

How classroom teachers do take the ‘Physical activity pauses at school’ (PAPS)? A project implemented in Wallonia

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Introduction

Nowadays, strong evidence show the link between an active lifestyle and the prevention of large array diseases (ANSES, 2016). Moreover, as pointed out in the Human Capital Model (Morris, 2013), physical activity benefits are not limited to the health domain. So, six categories of benefits are identified: physical, emotional, social, individual, intellectual, and financial.

Most of the studies focusing on physical activity and sedentary behaviour tracking show that the very early childhood lifestyle remains stable along the life course to adulthood (Jones et al., 2013; Telama et al., 2014). This underlines that children and adolescents should adopt an active lifestyle as soon as possible.

Unfortunately, many publications indicate that children and adolescents very rarely reach the 60 minutes of daily physical activity recommended by the World Health Organization (2010). The Report Cards prepared by the 38 countries involved in the Active Healthy Kids Global Alliance emphasize that efforts are needed all around the world.

In fact, the lack of physical activity of young people is currently identified as a major health risk for the adults of tomorrow. Thus, focusing on the US population, Olshansky et al. (2005) concluded that, despite rapid advances in medicine and sanitation, life expectancy is decreasing rather than rising for the first time since 200 years. In 2012, the movement ‘Designed to move’ proposed an interesting diagram explaining how ‘physical inactivity perpetuates a very dangerous cycle that begins to take hold very early in life’ (p.7).

Need to promote physical activity in youths in schools

Even if they are not clearly mentioned in any of the goals and targets of the United Nations’ 2030 Agenda/Sustainable Development Goals (United Nation, 2015), the promotion of physical activity and the fight against sedentariness are definitely two of the health challenges that society is facing today. Following the Ecological model (Sallis et al., 2006), school environment is a key element in the promotion of a healthy lifestyle in youths. In fact, schools represent a particularly rich place of development, especially because of the opportunities offered to all young people, including those from a less

privileged background, to become aware of many facets of life in society. Young people spend most of their time at school (Guinhouya et al., 2009); they meet adults whose expertise is recognized in many fields, can benefit from secure and adapted infrastructures and their parents can count on a close collaboration on the part of the educational staff (Bar-Or, 2005; Trost & Loprinzi, 2008). Comprehensive school-based strategies encompassing physical education, classroom activities, after-school sports, and active transport can increase physical activity in young people (Heath et al., 2012, p. 272). Based on several other models, Cloes (2014) identified six key dimensions of an active school: physical education, 'sport' at school, life environment (recesses, spaces), PA in the classroom, active transportation, and school policy. Bassett et al. (2013) showed that each dimension is likely to significantly increase children's daily moderate to high level of physical activity (MVPA).

As pointed out after the 6th International Conference of Ministers and Senior Officials Responsible for Physical Education and Sport (MINEPS VI), developing active schools becomes a priority:

Active schools, in which physical activity is placed at the heart of the school, support the establishment of healthy lifestyles, behaviour and learning. In addition, quality physical education is a necessary component of primary and secondary education. It supports the building of physical skills and fitness, life skills, cognitive, social and emotional skills, and values and attitudes that frame socially responsible citizens (UNESCO, 2017, p.7).

Research underlined the effectiveness of projects aiming to promote physical activity in schools. There is a strong evidence for the interventions combining school plus family or community environment in adolescents and inconclusive evidence in children (Biddle et al., 2012). Such findings show that modifying lifestyle needs the collaboration of several actors and reinforces the legitimacy of comprehensive models like the CDC's Coordinated School Health (CSH) approach (Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child – Lewallen et al., 2015).

Physical activity in the classroom – Some approaches

Among the strategies that could be implemented to reduce the physical inactivity at school, limiting the sitting time in the classroom represents a promising opportunity. In kindergarten and primary school, classroom teachers often spend more time with children than their parents. They can play a key role in motivating youth to adopt a physically active lifestyle. Thus, in collaboration with their specialist physical education colleagues, they are able to propose physical activities in their lessons.

All around the world, physically active academic lessons have been developed as a part of comprehensive strategies aiming to increase physical activity while also addressing core educational goals: AS! BC (Naylor et al., 2006), Take 10! (Kibbe et al., 2011),

Texas I-CAN! (Bartholomew & Jowers, 2011), L'école bouge (Uwer et al. 2015), Finnish Schools on the Move programme (Blom et al., 2017).

