

# FROM PLENARIES TO PODCASTS: ADVANCING STUDENT LEARNING IN EDUC 551

## SUMMARY REPORT

### OVERVIEW

Early in 2020, Dr. Shelly Russell-Mayhew from the Werklund School of Education received a University of Calgary Taylor Institute Teaching and Learning Grant for Development and Innovation in collaboration with Ever Active Schools and the Body Image Research Lab. The project sought to innovate the delivery of EDUC 551: Comprehensive School Health and Wellness, a required course for all B.Ed. students. Overall, this course aims to empower students with knowledge and skills that will enable them to promote holistic wellbeing for school communities.

Historically, EDUC 551 began with a three-day conference during Block Week featuring concurrent sessions and guest speakers. Following the Block Week conference, students attended lectures and labs for five weeks. While students were enthusiastic during the Block Week conference, they did not seem as engaged during large lectures. There was concern that a 75-minute plenary lecture, followed by a 3-hour lab was creating cognitive fatigue for learners. Reformatting the lecture content into podcasts helped break up the learning for students, and give them a chance to experience prioritizing their own wellbeing through their learning (in keeping with a main theme in the course). The “secondariness” of auditory podcasts allowed students to exercise, get outside, or develop a hobby while simultaneously learning course content.

The Development and Innovation Grant from the Taylor Institute provided the initial funding for the work and resources of the project. When the three-day Block Week conference had to be cancelled due to pandemic restrictions, the plan to flip just the lectures of the course grew to include flipping all of the conference content as well. Ever Active Schools was able to secure the funding to support the expanded initiative and host the collaborative series of 20 episodes, called Conversations on School Health, on their podcast channel, The Podclass.



### AVAILABLE ON



At the beginning of the course, one third of EDUC 551 students (n=324) reported that they typically listened to podcasts daily or 1-2 times per week.

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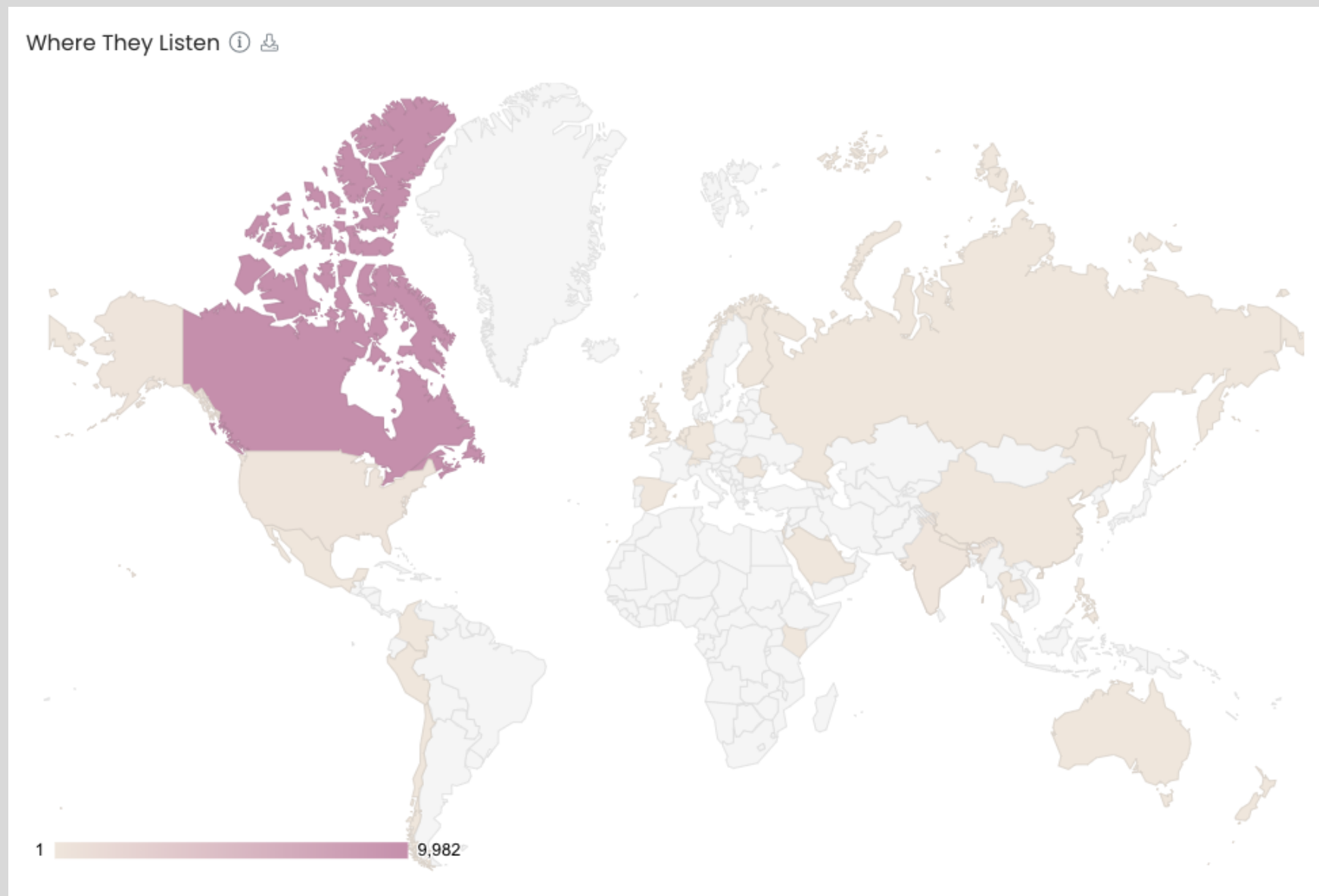
### EPISODE LIST

