

Benefitting from National Initiatives: Tennis Australia ‘Hot Shots’

Abstract The purpose of this chapter is to share the continued ‘Friday Sports’ community partnership programme success. The programme again accentuated the vital role pre-service teacher education can play in the development of children’s health, wellbeing, and physical education (HW & PE). This was the second time ‘Friday Sports’, embedded in unit EDF3619 for the university students (pre-service teachers), was offered for local primary schools. Tennis Australia ‘hot shots’ national initiative was adopted as a platform, and subsequently, became the modified sport for all sessions. Data gathered and feedback received suggested that this major amendment was effective.

Discussion of the successful ‘Friday Sports’ partnership embedded in unit EDF3619 ‘Sport and physical activity education’ (semester one, 2012) was presented in Chap. 7. The purpose of this chapter is to share the continued ‘Friday Sports’ community partnership programme success. The programme again accentuated the vital role pre-service teacher education can play in the development of children’s health, wellbeing, and physical education (HW & PE), within all communities.

This was the second time ‘Friday Sports’ was offered for local primary schools and the second time it was embedded in unit EDF3619 for the Initial Teacher Education (ITE) university students (pre-service teachers). Using the Tennis Australia ‘hot shots’ national initiative as a platform, it was decided that tennis ‘hot shots’ would be the modified sport for

all sessions, a major amendment to 2012, when children were offered a number of modified sports to choose from. Data gathered and feedback received suggested that this was effective. Tennis Australia developed tennis ‘hot shots’ as an introductory developmentally appropriate programme for children where they can enjoy playing tennis with modified racquets, balls, and courts.

As previously addressed, the units within the PE major were offered biennially, that is, units were offered once every two years. Furthermore, keeping consistent with all partnership chapters, the storyline is shared with reference to the International Civil Society Centre (ICSC) ‘Nine building blocks for successful partnerships’ (2014, p. 14).

ACTORS

Leadership

In January 2014, the leader of the project ‘Best Start: A community collaborative approach to lifelong health and wellness’ was a guest speaker for Tennis Australia. The conference titled ‘University Education Day’ comprised delegates representing 12 Australian universities and Australian Council for Health, Physical Education and Recreation (ACHPER). It was held in the Tennis Australia Boardroom, during the 2014 Australian Tennis Open, and the presentation was titled ‘HPE in the primary school: generalist teachers, specialist HPE teachers and tennis development’. The leader reflected on experiences and thoughts from associations with schools, universities (teacher education), and community collaborations in relation to the development of tennis within primary schools which was appreciated (Lynch 2013a).

Hello Tim

Just a brief note to say thank you for attending the University Day at Melbourne Park. I really enjoyed your presentation and insights with regards to specialist and generalist teachers.

I look forward to staying in touch.

Let us know if we can be of further assistance. (Tennis Australia personal communication, 22 January, 2014)

This initiated strong relations with the Tennis Australia ‘Tennis in schools manager’ and the ‘Coach education coordinator’. The University Education Day was part of the national promotion for the implementation of tennis ‘hotshots’, an introductory programme to tennis for children in schools and communities. The leader envisaged that equipment could be supplied by Tennis Australia, Monash University Faculty of Education, and the local leisure centre could provide the facilities (hockey field and stadium) and pre-service teacher health and physical education (HPE) expertise.

The leader travelled to Melbourne where he received a day of inservicing for the ‘hot shots’ programme and collected equipment from Tennis Australia’s home at Melbourne Park. Online ‘hot shots’ tutorials were available and utilised to assist the pre-service teachers learning. They were also encouraged to sign up for the Teacher Ambassador Programme, where they could receive free ‘hot shots’ teacher resources. The article ‘School Centres for Teaching Excellence (SCTE): understanding new directions for schools and universities in health and physical education’ published in the *Asia-Pacific Journal of Health, Sport and Physical Education* (Lynch 2013b) was shared with the education coordinators. This enabled a common understanding and enabled Tennis Australia to be aware of the leader’s intentions for implementing ‘hot shots’ within the Gippsland context.

School visits were made by the leader to stoke interest for the ‘Friday Sports’ programme. While all schools were initially interested in the programme, just a few days before, some schools reneged on their intentions due to costs for transport or clashes with other educational priorities. This will be discussed in detail in Chap. 10.

