

Examining the Utility of the School Physical Activity and Nutrition Environmental Tool (SPAN-ET) as Implemented by SNAP-Ed Practitioners

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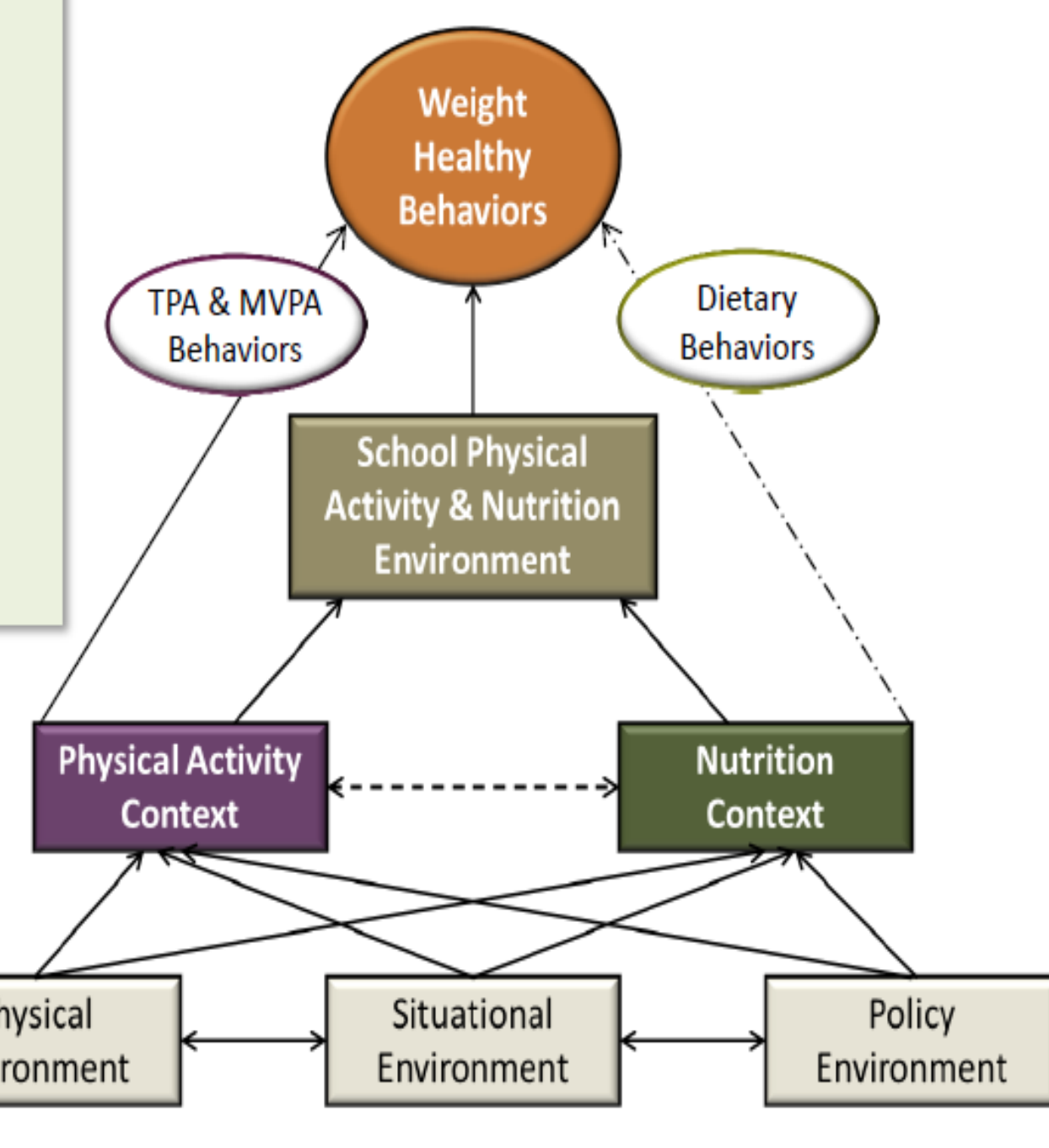
Background

The School Physical Activity and Environmental Tool (SPAN-ET) is an evaluation tool for elementary schools developed by College of Public Health and Human Sciences Extension researchers. The tool was developed for use by practitioners to assess and address factors that influence students' weight health behaviors in a given elementary school's modifiable environment.

