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Building community partnerships to enhance participation in sport and physical activity: tertiary institutions and primary schools

Kim Mckeen

University of Wollongong, kmckeen@uow.edu.au

Paul I. Webb

University of Wollongong, paul_webb@uow.edu.au

Philip J. Pearson

University of Wollongong, pearson@uow.edu.au

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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***

John Saunders, Christopher Hickey and Wayne Maschette

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| | | |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| Chapter Seven: Improving the quality of professional development experiences for physical education and school sport professionals. | <i>Jean Keay and Chris Lloyd</i> | 57 |
| Chapter Eight: Quality of Thai Attitude Towards Physical Activity measure development and validation. | <i>Chairat Choosakul, Duankarai Taweasuk and Arpon Pospa</i> | 69 |

SECTION THREE: Developing Partnerships

| | | |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| Chapter Nine: Building community partnerships to enhance participation in sport and physical activity: tertiary institutions and primary schools. | <i>Kim McKeen, Paul Webb and Phil Pearson</i> | 89 |
| Chapter Ten: Building community partnerships to enhance participation in sport and physical activity: tertiary institutions and community sporting associations. | <i>Phil Pearson, Paul Webb and Kim McKeen</i> | 95 |
| Chapter Eleven: Building community partnerships to enhance participation in sport and physical activity: coach education in tertiary institutions. | <i>Paul Webb, Phil Pearson and Kim McKeen</i> | 102 |

SECTION FOUR: Managing the Athlete

| | | |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|-----|
| Chapter Twelve: Ethical governance of Australian national sporting organisation. | <i>James Daly</i> | 111 |
| Chapter Thirteen: "We'll only recruit public school boys in the future": issues of risk management in talent identification and professional development in the AFL. | <i>Christopher Hickey and Peter Kelly</i> | 119 |

Building community partnerships to enhance participation in sport and physical activity: Tertiary institutions and primary schools

Kim, McKeen, Paul Webb and Phil Pearson

University of Wollongong

Chapter 9

Introduction

Decreasing levels of physical activity and increasing obesity levels amongst Australian children have received much attention in recent years, with research finding that the prevalence of overweight Australian children and adolescents, almost doubled during the ten year period from 1985 – 1995 (Magarey, Daniels and Boulton, 2001). Schools have been identified as one community setting that has the potential to address concerns regarding child physical activity and obesity levels by providing an environment which promotes lifelong physical activity, through both structured and unstructured programs. As a response to the resolutions from the Childhood Obesity Summit convened in New South Wales in 2002, the government recognised the role that schools can have in addressing childhood obesity and identified Healthier Schools as one of the seven key priority areas to prevent childhood obesity in NSW (NSW Department of Health, 2003).

Preparing Pre-Service Primary Teachers In Personal Development, Health And Physical Education (PDHPE)

In NSW public schools, there are no specialist teachers in primary schools (K – 6) and all classroom teachers are required to teach across all Key Learning Areas (KLAs). In the NSW curriculum there are six KLAs: English, Mathematics, Science and Technology, Personal Development, Health and Physical Education, Human Society and Its Environment, and Creative and Practical Arts. Subsequently teacher education institutions preparing pre-service teachers to teach in NSW primary schools must ensure that their students have the knowledge, skills and confidence to plan and implement programs in each KLA.

To prepare pre-service primary teachers to teach PDHPE and promote lifelong physical activity, all students in the Bachelor of Education (Primary) at a regional university in NSW, complete a core subject in PDHPE and have the opportunity to complete a range of PDHPE electives. Through strengthening and further developing partnerships that already existed between the university and local schools, one of the

PDHPE electives has fostered strong links with a cluster of local schools so that pre-service teachers have the opportunity to teach PDHPE as a component of the elective.

Developing School – University Partnerships

To integrate a classroom teaching component into the PDHPE elective, the two lecturers co-ordinating the subject initially approached the principals in three local primary schools. The reasons why these three schools were selected included:

- strong partnerships already existed between the Faculty of Education and schools through the practice teaching program
- the lecturers had previously had professional contact with the principals in each school and felt that they would be interested in their school participating in the program
- the schools had shown previous interest in promoting physical activity through their involvement in the NSW Department of Education and Training's Gold Medal Fitness Program – a professional development program to improve fundamental movement skills and increase physical activity levels in primary students
- the proximity to the University (each school was within ten minutes travelling time of the University)

These factors, together with principals who were already known to lecturers facilitated the development of the partnerships. All three schools approached were enthusiastic to be involved in the program with more teachers offering to take students than was required. As student interest in the elective increased, further partnerships were needed to meet student demand to ensure that the opportunity to teach PDHPE in a school setting could continue to be an integral component of the subject. Fortunately, the transfer of one of the principals from the initial three schools to another local primary school created a new partnership. Due to the success of the program at their previous school, one principal approached the subject co-ordinator requesting that their new school also be involved in the program. Further partnerships were also developed through principals contacting the University as they were made aware of the success of the program through local school networks. Currently there are seven schools actively involved in the program to cater for the forty six students enrolled in the elective in 2006. (Refer to table 1).

