Implementation of an active school project in a rural environment in Wallonia. A collaborative study

Marc CLOES & Aurélie DEQUENNE

Department of Sport sciences - University of Liège (Belgium)

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Introduction
- Schools are considered as one of the sectors of the society that can contribute to limit the sedentariness
- Several model of active schools have been described
  - Cale (1997)
  - OPHEA (2006)
- More and more projects are launched all around the world
  - SPARK... (USA)
  - "Une École bouge" (Switzerland)
  - "Ecole active" (Québec, Ontario)
- Few data about how they are implemented

Purposes of the study
- To answer to the request of a rural primary school to propose a more active program to the pupils
- To identify the difficulties encountered by the staff to implement their projects
- To analyze the impact of the actions implemented during one school year

Context of the study
- Belgium
- Remouchamps
- One little rural school depending on the community educational network
  - 4 classroom teachers (6 grades - 68 pupils)
  - 1 PE teacher (1/2 day per week)
Origin of the study
- Will of promotion of the school because of concurrence with another one
- Opportunity to double the time for "sport"
  - 100 → 200/week
  - 100 at school with a PE teacher
  - 100 at the community’s sports facilities /week with sport educators

Meeting at the university to take information about similar projects (research in progress in Wallonia)
- Director + Coordinator (one of the classroom teachers)
- Underlining of the "active school" concept
- Increasing "sport time" is not enough
- Need of "integration projects" of physical activity
- Motivation of the educational staff
- Invoking parents
- Request of support to implement a project
  - Need of ideas (non specialists classroom teachers)
  - Role of consultant: advices, feedback
  - Follow up: research action basis

An action research model
1. Exploration and analysis 1
   - Identification of a problem 1
   - Planification of a project 1
   - Action 1
2. Exploration and analysis 2
   - Identification of a problem 2
   - Planification of a project 2
   - Action 2

Mayer & Ouellet (1991)

Time line
First formal meeting: Principal + Coordinator
Presentation of the "active school" concept
Second formal meeting: Principal + Coordinator
Elaboration of a project – Examples of activities
Contact with the actors: School’s staff + Officials + Parents
Conference on the "active school" concept
First part of the school year: beginning of the project + collect of data + regular informal discussions with the coordinator
First written report: Provided to the principal + coordinator

Second part of the school year: continuation of the project + collect of data + regular informal discussions with the coordinator
Third formal meeting: Principal + Coordinator
Analysis of the data collected during the first part of the year
Contact with the actors: School’s staff + Officials + Parents
Conference presenting the findings
Contact with the actors: Informal follow up

An ecological overview
Results & Discussion - Basic information

- **Origin of the project**
  - 2 different opinions about the leadership of the project
    - Initiative of 2 classroom teachers (coordinator) who obtained the support of the school and community’s authorities
    - Collegiate decision not underlying the role of the coordinator
  - Lack of preparation underlined by the manager of the sports facilities (delay of the official decision to support financially the project - payment of the sports educators)

- **Goals of the project**
  - To bring benefits to pupils (learning, respect, motor development, active lifestyle)
  - To offer an answer to concurrent schools

- **Specific aspects**
  - The PE teacher is marginalized according to a limited time at the school
    - Lack of motivation?
    - Lack of integration in the staff?

Results & Discussion - Content of the project

- **“ACTIVE” school concept (OPHEA, 2009)**
  - Active Participation: Active play for students beyond PE class
  - Co-Curricular: Activity during recess, transportation to school
  - Teamwork: Group focus on physical activity within the school
  - Involvement: Participation of extra school actors (family, athletes…)
  - Values: Regular communications within school
  - Education: Activity integrated into the programme (PE and sport)

- **Pate et al. (2006)**
  - Physical education and school sport
  - Recess and active transport to school
  - Physical activity in the Academic classroom
Results & Discussion – Content of the project

Teamwork
- Fitness tests day + using the results
- Jogging + presentation of the performance + pictures
- Ice-skating afternoon (older pupils)
- Walk organized for all grades
- Visit of a museum of bicycle race + preparation + analysis
- Orienteering afternoon (4th grade)
- Sport day outside the school (younger pupils)
- Enthusiasm of the children
- Parents identified positive changes in the attitude of the children

Involvement
- First attendance of the parents during the school festival
- Pupils received a tracksuit !!!
- Invitation of the parents for walking/bicycling (from January)
- Accompanying parents to the museum visit
- Visit of the Belgian Davis Cup Captain + preparation of questions
- Last sports day with parents’ attendance + attendance of top level athletes (Philippe Gilbert - Belgian professional bicycle racer)
- Difficulty to mobilize people
- One journalist did not publish a paper after his visit to the activities
- Parents regretted to be not more involved