Other projects were more specifically focused on the classroom setting. Such moments during which pupils/students can be physically active, take different forms and names in literature but the basic principle remains the same: children should be encouraged to move around in class, taking into account the limited space.

Among the approaches that have been proposed, it is possible to stop a lesson for a short break. The duration of these breaks varies from 4 to 15 minutes depending on the method. Most have an average duration of 10 minutes, corresponding to the minimum duration of endurance periods recommended by the WHO (2010). These breaks include the *Energizers* developed by Mahar et al. (2006), the *CHAM Jam* studied by Reznik et al. (2015) or the *Instant Recess* of Whitt-Glover et al. (2011). Some breaks, however, have a shorter duration, from 5 to 7 minutes, like the *Movement Breaks* proposed by Fedewa et al. (2015) or the *Bizzy Break!* (Murtagh et al., 2013). The *FUNtervals* of Ma et al. (2015) have a duration of 4 minutes and are the shortest breaks.

Equipment used for the pause varies a lot. Several types of breaks include three components: warm-up exercises, central strength or endurance exercises, and cool-down exercises. This is notably the case of *Activity Bursts in the Classroom* developed by Katz et al. (2010) or *Physical Activity Breaks* studied by Carlson et al. (2015).

Some breaks incorporate school content (*Instant Recess*, Whitt-Glover's et al., 2011 ; *Activity Burst*, Katz et al., 2010), others simply consist of games that are easy to set up.

Several physical activity breaks use videos like the *HopSports Brain Breaks* operated by Tumynaitė et al. (2014) as well as Cloes and Mornard (2014) or Sacli Uzunoğlu et al. (2017). This is also the case for *Classroom exercises for the body and brain* studied by Caldwell and Ratliffe (2014) or *Brain Breaks: Classroom Fitness for Children* used by Perera et al. (2015). The proposed videos then have a duration of 3 to 10 minutes and are shown on the board. Other supports can also be used as the movement card developed for the *Movement Breaks* (Fedewa et al., 2015) or an audio track used in the *Instant Recess* (Whitt-Glover et al., 2011).

Whatever the type of support used, the duration or the conditions of use, there is always a playful component intended to stimulate the motivation of the children. The goals of these breaks are usually to increase the physical activity of the children and allow them to refocus on school activity.

Why to implement physical activity in the classroom?

The benefits of the physical activity breaks begin to be documented. A non-exhaustive analysis is presented in Table 1. The studies that we reviewed show in particular that these breaks can significantly increase the daily physical activity rate. They also lead

Table 1 – An overview of the physical activity breaks' benefits

<u>Daily PA rate:</u> positive effect
❑ Whitt-Glover et al. (2011), Wadsworth et al. (2012), Carlson et al. (2015)
<u>Fitness level:</u> mixed effect
❑ Tumynaitė et al. (2014) – No effect
❑ Katz et al. (2010) – Positive effect
<u>'On-task'/'Off-task' behaviors:</u> positive effect
❑ Mahar et al. (2006), Whitt-Glover et al. (2011), Ma et al. (2014), Webster et al. (2015)
<u>Selective attention:</u> positive effect
❑ Ma et al. (2015)
<u>Academic success:</u> mixed effect
❑ Katz et al. (2010), Howie et al. (2015) – No effect
❑ Maeda & Randall (2003) – Positive effect
<u>Group interactions:</u> positive effect
❑ Paquette (2016)

to a decrease in students' off-task behavior, and this is especially true for the least on-task students. Active breaks could also positively influence certain fitness parameters as well as social interactions in the classroom. Nevertheless, more research is still needed to bring the evidence. Moreover, there is no consensus on the effect of this practice on school performance and the selective attention of students. However, no negative consequences were put forward: the time spent in physical activity never cause a decrease of the academic learning. According to the already identified positive effects, this should encourage more teachers to introduce active breaks in their lessons.

