

The Picture of Health: Examining School-based Health Environments through Photographs

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A 'Health-Promoting Schools' (HPS) approach is an internationally recognized framework that promotes health through a focus on the school environment, curriculum and engagement of students, staff and the broader school community. Since HPS is implemented in different ways based on the school context it is difficult to evaluate the approach. New and innovative evaluation strategies to examine HPS are needed.

Purpose of the Research

To explore the physical features of school environments through photographs of schools that had formally implemented a HPS approach versus schools that had not.

What was done?



A guided plan for taking pictures of physical features that related to specific aspects of the school environment was created.



Trained evaluation assistants captured photographs of physical features of the school environment (10 HPS schools, 8 non-HPS).



Photographs were categorized into five domains. Differences between schools were explored.

Five Domains Explored in School Environments

1. Promotion of Healthy Eating & Physical Activity

2. Accessibility & Access to Healthy Eating

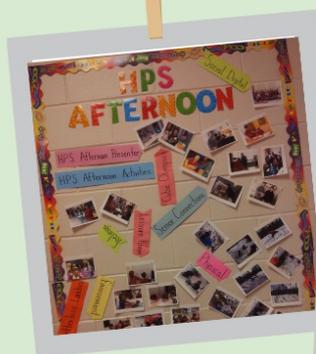
3. Accessibility & Access to Physical Activity

4. Healthy School Climate

5. Accessibility & Safety of School

What were the results?

HPS



Non-HPS



Main findings across all five domains...

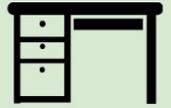
Photographs suggested that HPS schools compared to non-HPS schools placed more emphasis on promoting nutrition, physical activity and mental health through visual cues, such as posters.



Photographs showed that HPS schools had greater student involvement in the promotion of health, such as drawings of healthy food, physical activity and mental well-being.



The quality of resources between HPS and non-HPS schools did not seem to differ, such as in kitchens and cafeterias.



What do the results mean for schools?



HPS strategies are being put into practice in real-world environments through the promotion of health using visual cues and student engagement.



Health promoting initiatives seem to be apparent across all schools which is most likely due to required health policies. It may be difficult to determine all differences through a visual assessment.



Quality of resources in schools is most likely due to funding and support rather than the implementation of a HPS approach

Take away message...



- Going beyond traditional methods is useful to further understand the complexity of a HPS approach.
- A HPS approach may foster health initiatives that go beyond the normal scope of required school healthy policies.
- Differences between HPS and non-HPS were subtle, and future innovative methods will help to fully understand how the HPS approach is reinforcing students' health and well-being.

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