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Zero to Eighty Degrees: Six Years and What We Have Learned [Abstract]

School-university partnerships are frequently superficial and short-lived, with a significant power differential between the university and the teachers involved. Too often such partnerships reach a short-term goal, but achieve few long-term changes. Consequently, they accomplish little, and teachers and physical education return to old, familiar practices. The purpose of this article is to describe a school-university partnership and the sustained changes recognized by teachers as a result of that partnership.

This specific partnership was between elementary physical education teachers and sport pedagogy faculty members working in an intermountain west community with a population of more than 90,000. The physical education teachers taught in a diverse school district comprising 35 schools, 17 of which were elementary schools. When the collaboration began, the school district was on academic watch for not making adequate progress on standardized test performance and the teachers were among the lowest paid in the country. The university faculty members worked at an institution of higher education designated as a doctorate-granting/ research university that served 12,599 students and was recognized for excellence in teacher education.

The partnership initially began when university faculty members and elementary physical education teachers came together to try to secure a Carol M. White Physical Education Program Grant (PEP grant). The collaboration was off to a great start as the university took the lead in the grant-writing process with input from the teachers. Although not successful the first time, the group remained positive, learned from the experience, and received funding the next year. Once funded, the partnership began a new phase. The group expanded to include additional university faculty members and school district administrators. If this new phase (year one) of the relationship were a weather forecast, it would have sounded something like this: Arctic cold temperatures producing heavy blowing snow with hurricane force winds causing blizzard conditions. Attempts to collaborate were characterized by values differences that led to all the classic signs of becoming just another superficial short-lived partnership. Several members of the partnership were no longer interested in weathering the constant stormy conditions and dropped out. Karla, Lizzy, Nancy, and Tia, however, were determined to develop a standards based curriculum for elementary physical education. They asked the university faculty members to help, and the faculty members agreed. As the second year of the partnership culminated, the four teachers and three university faculty members gathered for a three-day retreat at a mountain cabin to develop a curriculum. This is when warmer temperatures, calm winds, and clear skies could begin to be seen along the distant horizon.