Implementation of the activity breaks by the classroom teachers

The perception that classroom teachers have about physical activity breaks is important: "... if participants do not like the treatment, they can avoid it, or run away, or complain loudly. As a result, society will be less likely to use our technology as efficiently and effectively as it is." (Howie et al., 2014, p. 681)

McMullen et al. (2014) analysed logbooks and semi-structured interviews at the end of a one-year experiment during which 12 teachers implemented the *Energizers*. The main characteristics of the activities favoured by teachers were: not generate a feeling of chaos; not too noisy; not requiring preparation time; short duration (5 to 10 minutes); instructions quickly understandable; activities that children enjoy doing. Teachers also seemed to prefer activities that incorporated disciplinary content, which reduces their sense of wasted time.

Howie et al. (2014) have also pointed out teachers' preference for short-term activities: they compared opinions of eight classroom teachers about three durations of *Brain*

Bites (5, 10 or 20 minutes). The analysis of the focus groups showed that the teachers only feel able of implement daily breaks of 5 minutes, because of the time constraints related to the school program. On the other hand, students preferred breaks of 10 or 20 minutes and found breaks of 5 minutes too short.

In many studies, teachers are asked to set up the active breaks on a daily basis. However, effective implementation of active breaks often differs from what is prescribed. For example, Reznik et al. (2015) asked to their subjects to perform three 10 minutes *CHAM Jam* per day. An objective measure evidenced that, during the 8th week of the project, only one out of the 25 teachers respected the requirements, the average use of being 1.8 per school day. Barriers reported by teachers to more regular use of activity breaks were mainly lack of time.

The research of Delk et al. (2014) is particularly interesting because the researchers studied longitudinally the implementation of *Activity Breaks* (5 to 10 minutes) in 30 schools for three years. The research team sent questionnaires to each teacher in the 30 schools two and three years after the end of the *AB* training program. Two years after the supply of equipment in schools, 28.2% of the teachers who answered the questionnaire ($n = 73$) ensured at least one *AB* per week. After three years, they were 34.3% ($n = 84$). However, the results are different for schools that had a facilitator. This person had a varied role: to offer demonstrations of *AB*, organize promotional activities in the concerned schools, provide technical support, send regular e-mails to help the implementation of *AB*, etc. In this condition, the percentage of teachers reporting at least one *AB* per week two years after the start of the experiment was 43.5% and 53.7% after three years. However, the facilitator did not influence the average usage of the *AB*. In both conditions, it was 2 times/week.

Teachers' attitudes towards innovation

Gather Thurler (2000) considers that the fate of an educational innovation depends on what teachers do with it, on their understanding of new ideas, on their adherence, but also on their ability and willingness to integrate them into their practice in a sustainable manner. The author defines six sources of change: (1) the changes envisaged by the individual teacher, arising from a personal reflection on the practice; (2) the induced changes because they are fashionable; (3) the changes contemplated because the work place insists on them or requires them; (4) the changes induced by the results of scientific research (for example: moving from front-line education to socioconstructivism); (5) the changes required by an institution (example: program update) and, finally; (6) changes resulting from a team decision, whether or not part of the school project.

According to Marsollier (2002), teachers are more likely to change their practices early in the school year. He showed also that discussions with colleagues and textbooks are the two ways that teachers used the most to discover innovative approaches when they feel a "dissatisfaction with their work". Huberman (1989) highlighted a succession of

crises and phases common to teachers at different points in their careers that affect their attitude towards innovation. This theoretical framework postulates that the teachers most likely to engage in innovations are those with between 7 and 25 years of seniority whereas teachers who have 25 to 40 years of experience would tend to adopt conservative attitudes leading to caution or resistance to change. Moreover, resistant teachers have most often started under conditions that were not very motivating: lack of initial training, choice of the profession out of spite, inspections too far apart, lack of encouragement or low turnover of teams (Marsollier, 2002). Finally, the institution's own culture could also provide a common code that allows teachers to be on the same wave when a reform occurs or when an informal leader or school head proposes a project (Gather Thurler, 2000).

Ducros and Finkelstein (1990) proposed a list of 10 tips to help change or adopt an innovation (Table 2). It seems that any project aiming to implement a change in the habits of classroom teachers should consider carefully such principles.