Figure 1. SPAN-ET Theoretical Model

SPANET Model for Measuring and Changing the School Context for Obesity Prevention

Practical tool was needed to reliably measure the complex physical activity and nutrition environments of elementary schools that influence children's weight health behaviors and energy balance



SPANET was developed and beta tested in six rural SNAP-Ed eligible elementary schools in Oregon reaching over 2200 children

John, Jackson, Gunter. *J of School Health*; 2015 (in press)

SPAN-ET Context

Over the past several years, two notable OSU organizations—Generating Rural Options for Weight Healthy Kids and Communities (GROW HKC) and Oregon's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education (SNAP-Ed)—have worked to implement the tool in low-income (defined by >50% or more students qualify for free or reduced lunch) elementary schools in Oregon. The SNAP-Ed staff who have been early trainees and adopters of the tool were voluntarily recruited to participate in an evaluation study (IRB 5929: Evaluating implementation and utility of SPAN-ET and HEAL MAPPS when used by trained practitioners).

Acknowledgements

A very special thank you to Dr. Deborah John who graciously welcomed me to her research team, allowing me to gain an invaluable insight into the processes of conducting qualitative research. Leah Gramlow, RD, MPH candidate was instrumental in helping develop the evaluation plan and guiding my contributions to the project. This research is funded by grants from the USDA NIFA 2010-04614 and would not be possible without the work of GROW HKC, SNAP-ED, and OSU Extension.

SPAN-ET Components

- 1. Training of Auditors**
 - Currently offered in a live seminar
 - Training is being adapted to an online format
- 2. Implementation of Tool**
 - Two independent observers use qualitative methods (see Figure 2) to evaluate and score 187 criteria in 27 areas of interest relating to physical activity and nutrition physical, situational, and policy environments.
 - Each criteria determined as “met” after being validated by two data sources, interviews, observations, or reviewed documents, and both auditors is scored (1=met; 0=not met).
- 3. School Reports**
 - Auditor's scores are combined and explained in a comprehensive school report
 - Report is provided to participating school
 - Can be used by school for grants, policy development, education etc.
 - Continued involvement at discretion of auditors/schools