Table 1: Partnership development

| Initial Program - 2000 | 2006 Program |
|------------------------|---------------------|
| 3 schools | 7 schools |
| 11 classes | 23 classes |
| 22 students | 46 students |
| 3 x 1 hour sessions | 5 x 1 hour sessions |

Barriers to Partnerships

Although developing school-university partnerships for the purpose of the elective has been a relatively smooth process, there are several barriers that can impact on whether schools will be involved in the elective. These include:

University Timetable

It is essential that the subject is scheduled at a time in the week that is suitable for the schools involved in the partnerships. One example when the University timetable impacted on the partnerships was when two schools who had been involved since the program began, had to withdraw as the allocated time scheduled for the subject was moved from where it had been scheduled since the inception of the program. Consequently, when the subject was scheduled at a new time in 2005 two schools were unable to change their schools' weekly schedules to accommodate the elective and although the other schools remained involved they indicated that the allocated time was not ideal and that they may not be able to be involved or have as many staff involved if the allocated time remained for future years. To ensure the partnerships that had been developed were maintained the subject co-ordinators had to negotiate with the university to ensure that the subject was scheduled on Thursday afternoons to guarantee that we would have sufficient schools to meet student demand in 2006. This was achieved allowing all schools to be involved including the two schools that had to withdraw from the program in 2005.

University / School Calendar

When university session breaks and school holidays do not occur at the same time this can impact on the level of school experience that schools can provide. When this has occurred schools have been asked to be flexible when allocating teaching time to the students to allow the teaching experience to be completed in a fewer numbers of weeks. For example, in one year the students were required to teach five lessons within a three week period and negotiate times outside the scheduled teaching time to

make up the additional lessons. Although in most instances schools can accommodate these requests it can cause disruption to both the school week and the program.

Putting Theory into Practice

One of the strengths of this elective is the opportunity for students to put theory into practice – to teach PDHPE to ‘real children in real schools’, rather than teach their peers in the university environment. The school–university partnership created to support this subject provides this opportunity and enhances pre-service teachers’ knowledge, skills and confidence to plan and implement programs in PDHPE. The subject structure involves nine weeks of on-campus lectures/workshops followed by the in-school teaching experience. To meet subject requirements students must plan and implement five sequential PDHPE lessons which focus on ‘promoting a healthy lifestyle’ and integrate content strands across the PDHPE syllabus. Pre-service students must negotiate with their supervising teacher the specific content which they must cover from the K-6 syllabus, however, students are required to teach both theory (in the classroom) and practical lessons. With fundamental movement skills (FMS) considered the building blocks or precursors to more specialised skills that are involved in games, sports, dance, gymnastics and other recreation and leisure activities (Booth et al, 1997), all physical education lessons taught must have a strong emphasis on developing FMS. This supports the NSW PDHPE K-6 syllabus that states:

Children do not naturally develop fundamental movement skills as they grow. Opportunities should be provided for these skills to be taught, practised and encouraged. Having mastery of the Fundamental Movement Skills such as throwing, catching, running, and jumping opens up a vast array of sport, leisure and recreation options for individuals. (Board of Studies, 1999, p.8)

Benefits of the Partnerships

If partnerships are to be sustained all concerned must believe that the partnership is worthwhile and they must value the program. In this case study the partnership involves the university, schools, teachers, children and pre-service teachers. Partnerships that are formed between universities and schools can have a significant influence on enhancing pre-service teachers’ ability to develop and implement quality PDHPE programs which will promote lifelong physical activity. They also have the potential to provide valuable professional development opportunities for teachers. Both the pre-service teachers and the schools involved in this case study have cited several benefits of the partnerships. (Refer to table 2)

Table 2: Benefits of the partnerships to the participants

| School Benefits | University Benefits |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Adds value to the PDHPE program · Supports the school focus on fundamental movement skills · Provides professional development in PDHPE for classroom teachers · Develops links with pre-service teachers for support with other school activities · University partnership used by the school when promoting their school in the community | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Enriches the university learning environment · Provides opportunity for students to teach a KLA often not taught during past practice teaching experiences · Allows theory to be put into practice · Enhances pre-service student skills in teaching PDHPE · Develops pre-service student links to schools |

Conclusion

With schools identified as one community setting that has the potential to address concerns regarding child physical activity and obesity levels, it is vital that primary teachers recognise the role of the school in addressing these issues and acquire the knowledge, skills and levels of self-efficacy to deliver educational programs that will promote lifelong physical activity. The development of the university-school partnerships has provided pre-service primary teachers with teaching experiences in PDHPE which enable them to make links between the theoretical and practical aspects of teaching this KLA. This case study is an example of how a collaborative university-school partnership can have a significant influence on preparing pre-service teachers to better understand the role of the primary school in addressing concerns regarding the physical activity and obesity levels of children.

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