**Table 2 – Ten recommendations to achieve an innovation
(Ducros & Finkelstein, 1990)**

1) Work with volunteers
2) Do not run out in the preparations
3) Take into account the resistance of teachers and ensure that everyone finds ones account
4) Offer a commitment of limited duration
5) Propose a specific, cognitive objective
6) Get the support of institutional leaders
7) Agree to negotiate innovation, but not at any price
8) Provide internal and external support over time
9) Propose to the concerned actors a continuous training between "peers", focused on the practices
10) Assist in the theorization of practices

Goal of the study

Cloes & Cloes (2014) proposed a specific approach allowing children to move in class using playful videos or traditional games: *PAPS* (Physical Activity Pauses at School). A special protocol was then developed so that any Wallonian teachers could set up *PAPS* easily. The pilot study demonstrated the satisfaction and interest toward the *PAPS* of the classroom teachers, students, and principals. Nevertheless, a limit of the initial project was its duration limited to four weeks.

In the present study, with the support of the City of Liège (French speaking part of Belgium), the goal was to implement the *PAPS* during an entire school year in several

classes volunteer to be part of the project "*The school moves for its health*". According to the review of literature, we identified three research questions:

- 1) What is the real implementation of the PAPS throughout the school year ?
- 2) What factors distinguish continuing teachers from those who stop ?
- 3) What are the barriers and levers to the daily implementation of the PAPS ?

Method

The *PAPS* are a synthesis of the "*Brain Breaks*" proposed by HOPSports and the "*Physical Activity Break*" of Mahar et al. (2006), Maeda and Randall (2003) or Fedewa et al. (2015). *PAPS* are approximately 6 minutes long, require little space and allow pupils to do exercises. They respect a precise routine:

- 1) The setting up. An auditory signal decided with the children or brought by the teacher (horn, bell, new sound, etc.) indicates the beginning of the break. At this signal, the children stop their activity. They put their chairs under their bench and go to a place where they have enough space allowing them to raise their knees and stretch their arms.
- 2) The active phase. The pupils perform physical exercises either during a game proposed by the teacher (PAPS games), or by copying the movements of a character from a projected video (PAPS video).
- 3) The cool down. Before returning to their activity, the students collectively perform a breathing or relaxation task. They then quietly join their place and go back to work.

The use of such a routine aims to limit the loss of time and maximize the time on task. The *PAPS* are set up a pause between two periods of 50 minutes of consecutive classes, in order to limit periods of sedentary life and/or as soon as the students show that they need to expend energy.

There are two types of active phases:

- 1) The PAPS games which are activities implemented directly by the teacher by means of precise instructions and which do not require a video projector. These activities, inspired by the *Energizers* of Mahar et al. (2006) and *GEARs* (Maeda and Randall, 2003). They can use movement cards.
- 2) The PAPS videos that consist of showing a video of a character performing some physical exercises in a particular environment. In this case, the children act as if they were the character and reproduce his movements (short choreographies, fitness movements, etc.). These videos are those developed by HOPSports (2013) or those that can

be found for free on Internet. In the pilot study, we asked also to the pupils to create their own PAPS videos.

Context

The project "*The school moves for its health*" consisted of the implementation of actions aiming to promote the development of healthy attitudes among 6 to 8 year-old pupils. It was based on a collaboration between the deputy burgomaster of health of the City of Liège, which provided a financial support to buy video devices for the schools, the University Hospital of Liège, involved in the "healthy food" part and the SIGAPS-ULiège research unit, in charge of the promotion physical activity among young people. After the agreement of their school principal, teachers were invited to attend to a seminar aiming to provide information about the project (Table 3).

Subjects

23 primary school teachers from 6 different schools received an initial PAPS training. Of these, 9 have a 1st grade class, 8 a 2^d grade and 6 a mixed class (1st and 2^d grades). The sample comprises of 2 men for 21 women. The teachers have between 4 and 40 years of professional experience. Five schools come from the network of the City of Liège and one from the catholic network.

Data collecting

Quantitative and qualitative data were collected throughout the project (Table 3). At the end of the training, the teachers had to complete an online questionnaire aiming to identify their initial impressions about the PAPS and their self-confidence on the project's success. During the whole year, teachers were requested to fulfil a logbook, recording each day the PAPS that were proposed to the pupils (start time, duration, type) or to explain why they did not propose it. PAPS were coded between November 9, 2015 and May 2, 2016, which corresponds exactly to a duration of 100 working school days.

After four months, a follow up meeting was organized with the teachers. We proposed a focus group to identify good practices, share experiences in an interactive way, and identify difficulties encountered during PAPS. At the end of the school year, a final online questionnaire was proposed. One year and half after the beginning of the project, we sent an email with few questions focusing on the long term follow up.