Partners

Partnerships instigated with Tennis Australia were timely with the release and promotion of the ‘hot shots’ education programme. Tennis Australia “is the governing body for the sport of tennis in Australia. The organisation exists to promote tennis and to conduct domestic and international tournaments on behalf of Australia, including the Australian Open and the Davis Cup for the Australian Davis Cup Team” (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tennis_Australia).

Another new partner to the Best Start programme was Federation University. In May 2013, Monash University announced that it was to

transfer its Gippsland campus to be part of a new Federation University Australia (formally Ballarat University). This was described as a merger and occurred on 1 January 2014. Monash ceased making offers to new students, and made arrangements with Federation University for teaching its continuing students. Hence, Federation University became a partner by default and the ITE students (pre-service teachers) remained students of Monash University.

The local tennis club held discussions with the leader and offered support in the form of using tennis courts, assistance from tennis coaches, and in return, the children were given flyers with the tennis club's details. While the tennis club were not heavily involved, they did become new partners and had the potential to play a large role in the future. The local health industry (local leisure and sports centre) continued their support of the local primary school children through the availability of facilities at reduced costs for Federation and Monash universities.

While all six schools involved in the Best Start programme initially expressed intentions in having their children participate, this was reduced to five schools, and then two days before the first session another two schools reneged. Subsequently, the Friday Sports were conducted over four weeks, and the schools that participated included Lumen Christi (Year 3–6), Churchill Primary (Year 5 and 6), and Yinnar South (Year 3–6).

PROCESS

Goal Setting

Although the involvement of local primary schools during the unit (at no cost) remained the major goal, the programme leader was forced to lower his expectations for the Best Start programme. This was due to the impact the change of institution, from Monash University to Federation University, had on the community. While the change was promoted as an exciting new chapter in Gippsland's history, it was received by the school and university community as an exodus. There was no denying that relations between the schools and university had been affected in a negative way. The Gippsland community was losing a renowned university ranked globally in the top 1%. Subsequently, the partnership was not taken as seriously, and in some cases, the pressure for schools to be involved had deteriorated and memories of previous learning experiences, in some schools, lost.

The 2012 goals for the Friday Sports programme remained. From a university perspective, the teacher education students were provided with an opportunity to teach and reflect on real-life experiences. Equally as important, this programme provided children in local primary schools with quality HPE lessons, whilst at the same time educating and/or reinforcing teachers within schools with practical quality HPE. Another goal of the programme was to progressively work towards achieving the objectives of the broad framework for unit EDF3619, the Sports Education curriculum model: "to develop as competent, literate and enthusiastic sportspeople" (Siedentop 1994, p. 4).

Funding

Hope for funding in this programme had all but disappeared. After applying for 12 internal and external grants for the Best Start project, in addition to working collaboratively with the Monash University Gippsland philanthropist to no avail, the leader chose to stop donating time and effort to this cause. It was decided that instead of applying for grants that opportunities where partnerships with a win-win result would be explored. This was the situation for Swimming Australia, one of the strong partnership stakeholders.

Tennis Australia was another stakeholder of strength, similar to Swimming Australia. For this reason tennis 'hot shots' was chosen by the leader to be the focus for the 'Friday Sport Program' in the biennial unit. While some children had experienced tennis, surprisingly most had not. Tennis Australia supplied 18 'hot shots' mini tennis courts, 100 racquets, and 200 modified tennis balls. The 60 pre-service teachers provided four weeks of tennis 'hot shots' lessons to children from Lumen Christi (Year 3–6), Churchill Primary (Year 5 and 6), and Yinnar South (Year 3–6).

Management

Not having previous knowledge of the children, the leader originally decided that upper primary (Year 5 and 6) were developmentally appropriate and best suited to the Sports Education curriculum model and within the sport of 'hot shots' tennis. However, after two schools gave late notice of their unavailability, the schools already involved were offered for other year levels to participate, just one day before the sessions were planned to begin.

Similar to the Friday Sports sessions in 2012, each tennis group consisted of four teacher education students and approximately ten children with mixed sexes and mixed schools (this included mixed school systems). The sports were conducted in two sessions on a Friday. The first session was between 10:30 and 11:30 am and the second session was between 1:15 and 2:15 pm. There were approximately 30 Monash University students in each session which was designed to coincide with their unit tutorial/workshop times, and approximately 150 children. Schools and pre-service teachers were sent programme details in a similar format to Fig. 7.1.

