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Building community partnerships to enhance participation in sport and physical activity: tertiary institutions and community sporting associations

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Physical Education and Sports Coaching

People, Participation and Performance



Edited by

John Saunders, Christopher Hickey
and Wayne Maschette

***People, participation and performance:
Physical education and sports coaching***

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Building community partnerships to enhance participation in sport and physical activity: Tertiary institutions and community sporting associations

Phil Pearson, Paul Webb and Kim McKeen

University of Wollongong

Chapter 10

Introduction

Tertiary institutions are an excellent resource that can be accessed in order to assist the development of many sporting programs. The following are examples of the links that have been established between a number of community sporting associations interested in the promotion of physical activity, games and sport and a university located in NSW, Australia. A number of 'informal' partnerships between the university and sporting organisations have been consolidated over the years to form strong working relationships. Whilst many programs within the university have utilised the skills and experience of external personnel, this paper will focus on the utilisation of these partnerships with undergraduate physical and health education students.

The Royal Life Saving Society of Australia (RLSSA) has established links to the university through a number of university physical and health education staff who are instructors and examiners for the RLSSA. The RLSSA bronze medallion and Austswim instructor's award are part of undergraduate programs for PEH students. Similar partnerships have been established with Surf Life Saving Australia, NSW Surfing, Professional Association of Diving Instructors (PADI) and Aquatic Rescue Management (a private accreditation agency) from mutual contacts that have resulted in the sharing of resources to provide a variety of water sport accreditations to students.

Other sporting associations that the university has developed ongoing partnerships with include Australian Rugby League, Australian Rugby Union, Australian Touch, Lacrosse NSW, Triathlon NSW, Cricket NSW and Hockey NSW. Once again, initial contact was through university staff involved in these associations. The partnerships have been sustained through ongoing relationships with sporting association personnel, including past and present students, who have taken up roles within these associations. These partnerships provide students access to external expertise which works with university staff and students to offer a variety of accreditation opportunities.

Additional partnerships have been developed with other associations and promoters of physical activity to provide sport-related work experiences for students. For example,

the Active After School Communities (AASC) program coordinators have developed a relationship with the university in terms of training and employing students. AASC is a national program that is part of the Australian Commonwealth Government's \$116 million Building a Healthy, Active Australia package. It provides primary aged school children with access to free, structured physical activity programs in the after school time slot of 3.00 pm to 5.30 pm. The program is designed to engage traditionally non-active children in physical activity and to build pathways with local community organisations, including sporting clubs (ASC, 2005). 'Playing for life' is an approach to coaching that uses games as the focus of development. By concentrating on game-based activities, children are able to 'develop skills within a realistic and enjoyable context, rather than practising them in isolation and from a technical perspective and become maximally engaged in dynamic game-based activities that use a fun approach to developing a range of motor skills' (ASC, 2005, p.53).

Many students have also developed strong relationships with individual schools and have the opportunity to assist in the organisation and implementation of sports carnivals and coaching various sporting teams. The university has developed a formal partnership in this regard with the local Catholic Education Office sports organiser. A list of the year's sporting events is provided to students who then select events at which they can assist, depending on their interest and experience.

Review of literature

Traditionally, the main, if not only, university partners for teacher education students have been schools. The majority of teacher education students begin their careers in schools and much of their training needs to be school-related. However, there has been an increase in recent years of physical and health education students from the university, on completion of their degree, accepting positions in sport-related careers other than teaching in schools. As such, it was deemed appropriate to increase work related experiences and opportunities for the students in addition to practice teaching in schools. Job advertisements in the Australian sport sector continue to grow with almost 2000 positions advertised in 2004, an increase of 23% compared to 2003. The data show the market continues to enjoy strong growth with the number of jobs in sport at its highest level in eight years (Sportspeople, 2004). Coaching and instructor jobs topped the survey, while community sport, leisure and fitness centres and the government sector continued to lead the market in terms of employment opportunities (Sportspeople, 2004).

The 2006 Melbourne Commonwealth Games also made a positive impact, with 150 jobs advertised, while initiatives such as the Active After-school Communities (AASC) program played a significant role in the jobs market with 131 appointments across Australia in 2004 Sportspeople, (2004).

The National Coaching Accreditation Scheme (NCAS) and the National Officiating Accreditation Scheme (NOAS) are education programs coordinated throughout the nation by the Australian Sports Commission. These have been embedded into Australia's sporting culture as the primary means of education and training for all levels of coaches and officials, from beginner to advanced (ASC, 2006). The aim is to ensure all sports have qualified coaches to promote a safe and enjoyable sporting experience for all. National sporting associations have implemented NCAS and NOAS through their affiliated state and local associations. Many of these associations are now developing partnerships with other training organisations in order to gain access to potential coaches (Recreation Training Queensland, 2005).

An increasingly common and very effective method for sporting organisations to attract well-trained staff is for them to partner with a Registered Training Organisation (RTO). The Sport Education and Training Kit (Recreation Training Queensland, 2005) focuses on developing such partnerships that offer benefits to both parties. These benefits include increased quality and consistency, access to new markets, increased financial gain, volunteer and staff reward and retention (Recreation Training Queensland, 2005). This is part of the National Sport Industry Training Package (NSITP) which is made up of a set of nationally endorsed standards, guidelines and qualifications used for training, assessing and recognising people's skills.