Statistical analysis

Data collection was done using a variety of tools to respect triangulation recommended in qualitative studies (Griffin & Templin, 1989). The analysis of the quantitative data laid on SPSS software. A content analysis has been conducted for all open questions,

good practices, and problems encountered by the teachers. The reliability of the analyses was verified by comparing the themes identified by a second analyst and a percentage of agreement of 88% was obtained.

Table 3 – Description of the data collecting

January 2015	Contacts with the partners of ‘The school moves for its health’ and preparation of the action plan
May, June, July 2015	Recruitment of the schools (n=7)
October 2015	Meeting with the classroom teachers and principals (n=31) Focus on : - Description of the project’s principles - Presentation of the PAPS - Distribution and explanation of the PAPS supports - Distribution of the logbook and explanation of data collecting process
October 2015	Sending of the initial questionnaire (n=15)
November 2015	Beginning of the PAPS implementation until May 2016
March 2016	Focus groups with the classroom teachers Goals : - Make an inventory of the problems encountered and collectively seek solutions - Share good practices (n=54)
May 2016	Sending the final questionnaire (n=23)
June 2016	Organization of a social activity and collecting of the logbooks (n=20)
February 2017	Sending of a short follow up questionnaire (n=14)

Results

What is the real implementation of the PAPS throughout the school year ?

We coded 1575 PAPS in the SPSS software. Each teacher proposed between 13 and 156 PAPS during the 100 school days period ($M = 78$, $sd = 46$). Only 30% of the activity breaks used video. The three periods when PAPS were proposed the most are 11:00-11:20, 9:20-9:30, and 14:00-14:30. During the week, Monday is the day when the PAPS are the most frequent (27%). Finally, the PAPS performed by teachers had an average duration of 6 minutes ($sd = 2'31$).

Based on the 23 responses collected, 7 teachers totally stopped using PAPS while 16 used them on a regular basis: 2 once or twice a week, 6 three to four times a week, 6 every day and 2 more once a day (Figure 1). The same distribution appeared with the teachers’ answers about their intent to pursue the PAPS during the following school year. The teachers who stopped did not wish to resume the project the following year; those who implemented PAPS 1-2 times/week were uncertain and those who still used PAPS in May wanted to continue using them the following year.

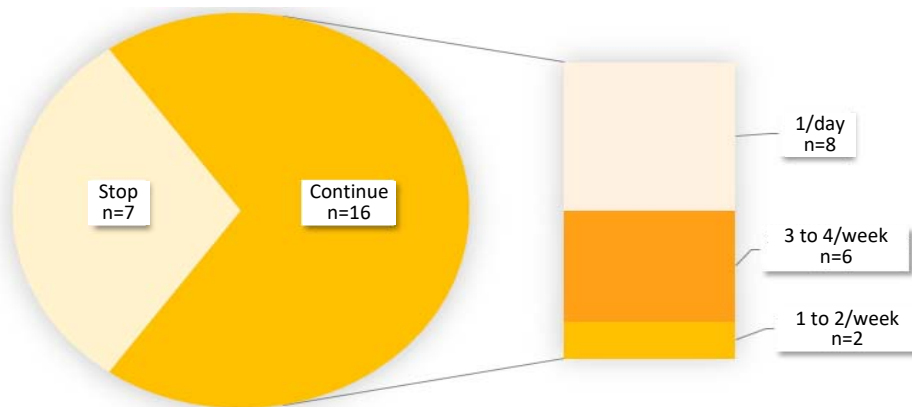


Figure 1 - How often do you put PAPS in place?

Four profiles emerged according to the teachers' reaction to the proposed innovation (Figure 2). They differ slightly from those proposed by Marsollier (2002). Among the 'innovative' teachers identified by this author, it is important to distinguish the "Involved" teachers who apply the proposed innovation as it was presented and the "Innovators" characterized by their ability to propose good practices illustrating new PAPS or proposals of improvements.