Altogether, 15.4 hours of professionally edited interviews with 25 experts, covering 20 topics concerning school health were created.

#	TITLE (RUN TIME)
1	Conversations on School Health: Meet the Hosts (11 min)
2	Foundations of Comprehensive School Health with Scott Bailey (46 min)
3	Vaping and Tobacco Education with Chrysta Bell (35 min)
4	How to Stay Calm as a Teacher During the COVID-19 Pandemic with Drs. Hu and Gustafson (36 min)
5	Positive Nutrition Messaging with Anna Lutz and Katherine Zavodni (44 min)
6	The Role of Play and the Outdoors in Education with Dr. Shannon Kell (53 min)
7	Activity Permissive Learning with Chris Fenlon-MacDonald (43 min)
8	Weight-Neutral Health Promotion with Dr. Shelly Russell-Mayhew (48 min)
9	The Impact of the Physical Environment on School Well-being with Tracey Tinley (55 min)
10	Promoting Empathy and Kindness at School with Krista Dumba (46 min)
11	Restorative Justice in a School Setting with Caroline Gosling (45 min)
12	Fostering Positive Relationships at School with Lianne Lee (37 min)
13	Trauma-informed Teaching Dr. Teresa Fowler (49 min)
14	Leadership Opportunities to Improve Student Wellbeing with Jamie Anderson and Elizabeth Tingle (50 min)
15	Comprehensive School Health and Sleep Promotion with Dr. Kate Storey (42 min)
16	Encouraging Positive Mental Health in Schools with Andrew Baxter (42 min)
17	Intentionally Creating Work-Life Balance with Lisa Bush (51 min)
18	How to Become a Health Champion for Yourself and For Your School with Lisa Taylor (40 min)
19	Positive Teacher Well-being with Dana Fulwiler (52 min)
20	Multiculturalism in the Classroom with Dr. Rahat Zaidi (54 min)
21	Mental Health and Substance Use with the Youth Addictions and Mental Health Provincial Advisory Council (46 min)

## ANALYTICS: KNOWLEDGE MOBILIZATION AND STUDENT EXPERIENCE

As a scalable and shareable pedagogy, the podcast series reinforces the leadership Werklund has shown in the field of Comprehensive School Health amongst teacher preparation programs. Since launching January of 2021, the Podclass has listeners from 33 countries. Individuals from every province and two of the three territories in Canada have accessed the podcasts.



