged was when directions were given or when a student was trying to ask or answer a question.

As part of her yearly plan, Ms. Martin purposefully included instructional strategies that she used to promote character development in every activity unit. She used two character-building strategies outlined by Solomon (1997): (a) She addressed the implications of behavior as situations arose and (b) she intentionally presented students with dilemmas, challenging them to use their problem-solving skills. As an example of the blending of both strategies, students played a *musical hoops game*, in which one hoop was removed each time the music stopped. Students had to find ways to share hoops, and eventually all students shared the one remaining hoop. "Pushers" and "nonsharers" were out until the next round or were directed to take a brief time out, during which they could reflect on why they were excluded briefly from the activity.

As examples of proactive activity, Ms. Martin conducted group discussions about safety, noncompetition, and moral dilemmas (e.g., perceptions of cheating) that frequently occur in the gym. If the children made fun of a student in the class, Ms. Martin asked them to think about something that they were not good at yet, and how it would affect them if someone were to comment on their lack of ability in that area. Teasing and name calling were not allowed and were addressed consistently. Ms. Martin also incorporated written journals for the Grade 3 class to further encourage reflection on issues arising in the gym.

When issues arose, as they often did, Ms. Martin chose from a repertoire of conflict resolutions. Those resolutions included students filling out a short form that prompted them to reflect on their behavior, taking a time out, or participating with Ms. Martin in a short discussion about the incident. Depending on the type of problem, she encouraged students to discuss conflicts with each other before addressing complaints to her. Many of the problems that did arise were of an interpersonal nature; in several instances, rule breaking, tattling, crying, arguing, or difficult behaviors challenged the possibilities for students to carry on with the class as planned. As Ms. Martin explained,

It doesn't allow you to do some of the activities that you might enjoy to do. It takes you back a step. They can't get

along, so you work a lot more on the cooperative activities, teamwork, and building . . . building blocks that go on to other activities. So I guess some of the social aspects make it a little bit more of a challenge . . . more than a barrier, to . . . to make it a successful program.

Ms. Martin incorporated extrinsic rewards (e.g., Fair Play certificates with gifts donated from local businesses) to acknowledge personal improvement, which became a popular motivator for students.

Overall, Ms. Martin's conscious efforts to plan lessons that proactively addressed issues that frequently arose in class resulted in many positive changes in class behavior over the course of the school year. One challenge for Ms. Martin was that many children had different sets of rules that applied in different contexts, which made it all the more important that she communicated consistent expectations. As she explained, children "have different rules in different places, and the changes of the rules in various places is sometimes difficult for young children to understand and to work with and we try to be consistent here to help them with that." Again, Ms. Martin's consistent attention to those issues proved successful: Over the evolution of the school year, students increasingly displayed behaviors indicating that they were aware of what was expected of them and that they worked well as part of a team. Given the rich texture of the unfolding social interactions that occurred within any given physical education class, Ms. Martin capitalized on opportunities to influence the psychosocial development of students.

Summary: Invitation to an Active, Healthy Life

Graham (1995) stated that students, "as early as 8 years old, not only can understand but can describe the purposes of a physical education program when it is clearly understood by teachers—and is continually stated" (p. 478). At Sunrise School, students responded to Ms. Martin's highly organized, well-planned and inclusive gym environment by excitedly joining in each day's activities. As Solomon (1997) stated, attention to the psychomotor, cognitive, and affective domains challenges students to reach their potential in a variety of contexts. The gym is a place where students can feel good about themselves, and Ms. Martin's positive attitude toward physical activity was obvious to her students. The gym was where fun happened, and Ms. Martin welcomed everyone by using the word "inviting"; students were invited to participate, invited to reenter a game after a time out, and invited to try new challenges. When Ms. Martin translated her pedagogical theories into practice, students knew that physical education was about inclusivity: "No one sits out—everyone participates."

Although this article is a brief description of one specialist program, it is worthwhile that we highlight how a well-articulated philosophy is often a precursor to effective practice. As Ms. Martin said,

(In physical education), you don't have to be a winner, you don't have to be a loser in the activities. We're out there for the fun of the game, in the spirit of the game, but we don't have to play by the high level of the rules of an elite game . . . we want to encourage others to participate, too, so the more that are involved, the more fun it would be for everyone. And I'm hoping that some of them will take that knowledge with them and be active as they grow old.