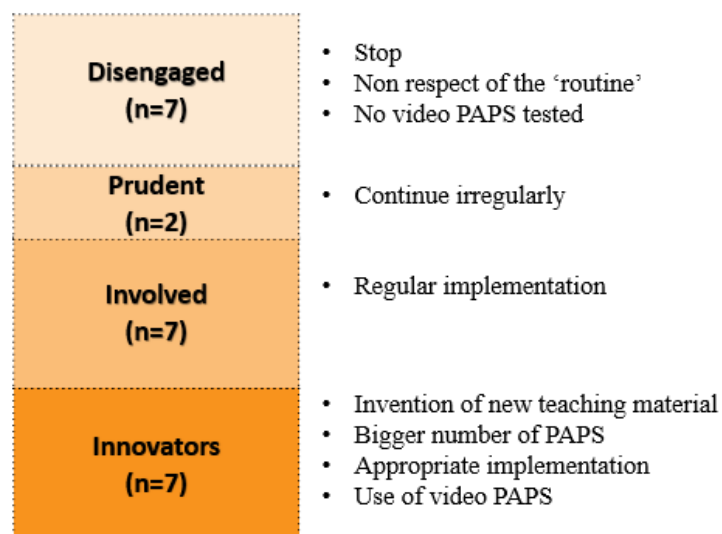


Figure 2 – Four profiles of teachers

What factors distinguish continuing teachers from those who stop?

Three categories of factors were analysed: (1) personal factors (initial interest of teachers; personal understanding of PAPS; perception of one's ability; number of years of experience; relationship to physical activity; relationship to new technologies); (2) school factors (school effect; principal's support; colleagues' interest in PAPS); (3)

class factors (number of pupils; pupils' age; perception of difficulty of class). Table 4 shows the characteristics differing according to the four categories of teachers identified above.

Table 4 – Links between teachers' profiles and several factors

Factors differing according to the profiles	Factors not differing according to the profiles
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initial interest of teachers towards PAPS • Initial understanding of PAPS • Number of years of experience • Use of video PAPS • School • Colleagues' interest in PAPS • Self-confidence about PAPS implementation • Participation of the teacher in PAPS 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Principal's support • Number of pupils • Class characteristics • Perception of difficulty of class • Perception of ones' computer skills

What are the levers and barriers to the daily implementation of the PAPS ?

In this section, our finding lays on quantitative and qualitative data as the levers and barriers perceived by the teachers were collected by different tools and at multiple moments. As shown in Table 5, the main positive aspect dealt with the pleasure demonstrated by the pupils. The most assiduous teachers underlined a positive impact on attention, and benefit for the atmosphere of the class. Only two teachers highlighted the interest of PAPS for pupils' health. The barriers to innovation identified in this study were the lack of time, the lack of computer knowledge and the identification of discipline problems in the classroom.

Table 5 – Summary of the factors that support/limit PAPS implementation

	Levers	Barriers/limits
Recurring items	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pleasure/pupils' interest • Positive effect on classroom management • Answer to a need of the pupils • Support to pupils' attention • Positive effect for group atmosphere • Personal interest of the teacher 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of time • Concurrence with other activity • Discipline problems • Lack of computer equipment
Punctual items	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quick/easy to implement activity • Wellness/health • Simple equipment • Overall view of the pupils • Creativity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Space • Some pupils do not participate • Noise

Discussion

The PAPS implementation rate is satisfactory if we refer to Perera et al. (2015). In addition, contrary to Cloes and Mornard's (2014) findings, no lassitude effect was reported by participants when they did not give up at the beginning of the experiment.

This study showed that even there are volunteer at the beginning of the project, all classroom teachers do not react in the same way when time is to the concrete implementation. Our findings allowed us to precise the categories proposed by Marsollier (2002).

Moreover, based on the combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches, 12 factors influencing teacher involvement in the PAPS project can be identified (Table 6).

Table 6 - 12 factors determining teachers' involvement in PAPS

Factors	Barriers	Facilitating
1 Initial motivation	Pressure of the principal	Interest, request of information
2 Appropriate implementation	Lack of cool down	Respect of the routine
3 Observed effect on behavior	Increase of off-task behaviors	Positive effect on pupils attention
4 Computer equipment	Lack of projection equipment	Availability of the equipment
5 Computer skill	Reluctance towards ICT	Mastery of the ICT equipment
6 School/class projects	Concurrent projects	Links with the school project
7 Colleagues' attitude	Indifferent colleagues	Supporting colleagues
8 Frequency of implementation	Obligation of daily implementation	Implementation on need
9 Pupils' interest	Lack of interest of some pupils	Pupils' request
10 Classroom space	Restricted space	Spacious classroom
11 Administrative aspects	Diary fulfilment	No document to fulfil
12 Individual support	Teachers left to their own	Support of the teachers

Finally, we tried to answer to the question: 'How to get teachers to move their students to class?' So, a model has been proposed to increase the achievement's rate of projects aiming to implement PAPS. It consists of five steps (Figure 3):

(1) At the request of a teacher or principal, the first step would be to briefly present the PAPS project to the educational staff. This presentation would be based on many concrete videos of PAPS activities in classrooms.

