

We Didn't Dance

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The students in our school walked, ran, or marched to Madagascar in the 2006-2007 school year. This past school year they ran half way across Canada: we were within a hundred kilometers of Winnipeg!

In summer 2006 the Ontario Ministry of Education introduced a plan called DPA (Daily Physical Activity). The objective of this plan was to have elementary students continuously active for twenty minutes each day. At our staff meeting in August, we toyed with how we could include this in our schedules without losing instruction time. In the end, we came up with a tentative plan of how we would use the first recess of each day and have the



children “march” to Madagascar. Our field was measured and the distance of a mile was calibrated to how many times we could circle the field. The distance to Madagascar was calculated by taking the distance I thought the children could each run in 15 minutes, multiplying that figure by the number of days in the school year and then multiplying that product by children in the school. The distance turned out to be 3,000 miles. If they were diligent, we would be able to cover that distance and at that point we would “hop a boat and ride” the rest of the way to Madagascar.

The first week of school, while I was getting things organized, measured and planned, I put announcements up that we would be starting M2M the next week. The children tried to guess what M2M represented. In the hallway I stretched a long piece of ticker tape to the wall marked off in divisions which indicated the 3,000 mile distance. Each week, the student who ran the farthest in his/her class was awarded a yellow paper star with his/her name printed on it, which was then placed above or below the ticker tape line. At joint worship, I announced the star runners of the week and coloured in the distance they had covered on the graph.

Did the program run smoothly? No, we ran into problems. Some of the teachers weren't behind the “M2M”, and I attempted to do too much on my own. It is very difficult to keep track of 64 students running- even if they all ran in two shifts. I tried to use small laminated tickets that the children took each time they circled the gym, but sad to say, some students were not honest and took more than one ticket or circled the table on which I had the tickets. They were, however, moving. The lower grade teachers were amazed that the children were still motivated in November, even though they were not receiving anything for their efforts. The children persevered and by the last week of school they were less than forty miles from their goal. So I took the remaining distance and the number of students, and divided to find out how many times each child would need to run the field to finish off the distance to Madagascar. On one of the last days of school, the whole school went outside and each teacher tracked her own students. In one

session we finished off the distance. The children were really proud of themselves, as was the entire staff.

That last day was so easy that this past year the whole staff was 100% behind the program. Fifteen minutes before recess, each teacher took a spot at a corner of the field and we tracked our own students. We changed our objective and decided to run across Canada—naming our DPA (Daily Physical Activity) the Cross Canada Challenge. On inclement days the school divided into grades JK-2, and grades 3-8 and took our rainy day recess time in the gym to work on our Cross Canada Challenge. Being in a small area made the recording of the children's running more difficult than out in the field. (One teacher handed out tokens, which tended to slow the students down, while the other teacher had the students make a tally mark with a marker on a laminated sheet with their name printed on it.) This year the star runner received a red maple leaf to post up on the bulletin board. Children who may not have received recognition for grades and academics were eager to invite their families to joint worship so that their parents could see them receive a paper maple leaf in recognition of the running that had been done the previous week. Sometimes a leaf was given to whoever could beat their personal best for the week or who could complete a certain distance. At the end of the school year, certificates were given to students who had run various distances and a medal was awarded to the student who had cumulatively run the farthest— over 100 km farther than the next student. The smile on his face told it all.

So, what does dancing have to do with the DPA? In the fall of 2006 just after the DPA had been introduced, one of our teachers was asked what our school was doing for DPA. She explained the M2M program to her public school colleague who replied, "Oh, our kids would never do that. We play music over the P.A. system and the kids get up and dance beside their desks for 20 minutes." Well, we didn't dance, but we have had fun learning about our country as we have walked, run, and marched across Canada.

Newfoundland gave us fry bread, P.E.I. the Anne of Green Gables books . . . who knows how we will celebrate crossing the Manitoba/Saskatchewan border?