## FINDINGS

EDUC 551 students were given opportunities to provide input throughout the course with optional surveys shared on D2L Participation ranged from 185 to 324. These findings were taken from the final survey focused on course delivery, n=185.

18% Students who listened to more than the two assigned podcasts each week.

76% Students who used the transcripts that were prepared for each episode.

89% Students who felt the amount of course content for this class was "just right" to allow them to balance their workload in this course and in others.

93% Students who felt the delivery method and content of the EDUC 551 course supported their own well-being as they learned.

82% Students who, if given the choice between the former all on-campus + Block Week conference format would prefer a course structure that continued with podcast learning at home and smaller, in-person lab cohorts.

3450 UNIQUE LISTENERS

10,393 DOWNLOADS

The most popular activities students reported doing while listening were:



Crafting and hobbies



Indoor chores



Relaxing and yoga



Walking, working out, and pet care



Taking notes and reading along with the transcript

Top 3 episodes students would recommended for listening:

#1 Weight Neutral Health Promotion with Dr. Shelley Russell-Mayhew

#2 Positive Teacher Well-being with Dana Fulwiler

#3 Trauma-informed Teaching with Dr. Teresa Fowler

## STUDENTS SAY...

"I am a student in your EDUC 551 course this semester. This is easily my favourite course. I always listen to the podcasts on my walks around the neighbourhood and I draw a lot of inspiration from them- both as a soon-to-be teacher and just for my own life.

As an aside, my parents are both teachers as well. They've started listening to the Podclass as well after hearing me talk about it so much. Hopefully we can get wellness initiatives into as many Calgary schools as possible! I find this class to be so directly useful and important as I move into my last practicum and (hopefully) begin my career. Thank you for the time and effort you've put into the series! I just wanted to express that because when I was teaching online, it felt like I was just throwing my lessons into the Zoom abyss and hoping they landed somewhere. I want you to know that these conversations have certainly affected me and how I plan to teach."

"I feel much better going into this last stage of my education and am looking forward to being a teacher with so much more optimism than I did before. We too often are told about the burn-out side and this series really countered that fear for me.

Thank you! This course was really mind-altering."

"I must let you know that I have absolutely loved the course content thus far. I have really enjoyed listening to each of the podcasts and focusing on my personal wellbeing while listening."

"This course has been absolutely fantastic and the podclasses were a huge hit! I actually passed them over to my partner teacher a few weeks ago and I hope it can help her out as well.

I strongly believe that the podclasses were impactful and represented holistic health with the flexibility it allowed. They were also very high-quality and I know a lot of students truly enjoyed them."

"Another argument for having this format (that I'm sure you're already aware of) is that it expands our conceptions of how information can be presented. Your podcast was interesting, engaging, and creative, yet still highly professional. Having the transcripts to accompany them was even better to be able to refer to references, resources or filling in gaps of pieces that stood out but may have been hard to completely remember since each podcast is packed with good ideas. Reading scholarly articles is an important part of university, but it is not the only way to learn. We are taught to differentiate as teachers, and it is refreshing when university professors incorporate some of these approaches while teaching in a post-secondary context."

## INSTRUCTORS SAY...

"The course assignments reflected deeper learning, and overall the learning seemed elevated compared to the delivery of previous years."

"Beautifully organized course. Loved the podcasts, keep the transcripts."

"Podcasts were excellent. No complaints."

"Just a note to let you know that students are enjoying the flexibility provided by the Podcasts."

## CONSIDERATIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

### Retain the podcast format for both Block Week and lectures for EDUC 551

The podcasts offer a novel and sustainable approach to course content for EDUC 551 that was widely supported by students. Using a flipped classroom method, where students listened to the assigned podcasts individually, and then gathered in smaller lab groups (virtually in 2021) to apply the concepts and extend the learning can be continued even when it is safe to return to campus. An unintended, but positive side effect is that the podcast saves students the investment in textbook materials.

