



Multisectoral Partnerships Promoting Physical Literacy and Physical Activity in Schools: A Qualitative Study

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Abstract

Background: While multisectoral partnerships (MSPs) are often promoted as a strategy for advancing physical literacy (PL), physical activity (PA), and school health priorities, limited empirical attention has been given to how these partnerships are developed, implemented, and sustained in practice. This research addresses this gap by examining the complex relationships and collaborative efforts of interest groups involved in a provincial MSP aimed at promoting and developing PL and PA in school settings. The study examines how such partnerships are conceptualized, operationalized, and sustained, and how cross-sector collaboration can support equitable access to movement experiences, PL, quality physical education, and lifelong engagement in PA, while also addressing broader educational and health priorities. Grounded in a social constructivist paradigm (Bruner, 1960; Jonassen, 2012; Perry, 1981) and guided by the Operational Model of Collaboration (OMOC; Roberts et al., 2016), this research explores the relational, structural, and political dynamics that shape collaboration among education, health, recreation, community, and sport sectors.

Methodology: A qualitative case study design was employed, featuring an in-depth examination of a provincial PL initiative, referred to as the PL Project. Data sources included semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and key documents, which were analyzed thematically to explore governance processes, trust building, mutuality, and policy alignment across sectors. Institutional ethics approval was obtained from the University of British Columbia Behavioural Research Ethics Board prior to data collection.

Results and Conclusion: Findings reveal persistent tensions between deliverable-driven mandates and the relational labour required for meaningful and sustained collaboration. Power asymmetries, particularly between education and health, along with jurisdictional complexity and resource constraints, further challenge partnership equity and long-term viability. At the same time, relational trust, shared purpose, adaptive leadership, and community-driven prototyping were identified as critical enablers of effective collaboration. This research is meaningful to the field of physical and health education because it demonstrates that school-based PL and PA promotion requires more than short-term programming or sector-specific mandates. Rather, sustainable and equitable change depends on relationally grounded governance, shared decision-making, policy alignment, and the meaningful involvement of education partners. This research offers three key contributions: it extends and critiques the OMOC by showing how governance arrangements influence equity and power-sharing; it provides empirically grounded insights into the challenges and relational dynamics of MSPs in school health promotion; and it offers practical recommendations for policy alignment and relationally grounded approaches to PL and PA promotion.

Keywords: multi-sectoral partnerships (MSPs); physical literacy (PL), physical activity (PA); collaboration; whole of school



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