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Planning Community Initiatives for Active Schools

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Planning Community Initiatives for Active Schools

- What do we mean by Community?
- What do we mean by Active Schools?



Community as a concept

- **The term community has grown in popularity, particularly for Health and Wellbeing initiatives, often without critique**

“...they will participate in creating healthy communities by taking responsible and critical action.” NZ PE curriculum statement

communities of learners, professional communities, schools as communities, community partnerships, community health initiatives

Community as a contested term

- **In sociology**
 - encompasses social organisations such as neighbourhoods, towns or a spatially bounded locality.
- **In anthropology**
 - culturally defined groups
- **In politics**
 - emphasis on citizenship, civil society and collective identity.
- **Historical and philosophical studies**
 - as an ideology or utopia

Community as a contested term

- *Communities have been based on ethnicity, religion, class or may underlie them; they may be locally based and globally organized; affirmative or subversive in their relation to the established order; they may be traditional, modern and even postmodern; reactionary and progressive*

Delanty (2003, p.1)



Community as a contested term

- **Common notion of community**

- Socially or geographically defined
 - > “...the dynamic act of people being together”
(Labonte, 2006)
- Delanty (2003) argues
 - > modern communities are constructed less from congregation and more from global forms of communication



Community as a solution

- **The 'loss' of the traditional foundations of community and belonging have been linked with various crises associated with societal ill health.**
 - “The notion of the obese child generates a powerful and increasingly pervasive cultural symbolism of degeneration” Kirk, 2006

Community as a solution

- **Therefore community is seen as something:**
 - that can regulate a 'return' to more healthy lifestyles and in turn be enhanced through greater connectivity and belonging
 - ‘...an expression of the search for something destroyed by modernity, a quest for an irretrievable past which is irrecoverable because it may have never existed.’ (Delanty, 2003, p. 188).

Community as a solution

- **Community is promoted unequivocally as an important social good**
 - When community unites around a common belief, it can give rise to conformity, parochialism, exclusion, distrust of outsiders and assimilation. (Noddings, 1996)
 - > Sporting clubs (masculine hegemony, privileged body)
 - > Obese people (blame, exclude, assimilate)

Community as a solution?

- **The term community is fluid and problematic**
 - Consider it beyond a catch phrase to be attached to initiatives
 - Beyond a focus on a common belonging, understanding, identity or way of doing/living
 - Bushfires?
 - Community is complex, nested, mixed, multiple, dynamic

Schools as Healthy, Active Communities

- **Consider an ecological view of community with**

“...dynamic entities that pulsate with the actions and interactions of people, the spaces they inhabit and the resources they use” (McMurray, 2007, p.10)

Difference and critique is part of sustaining communities. Explore the embodied meaning of physical activity for children. Sport & structured exercise is meaningful for some, alienating for others.

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What is an Active School?

Active Schools (communities)

- **Schools are unproblematically considered an appropriate setting for the promotion of physical activity**
 - Largely responsibility of PE teachers
 - Largely focused on individual behaviour change
 - Limited to sport / games curriculum
 - Viewed as a solution to a crisis (obesity)
 - > Intervention vs education

Active Schools



- **Phys Ed**

- Minimal time
 - Avg. btwn 55 & 132 min per week (Britain)
 - <50% of that time engaged
- Focus on individual behaviour change
 - > Behaviour has trouble changing in unchanging circumstances

Active Schools

- **Schools are places of learning**

- Should physical activity be 'done' to children as part of a dose response to a health condition?

OR

- Should physical activity in schools be considered as an opportunity for education in, on and through the physical?
- What meanings / understandings are children taking away from movement?



Active Schools

- **Physical Activity is done to kids**
 - Stamina, strength, fitness testing, structured, competitive = labels = *learned helplessness*
 - Exercise = slenderness = health
 - > This notion is overly simplistic and has been openly challenged (see Kirk, 2006)
 - What is meaningful, what is experienced, how is activity embodied?