Likewise, the in-kind investment from community partners to assist with organizing and presenting during Block Week is not required with a podcast approach, yet the same impact is achieved or exceeded. For example, many of the same or similar partners were involved as guests in the first series of episodes, and the resources they would have shared at the resource fair were included in the show notes. In fact, a geographically wider group of partners were able to participate because of the format - one teacher guest was from Ontario. Community-based pathways students were also able to access the expertise of these community partners through the podcast format, which has historically been difficult in EDUC 551. Additionally, the students could listen to every episode that interested them if they so chose, whereas attending every conference-style session during the on-site block week conference was not possible due to scheduling limitations. While secondary and hard to quantify, it is likely that this approach in the long term is more fiscally responsible both in terms of contributions from WSE and our community partners.

### Commit to updating 3-5 episodes per year to ensure assigned and optional content remains relevant

While many of the episodes were designed to be "evergreen," some episodes are necessarily time-bound. For example, the first series contained an episode on COVID-19 and teaching during a pandemic, which will presumably not be relevant in the future. A commitment to ongoing review and upkeep ensures that less relevant and less popular content can be retired and replaced with the most current information for a cutting-edge program. This could be negotiated as an inclusion in the role for plenary lecturer. Based on strong evidence that the transcripts were helpful to learners, a role for Teaching Assistants to offer this type of support would remain useful. A partnership with Ever Active Schools to collaborate on episodes and host the series on their channel could be reviewed every 1-3 years, with longer commitments preferable to ensure continuity with a high professional standard and polished result.

### Recognize and plan for the critical role the course coordinator played in production of the podcasts

The central role the plenary lecturer played was paramount all the way through planning and production, hosting and editing. Their involvement in planning helped line up episodes to topic areas matching the course outline and assisted in the selection of the right guest to present the topic. As a host, they were able to have an unexpected connection with students that is not normally possible in a large lecture. This connection was positively referenced in the feedback and outreach from students. They also intentionally struck a positive tone throughout the series, framing the profession as rewarding and challenging, to align with the well-being goal of Werklund School of Education's Health Champions Team around addressing the narrative of burnout. Through the editing process, they were able to ensure the messages across episodes, assignments, and readings were consistent and evidence-based.

### Consider how podcasts can be used in other courses

EDUC 551 need not be the only course at the Werklund School of Education to use podcast learning. The addition of podcasts to course materials can be done in small doses, as an option amongst assigned materials in course outlines or as part of course assignments. The flipped nature of the learning was very well-received from learners, in part because they could spend time in class applying the concepts or theories learned by listening. There is no need to custom-create episodes, although the Werklund School of Education is building their capacity to do so through projects like this. Quality content can be found on a wide range of educational topics. For example, [voicEd Radio](https://voicedradio.ca/), a Canadian-based community of people with a commitment to public education, hosts 135 different educational podcasts with numerous episodes each.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work was made possible through the collaborative efforts of many people and organizations. Funding support was provided by the Taylor Institute for Teaching and Learning at the University of Calgary, and from a Student Wellbeing for Systems Change Grant through WellAhead of the McConnell Family Foundation. Music for the PodClass was performed by Matthew Wood, Edmonton's Indigenous Artist in Residence for 2020. Sound engineering and consultation support was provided by Stephen Hurley of voicEd Radio. Elizabeth Tingle and Jamie Anderson were hosts and guests, while editing and transcribing support was provided by teaching assistants Helen Pethrick and Sally Vos. Cover art was created by Kayli McClelland. Elizabeth Tingle and Rebecca Marjoram co-produced the series with assistance from Kerri Murray. We are grateful to these partners for their skills and expertise, and wish to further extend thanks to the many guests on the show, and the listeners too.



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