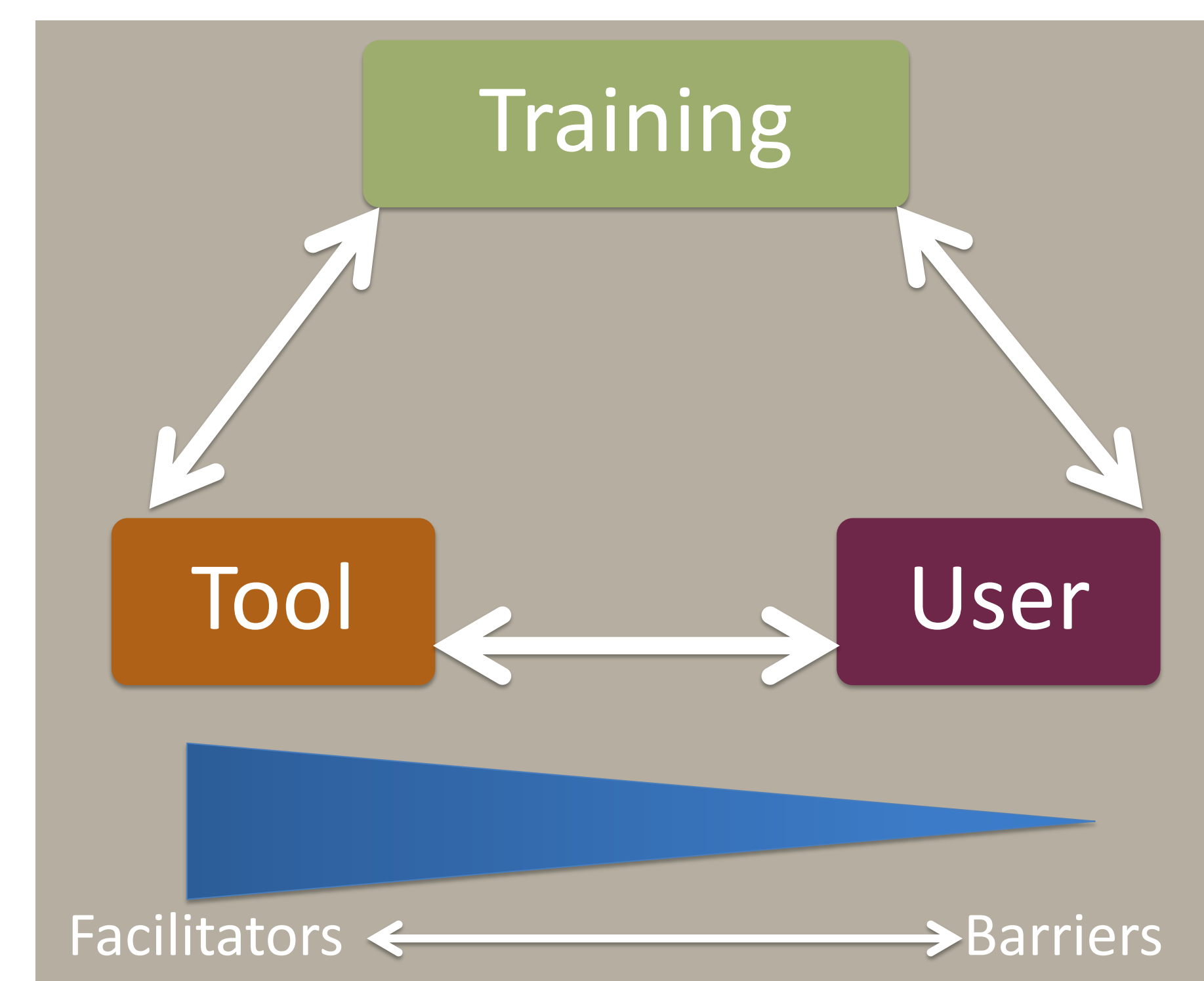
Figure 2. SPAN-ET Qualitative Methods



Research Objectives

The SPAN-ET aims to draw attention to and spur changes in the school physical, situational, and policy environments that correlate with students' weight health behaviors. The purpose of the evaluation study was to identify limitations to the utility of the SPAN-ET when used by SNAP-Ed staff who were trained to implement the tool. The results will be instrumental in increasing and/or affirming the efficacy of the tool and associated training processes, and promoting its use via peer-reviewed venues.

Figure 3. Framework for evaluating the utility of SPAN-ET



Guiding Research Questions

- What is the perceived utility of SPAN-ET by trained SNAP-Ed auditors?
- Has the SPAN-ET been delivered with fidelity by trained SNAP-Ed auditors?

Methods

1. Data collected using auditor interviews and triangulated with documentation supporting SPAN-ET Scores.
2. Qualitative data is managed using Nvivo 10 managed
3. Qualitative data coded by two trained researchers into nodes created to support evaluation framework (Table 2)
4. New nodes are added to the coding matrix to capture additional themes that emerge

Current Project Status

- Interviews are being conducted
- SPAN-ET documentation is being gathered
- Transcripts and documentation is continually inputted to Nvivo 10 and coded
- Of the 32 current SNAP-Ed auditors
 - 6 have scheduled interviews
 - 3 interviews have already been conducted

Preliminary Emerging Themes

Tool

- Straightforward overall
 - Has helped initiate positive changes
 - Guidance documents can be hard to find, are not all in one place
 - Some criteria and recommendations are not applicable for schools in extreme climates
- Auditor C explained, “We think that some of the indicators were actually written without thinking about other weather that might occur.”*

Training

- In-person training and connection with tool developers helpful in understanding expectations and answering questions
- Time between training and implementation can be significant, impact of this is unclear

User

- Auditor has flexibility in how positive or negative the school report is presented
- Preexisting relationships with the schools can help with tool feasibility but also can pose a challenge to fidelity

Auditor S explained, “Yes...we had to be very careful in not thinking things that we had seen before”

Personal Development

As a result of working as an Undergraduate Research Award (URAP) Apprentice, I have been exposed to a bounty of fascinating ideas and qualitative research techniques. I have learned about the complexities in navigating organizational structures and how that effects the implementation of changes that promote weight-health in elementary school students. I was given a freedom to explore different data collection and review methods within Nvivo 10. The fruits of this experience have and will continue to impact my academic and professional career.