

Take Action Project: Health and Wellness in Trinidadian Schools

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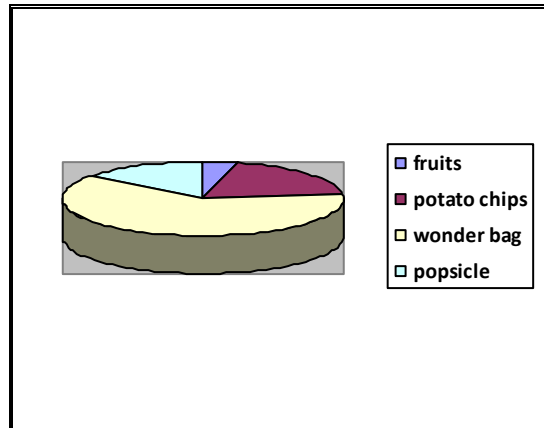
What is my concern for my teaching community?

Before I considered what I would like to do for my Civic Engagement Project I looked at the needs of not only the students in my class but throughout the entire school. My concern is the health of the students at our school. They tend to have unhealthy snacks and they drink a lot of sugary juices and soft drinks. At break time and lunch time there are no organised games that they can engage themselves in to burn off the amount of sugar they take in; therefore, they are usually “hyper” especially after lunch.

I would like the students of my school to be more educated about their choices of snacks and drink. I would like their parents to also know the importance of healthy eating and leading a healthy lifestyle because in Trinidad there is a growing rate of juvenile diabetes. I think that the parents in my school because of the foods, snacks and drinks they pack for their kids they don't really consider the consequences. The children also need to engage themselves physical activities in changing their lifestyles to a healthier one.

Research the concern

In researching my concern, I took a survey throughout the various departments on the most popular snacks eaten at break-time and lunch-time. My survey concluded that the children bought sugary snacks especially the ones that contained a toy in the packaging (the wonder bag). Rarely students brought fruits to snack on which would have been a healthier choice. This chart shows the result of my findings based on a survey of thirty students (10 from the infant department, 10 from the junior department and 10 from the senior department).



My Plan

My plan is to first take the result of my findings and consider how I would like to use this information to bring about a positive change in the culture of my school. I would like the students of my school to change their eating habits and to engage in organised games during the lunch and break times they have. Many of them when the “play” they run wildly and injure other students in the yard. We don’t have a variety of equipment to give to the children for them to use so I guess that’s why they run, they don’t really have options. This is another concern I have; I would like for the school to provide them with these options. We need equipment for the children to actually play with.

I would like to have the entire school engaged in an activity that addresses the concern of food choices and physical activity. I considered a plan that would interest all age groups. This plan was to have teachers focus on healthy eating habits in their classroom teaching (Social Studies and Health and Family Life Education) lessons. They would also integrate Art/Craft by encouraging their students to make flyers and posters depicting healthy eating and physical activity and its importance. These posters and flyers would be mounted on the classroom walls, outer walls of the school building especially nearby the cafeteria. Hopefully, students would be reminded that they should make healthier choices when they go to make their purchases. I had an idea of engaging the entire school in an activity that brings about awareness of my concerns. This event would incorporate some kind of physical activity and at the same time we can raise funds to buy equipment for the children to use at break time and lunch time. I took my

information (my plan and pie chart) to a monthly staff meeting and discussed my concerns with my colleagues. I proposed that the entire school should get involved, meaning the parents, teachers and students in changing the current lifestyle of the students. Here we discussed a variety of physical activities that all age groups were capable of performing. We decided on a “Jump Rope Competition”. The principal appreciated my proposal and concern for the students and asked me to organise a committee of teachers who will plan and execute this venture.

There were several meetings of this committee of six teachers including myself. During our meetings we discussed lesson plans for teaching “Healthy Eating” throughout the various levels, ideas for flyers and posters, tee-shirts we wanted to get printed for the day of the event, judges for the event, medals and prizes. Another aspect we discussed was having a fund raiser as part of the event. The money raised would then be used to purchase equipment for the children to use. Such equipment would be jump ropes, hula hoops, bean bags and balls. The children would find these pieces of equipment quite resourceful during their playtime.

Who supports me?

The committee organised donation sheets which were distributed among students and the P.T.A. Contributions were made to us by individuals and companies. The money we collected was then allocated by the committee to be spent on; tee-shirts for the participating students, medals, trophies for winners, tokens for participants and of course the sporting equipment mentioned earlier.

The students were encouraged to use their lunch and break periods to work on their skills. During the lunch and break periods I noticed many of the students getting into groups to work on their routines. It was pleasing to see them in a more organised fashion, working together and utilising their time wisely while having fun. Some of the kids wanted to do individual skipping and they were encouraged to do so while some wanted to do both individual and group routines.

The children looked forward to the P. E sessions because they got the entire yard to practice. There isn't much room for them to play so they take advantage of this opportunity when they

can. I decided to incorporate the skipping as part of the P.E programme. All classes when they came out for their P.E sessions engaged in a warm up and then they got to the skipping.

Integrating the topic with other area of discipline

Bringing the theme into the classroom was important for students to make connections. Teachers taught at the various levels 'Leading a Healthy Lifestyle' as part of the Health and Family Life Education which is also part of the Social Studies syllabus. Students were educated about the Caribbean Six Food Groups, Healthy Snacking, Importance of Exercise, Creating Healthy Meals etc. Health and Family Life Education is usually taught before or after P. E so that students can readily make the connections.

Students also made posters that were selected by the class teachers and these posters were stuck around the school walls especially by the cafeteria reminding students about making wise choices when they go to buy food and drinks. Integrating Art and Craft together with the H.F.L.E and P.E made the project more meaningful to the children.