Broader Concepts of Movement

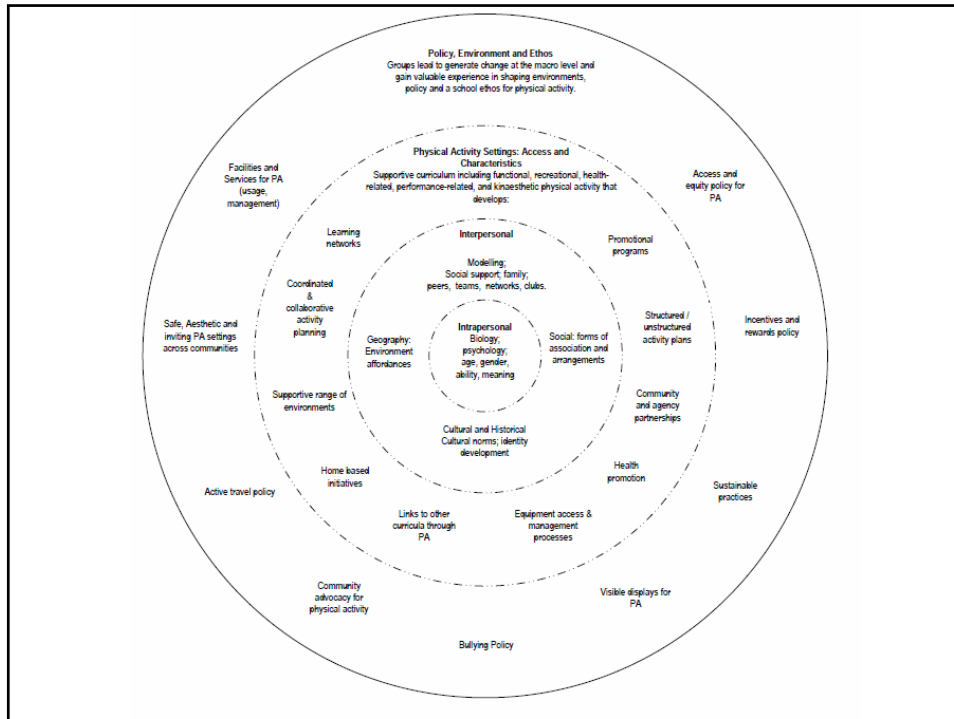
- **“I know when I was a kid I used to spend just about every waking hour outside of school, on a bike and you know catching yabbies and basically sort of nicking off for hours on end. I don’t know that kids get that kind of freedom, anymore.”
(school principal)**

Active Schools (communities)

- **There needs to be space to develop broader understandings of physical activity in order to develop notions of community:**
 - Socio-cultural
 - Organizational (Policy / Ethos)
 - Environmental

Socio-ecological Frame and Community

- **Health model adapted for physical activity**
 - (Cale & Harris, 2005; Michael, Dittus, & Epstein, 2007; Sallis, 2001; Sallis J. et al., 2006; Spence & Lee, 2003; Timperio, Salmon, & Ball, 2004; Wechsler, 2000).
 - Can be zoomed in to a 'community' level (school)
 - Multi-layered – beyond the individual
 - Considerate of different forms of community
 - Multiple connections – beyond the school grounds
 - Messy and complex but simple doesn't work



Active Schools

- **Understand their multiple communities and influences (children as researchers)**
- **Promote independent mobility**
 - Independent active transport vs walking school bus
- **Provide access to equipment / facilities**
 - Are outward looking, open to users & community, flow between school and community facilities

Active Schools

- **Work with community to provide for PA**
 - community groups, sports clubs, etc.
- **Change policy and promote a PA ethos**
 - Work with other policy change groups
- **Educate beyond skill, technique, fitness for competitive sports and highly structured recreations**
 - Community garden, exp. education, mobility, nature, play, embodied movement, place based pedagogy



Planning Community Initiatives for Active Schools

- **Strategically link to schools**
 - Focus on policy, ethos, environment
 - Entrench project into curriculum (learning)
 - Demonstrate cross curricula benefits
 - Demonstrate links to 'community'
 - Utilise alternate pedagogies (experiential learning)
 - Provide space to consider other ways of moving in community places
 - Understand local contexts, cultures, constraints, affordances (children as researchers)

Planning Community Initiatives for Active Schools



- **Background work**
 - Develop understanding of issue
- **Form a stakeholder group**
- **Evaluate local needs** (not one size fits all)
 - (children as researchers, quant/qual)
- **Draft a policy** (beware of unintentional consequences)
- **Promote, Adopt, Implement and Measure**

Active Schools Evaluation

- **Planning tool for Active Schools**
 - Bradley and O'Connor (2008)

<http://www.education.monash.edu.au/research/groups/mec/>

Thank You