Values
- Bulletin board presenting pictures shot during activities
- Specific sheet integrated into the pupils’ diary
- Oldest pupils prepared a board with personal sentences/drawings about benefits of PA
- Special issue of the school journal focused on the activities proposed within the project (some documents prepared by pupils)
- Interest of the parents to know what their children are doing

Education
- Sport afternoons: track and field, gymnastics and games (Kinball, handball, badminton, basket-ball, soccer, tennis and floorball)
- Performances are provided to the parents (portfolio)
- Formal evaluation of the pupils (never done before)
- Involvement of the PE teacher in the sports activities → better relationships with pupils, more appropriate content of PE lessons → more contacts with classroom teachers
- Increased time → larger opportunities to teach skills and to train fitness
- Lack of equipment/facilities at school

Practical problems
- The project received a financial support of the community’s authorities but the decision was provided very late
- Political decision is needed
- Will of one person against “overall” inertia
- Conflict of interests of some decision-makers (even within the school)
- Transportation of the pupils to the sports facilities was not covered by the community’s authorities
- A sponsorship for buses was obtained by the mayor after several alarming requests of the coordinator

Practical problems
- Sport equipment of the school is quite poor (400€ for 8 years!)
- Other schools seemed to be more supported!!!
- Request to the lending department of the Sport Ministry
- Lack of sports facilities at the school
- Rest place was “updated” after pressing of the coordinator
- A building project has been suggested but the school is too small !!!
Results & Discussion – Problems and solutions

Relational problems

- Lack of involvement of the schools' authorities
- Edition of a special issue of the school journal sent to all "community's council"
- Involvement of the PE teacher
- At the beginning, he was not invited by the coordinator
- According to the meetings with the consultant, he was integrated and became a determining actor even if he is not really associated to the decision making (not the initial leader • limited time in the school).

Relational problems

- Lack of interest/involvement of the parents
- Few were in favour of the project or showed interest toward what the school wanted to propose to the pupils
- At the beginning, classroom teachers did not request their involvement
- It changed after the feedback of the consultant
- Promotion of the activities
- Despite of the suggestions of the consultant few changes were operated

Results & Discussion – Some changes

Perception of the school climate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Grade 2002</th>
<th>Grade 2003</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I like homework</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I want to learn</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like the teachers</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like activities</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have fun</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have good friends</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Results & Discussion – Opinion of the actors

School staff

- Diversification in academic learning (integration of PA in the classroom)
- Team spirit (identified during sports activities with pupils of other schools)
- Valorization of the PE teacher's role
- Less absenteeism

Parents and children

- 94.7% of the pupils and 100% of the parents want that the project continues

Conclusions

- This study underlines again that implementation of an active school project is not a "long quiet river"
- The personal involvement of a leader and the collaboration of several partners are determining factors underlining the importance of human relationships
- Without a solid experiment in sport/physical activity management, the promoters of active school projects are likely to meet insurmountable obstacles

- Resources offered in the literature (on the Web) are not known or are not used
- Classroom teachers need to be accompanied as they have other teaching priorities but they can understand the interest of PA within the school
- While they are reluctant or indifferent before a new project, parents become interested when communication is effectively organized
Conclusions

- Most children are interested by increasing their PA at school when there are many kinds of situations and when the school proposes some consistence.

Implications

- A permanent support service should be developed in each country to share effective experiences and build a toolbox adapted to local/national requirements/characteristics.
- Promotion of effective projects needs to be more organized.

Thank you for your attention.

References

- Ontario Physical and Health Education Association (OPHEA).
"ACTIVE" school concept (OPHEA, 2009)

- Active Participation
- Co-Curricular
- Teamwork
- Involvement
- Values
- Education

Promotes regular active play for students beyond the health and physical education class.

Structured initiatives that provide activity-based opportunities for as many students as possible outside of the classroom.

Involves a group focus on physical activity within the school.

Involves activity-based interactions between the school and the community.

Promotes the value of physical activity throughout the school community through regular communications.
“ACTIVE” school concept (OPHEA, 2009)

- Active Participation
- Co-Curricular
- Teamwork
- Involvement
- Values
- Education

Opportunities for students to participate in vigorous physical activity and learn basic movement skills required to participate in sport and physical activity.