If a quality physical education program can affect future physical activity, the example of Ms. Martin's gym provides insight into how a specialist teacher can qualitatively provide an effective program that engages all students, particularly when the message is "Get busy, have fun, and be good."

Toward Quality Physical Education: Designating a Physical Education Specialist in the Classroom

At Prairie School, the teachers believed that they did not have the knowledge they needed to, in the words of one of the teachers, ". . . run the program the way it should be done." Yet, that is not the only issue; even a classroom teacher with specialist training would be challenged to meet the multiple curricular demands of the various courses that they teach on a daily basis. Add to the mix the problematic nature of gym sharing, and it becomes evident how the delivery of quality physical education is constrained in generalist schools. Prior to teaching at Sunrise School, Ms. Martin had an appointment as a classroom teacher in an isolated community in northern Manitoba. She explained that she could never run the same quality of program as she did at Sunrise School because the supports were lacking in terms of preparation time, coordination of instruction across grade levels, and opportunities to develop schoolwide extracurricular activities.

Fortunately, there are solutions. In a best case scenario, all of the problematic areas could be addressed by schools' hiring a physical education specialist. Yet, in the absence of financial resources, other possibilities exist. If the school administration is committed to delivering a quality physical education program, yet lacks funding to add a specialist position, one option is to hire a "designated" physical education specialist as a classroom teacher. Although appointed to teach Grade 6, for example, that teacher could be designated to deliver some or all of the physical education classes for other teachers in the school by arranging for teachers to swap classes. During the Grade 2 physical education time slot, the Grade 2 teacher could take over the physical education specialist's Grade 6 class, thus freeing him or her to teach in the gym. In that way, continuity across classes and grades could be improved. With less responsibility to prepare lessons across subject areas, the "physical education" teacher could advocate for physical education while exercising leadership in areas such as purchasing equipment and organizing extracurricular activities.

It seems obvious that hiring practices and designing teacher responsibilities will require a change in priorities

regarding the importance of physical education in the daily school curriculum. Yet, as our study shows, a belief in the value of physical education is not a guarantee of a quality program nor an indicator that students will develop the knowledge and skills to move competently as physically educated persons. Furthermore, the absence of informed advocates (i.e., physical education specialists) who would champion the cause of quality physical education constrains efforts to access improved resources. In generalist schools, the cycle of marginalization of physical education remains or becomes ever more difficult to interrupt, to the detriment of students.

Further possibilities for change exist, however. In Canada, implementation of new outcome-based physical education curricula in a number of provinces (e.g., Manitoba, Ontario, Alberta, British Columbia) has resulted in an allocation of new funds for physical education; in many cases, this funding has been used to design resources (e.g., Web sites with specific lesson plans related to learning outcomes) and professional development workshops for elementary school teachers to learn about the new curriculum. Given that one ethos of outcomes-based curricula is that teachers should be held accountable for what students are learning, a possibility exists that generalist teachers can petition for added support regarding physical education (Fleming & Wirszyla, 1999).

As the Prairie School example illustrates, access to resources and training may be only part of the solution to schools' providing quality physical education. Our results indicate that in the absence of schools' designating a teacher to exercise leadership for the overall physical education program, even improved knowledge and training of individual generalist teachers will not address planning and program organization issues. Classroom teachers need a coordinated strategy for addressing all the components of a quality physical education program, both during and after class time. Until that strategy is implemented, the potential benefits of a quality physical education program will not be fully realized in generalist schools. That is a daunting prospect for children living in a sedentary age.

NOTES

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1. In 1993, the Canadian Liberal Government decreased the federal education budget by \$7,000,000,000; their stated rationale was a need to respond to the "debt and deficit" crisis. Evidence now shows that the government's fiscal challenges were a result of its own policies of tax cuts and increased interest rates (Mimota Study—Statistics Canada, as cited in "University of Winnipeg Students' Union," 2004).

2. For a more detailed description of the methods used for collecting and analyzing the data, refer to Janzen et al. (2002).

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