(2) At the end of this, the volunteer teachers could enroll in the second step, a training lasting at least one day. During the course, the teachers would receive the equipment necessary for the implementation of PAPS as well as explanations about how concretely use them. Computer equipment would also be presented to teachers. Finally, small groups of volunteers should create PAPS activities and propose them to their peers.

(3) Essential for the achievement of such a project, the third step would consist to stimulate exchanges between the participants. We recommend to plan group meetings to share good practices and collectively find solutions to the potential problems.

(4) In the fourth stage, it would be appropriate to organize the project monitoring by an external person that would be available in case of problems and would regularly meet the teachers to relaunch the project. Internal monitoring could also be implemented in collaboration with the support of a physical education teacher. This would reinforce the teamwork.

(5) Finally, in order to try to extend the project as much as possible, teachers would be invited to share their experience with their more reluctant colleagues ... or with colleagues from other schools.

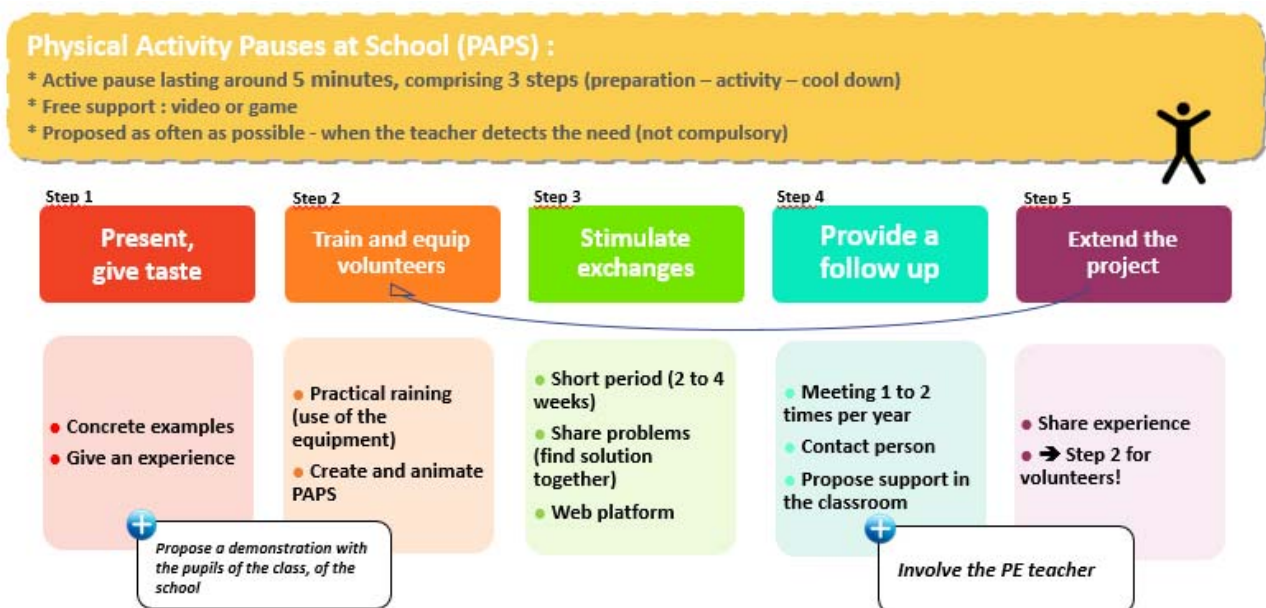


Figure 3 – A model to implement PAPS in schools

Surfing on the positive *a priori* expressed by most of the classroom teachers and principals who were involved in the project or were informed about it, it would be necessary to apply the model within a dissemination of the PAPS concept in Wallonia as it is the case for similar approaches in many regions or countries around the world. Encouraged by the smiles of the pupils, the support of practitioners and parents will be a key element.

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