Taking Action

The week of the event, students who were willing to participate were called out to perform for preliminary rounds, semi-finals and then the final day of the event. On the day of the event, participating students were given a tee-shirt with the printed theme. Members of staff wore the tee-shirts to advertise the theme. Parents were also encouraged to purchase the shirts to show support for this cause.

As the students competed against one another there was much excitement among the student body as they cheered on their colleagues. While the students had their water breaks, we had a pop quiz (about health and fitness) and volunteers who had correct answers to the questions were given prizes.

Students were given medals for coming in first, second and third within their categories. Each gold medal winner advanced to the next level until there was one student from each level competing for the grand trophy.

After the students' competition had ended, teachers were called out to take part in the event then the parents. By getting everyone involved in having fun and doing something good for their bodies we hoped for continuity with this change.

All students who participated were given a token for their efforts. Students who did not wish to participate were now excited to take part the next time we plan on such an event. Both the parents and the children enjoyed themselves. The principal was quite pleased with the planning and implementation of this project. She is thinking of making it an annual event.

Evaluate the plan

At the next staff meeting, the committee give a financial report of the fund raising part of the event. We included the total amount raised minus expenses for tee shirts and prizes. The money we were left with we collectively decided on which equipment we should purchase and how many. Teachers were given an opportunity to give the committee feedback on how well the event was planned and executed. Generally, the feedback was quite good. We had accomplished our goals. The students and parents got involved and became aware of the choices they make for their health. Students are now getting into different kinds of organised play using the equipment we bought as opposed to running carelessly in the yard and hurting others.

A follow up activity

This project was extended by students compiling a scrapbook of the experience and what they learned. I had them answer questions about health and fitness, differentiating between healthy snacks and foods and unhealthy snacks and foods, writing a short paragraph as a journal entry about what the experience was like for them and what they appreciated the most.

Evaluating my plan

I personally think that this exercise was a success. I had been observing the students of my school for a long time and wanting to do something to change their lifestyle for the better. This assignment had provided the incentive I needed; also, it provided me with guidelines of planning

and implementing. The “Take Action” book helped me out in outlining questions and details of my plan. It helped me to organise my ideas and make it come to fruition. The children enjoyed themselves and the parents praised all the teachers for their efforts in putting together such an event all for the sake of the students’ well-being.

Applying what I have learned

I continue to encourage my students to have organised play during the lunch hour. Before I send them outside, I ask them about the games they would be engaging in. I do this to ensure that they are engaging themselves in some sort of organised physical activity such as catch, skipping or hop-scotch. I also continue to monitor what my students have in their lunch-kits and what they buy at the cafeteria. The principal and other teachers were also concerned about what is sold at the cafe and we made a collective request to the proprietor of the cafe to stop selling the sugary snacks and drinks. We urged for there to be fruits and fruit drinks for the students. The request was heard but the change was not permanent. I hope that through a boycott of buying they would eventually get the message.

Through this experience I have learned that there can be change. Observing what is going on within your surroundings and wanting to make a difference can come to pass. Knowing how to plan, getting support (because you will need it) and sticking to your beliefs or what you hope to see in the end can create change. Maybe other schools within our community can look at us and see how we took a problem and turned it around. Another project I have in mind for my school is littering. It is another problem that needs to be addressed. I am considering using the “Take Action” approach together with the support of the teachers at my school to solve this issue.

Here are some of the pictures from the ‘Jump Rope Competition’



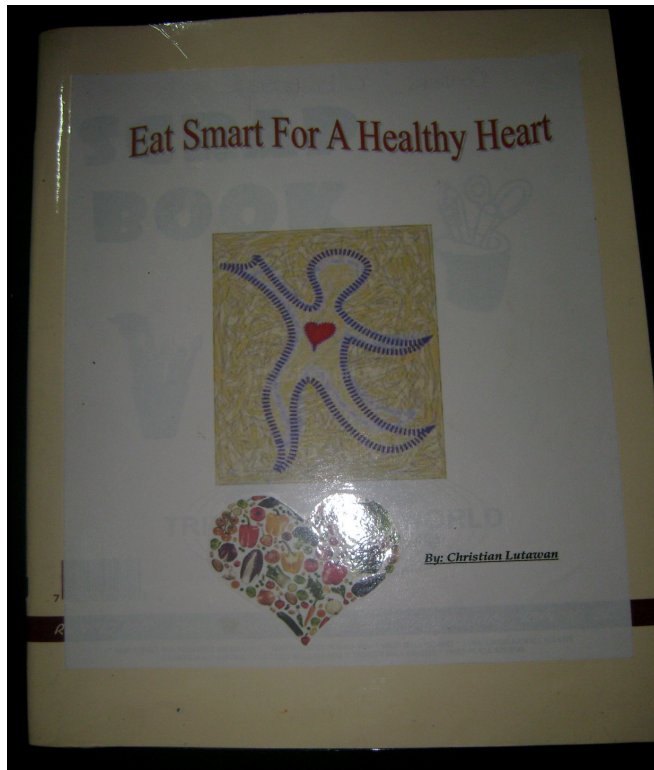
Here is a picture of one of the tee-shirts we printed



Here is a picture of students from my class who won medals



Here are a few pictures on the project we did in a scrap book



Do you like to exercise?

yes I like to exercise.

What is your favourite way of exercising?

My favorite way of exercising
I like to play bat and ball



Page 4

What is a balanced diet?

A balanced diet is a diet that
includes food from all food groups



Do you like to exercise?

yes I do love to exercise.

What is your favorite way of exercising?

My favourite way of exercising
is