Whilst this model is an alternative to the Australian Sports Commission's coach education program, there is no reason why the established NCAS and NOAS cannot develop strong partnerships with tertiary institutions to access potential coaches and deliver high quality programs by sharing expertise and resources. Some Australian universities have already established on-site coordinators to develop such partnerships.

It has long been argued that there can be much better utilisation of resources to achieve common goals in physical and coach education through collaborative partnerships (Graham, 1988; Fiorentino, Kowalski and Barrette, 1993). There are several success factors that can be used by organisations building a partnership with a university. The first is communicating a shared vision for success (Meister, 2003). When managing education through strategic relationships with universities, existing infrastructure should be utilised. Programs need to be relevant, flexible and include a special costing for participants. At the start of the partnership, all key stakeholders should meet to assign roles and responsibilities with a champion from both the association and the university. The next goal should then be to mutually devise a recruitment and marketing program to communicate the benefits of the partnership (Meister, 2003).

Hart (2005) emphasises the importance of satisfying the needs and interests of all stakeholders for effective partnerships. The relationship of the partners involved is crucial to the success of the partnership. Hart (2005) outlines a number of characteristics that will develop and sustain partnerships. These include: involving all stakeholders in planning; determining roles and responsibilities for all participants; creating relevant opportunities that foster mutual learning and; continual evaluation to improve the partnership.

Description of the study

In 2005, forty physical and health education students from the Australian university undertook a subject that required them to take part in a variety of coaching, refereeing and sport-related accreditations and other sport-related experiences. Sports Studies is an elective subject offered to third and fourth year undergraduate students. Some of the outcomes for this subject require students to demonstrate a variety of skills in selected sports areas, analyse pedagogical issues in coaching/refereeing /administration, apply appropriate teaching techniques to certain sports, and develop an understanding of physical and recreational benefits, risk assessment and safety precautions related to sport.

Part of the assessment for this subject requires students to attain a Level 1 coaching accreditation (or equivalent) and be involved in a sport related experience equivalent to two and a half days (15-20 hours) duration. In addition to the 40 students, six personnel from different community sporting associations were surveyed. These sporting associations included Rugby League, Touch, Lacrosse, Hockey, AASC and RLSSA.

The questionnaire and interview questions focussed on the partnerships that had developed between the sporting associations and the university – the positives and negatives. For example, students and sporting association personnel were asked to describe the advantages and disadvantages of their course that was conducted within the university compared to those administered and implemented externally. All students involved in the questionnaire had completed coaching accreditations external to the university in previous years so this allowed for comparison between accreditations completed with sporting associations within university partnerships and those completed with other sporting associations.

Results

A summary of the results from the survey is shown in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1: Summary of participant responses

Positive	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Presenters take into consideration prior learning (30)• Participating in a course where all participants have similar backgrounds (27)• On-site learning - easier for transport arrangements (34)• Reduced cost a great attraction (38)• Credit as part fulfillment of subject assessment requirements (21)• Opportunity to 'get foot in the door' with potential employers (19)
Negative	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Do not get to mix with others from different backgrounds and Experiences (11)• Takes a while to get certificates (15)• Different from other courses where 'If you pay the money, you get the accreditation' (positive?) (14)

Table 2: Summary of provider responses N = 6

<p>Positive</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excellent venue and facilities (6) • Assistance from lecturers/students in administration (6) • Good foundation knowledge of participants (5) • Opportunity to access participants who may not have had an existing association with the sport or association (4) • Reputation of the university students (4) • Potential for developing/selecting future employees (6)
<p>Negative</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Linking in with university timetable (5) • Collection of money (3) • Parking in university grounds can be a problem, particularly with a lot of equipment (6)

Discussion

The results indicated that the benefits of the partnerships far outweighed any negatives for both the students and the sporting associations. Students can follow their sporting interests and gain valuable sport related work experience as part of their university qualification whilst sporting organisations gain access to potential coaches with knowledge and experience of teaching and coaching games. Sports organisations and educational authorities recognise the benefits of qualified coaches teaching in the school system.

There appears to be great variation in the presentation and expectations for different sports for similar level coaching qualifications. More consistency through quality teaching and assessment of outcomes is suggested. Part of the assessment for the university subject requires students to compile a resource folder of the accreditation including all resources from the course, additional resources and contacts, and an evaluation and critical analysis of the content and delivery of the program.

Recommendations from the study for sporting organisations to develop and sustain partnerships with tertiary institutions are summarised as follows:

- establish a contact from the university (collaborative planning and commitment)
- be flexible with the program in comparison with how it is usually delivered, so as to fit in with university student goals and expectations (eg. acknowledge prior learning, timetable restrictions)
- offer the program at a reduced cost/special student rate (if possible)
- involve staff and students in the administration and delivery of the program.

Conclusion

The university will continue with existing partnerships by working with sporting organisations to improve the quality of programs. New partnerships will be sought and developed to offer greater variety of opportunities for students by exploring student and sporting association needs. Ultimately, the long-term success of such partnerships is dependent on the on-going building of relationships between all key stakeholder groups. By working together, more can be achieved.

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