It was clarified that schools were responsible for the implementation of their own school excursion policies and that while the university students (pre-service teachers) were very capable and had a great deal of potential, they were not qualified teachers. Each school was responsible for arranging their own transport to and from the Latrobe Leisure Centre—Churchill. Respect for all adults regardless of whether they were from a school, university, or leisure centre was also reinforced, and as had been always the case, the teachers worked collaboratively with the pre-service teachers.

The pre-service teachers were given clear guidelines for preparation. They were to choose their own groups (of four students) and were required to prepare a unit ‘sequence of lessons’ that outline using tennis ‘hot shots’. Lessons were to focus on a particular skill (or strategy), to be progressively developed through fun games (aim of a prerequisite unit) and/or modified version of the sports.

Lessons were required to be flexible and inclusive, and the identified skill and/or strategy was to be the focus for each of the four week’s lessons, and each pre-service teacher was required to take leadership for a particular week and plan the lesson’s activities in detail. During the four-week programme, time was allocated before and after the primary school sessions so that reflection could take place, queries could be voiced and answered, equipment could be prepared, and space could be maximised.

Monitoring, Reporting, Evaluation, and Learning

‘Best Start’ had a positive atmosphere that had been developing over the years, and this year surprisingly amongst some schools the vibe appeared to have diminished. Despite this, data gathered from stakeholders suggested continued success. Methodologies for monitoring and evaluating the learning during the ‘Friday Sports—hot shots’ programme consistently included a reflective journal, ongoing observations, and regular informal

interviews held with all stakeholders, namely, the pre-service teachers, teachers, school principals, leisure centre staff, children, and parents.

The previous discussions the leader had with teachers and principals during the Best Start programme had paid dividends as teachers began sending e-mails to the leader detailing what they thought were the best aspects. Furthermore, letters from schools were also received at the Faculty of Education. These were letters of thanks addressed to the pre-service teachers from the children (Fig. 9.1). Such actions, in what was to be the last of the 'Best Start: A community collaborative approach to lifelong health and wellness' lessons for schools, were a fitting way for the programme to conclude. The teachers acted without any probing as a sign of appreciation.

The overall ITE student satisfaction (pre-service teachers) with the quality of the unit (Student Evaluation of Teaching Unit—SETU) received a median of 4.4 out of 5; more so, the 'positive contribution to experiences during practicum' received a median of 4.75 out of a maximum 5. University pre-service teachers shared that the best aspects of the unit was "Being able to teach children and the feeling of satisfaction when the children learn from what you taught them and when they enjoy the sport" (SETU EDF3619 2014, Q11). Another commented, "I thoroughly enjoyed the opportunity to plan and implement lessons with the local schools. It was challenging and engaging" (SETU EDF3619 2014, Q11). "Being able to work with students [children] in the physical activity aspect. The group work was helpful and encouraging" (SETU EDF3619 2014, Q11). Comments also acknowledged the resources provided by the new partners, Tennis Australia:

The resources that were made available within this unit. By participating in activities with the students [children] one day a week, the best opportunity was given to all pre-service teachers. The leader had all of the necessary equipment for tennis available to use and guided us to receiving resources from Tennis Australia. This unit has provided myself with the most knowledge and experience for teaching! (SETU EDF3619 2014, Q11)

The children commented to their teachers, and as previously mentioned, posted letters of thanks to the university. One boy wrote, "I learnt how to backhand and it was a great program" (personal communication, 19 June 2014). Another girl expressed her enjoyment: "I would like to say it was an awesome four weeks with our coaches and I got to

Thankyou to the Hot shots people for giving up their time and teaching us how to play tennis and the techniques. I learned how to do a forehand a backhand, how to get a grip of the tennis racquet; how to pick up a tennis racquet, the best way to hit the tennis racquet and I learned how to go over the bridge then go under the bridge to the top. I always thought tennis was boring but what you have thought me now so I love tennis, I even want to play. So thankyou for teaching me I hope all of you end up being a coach for a tennis team.

Breeanna

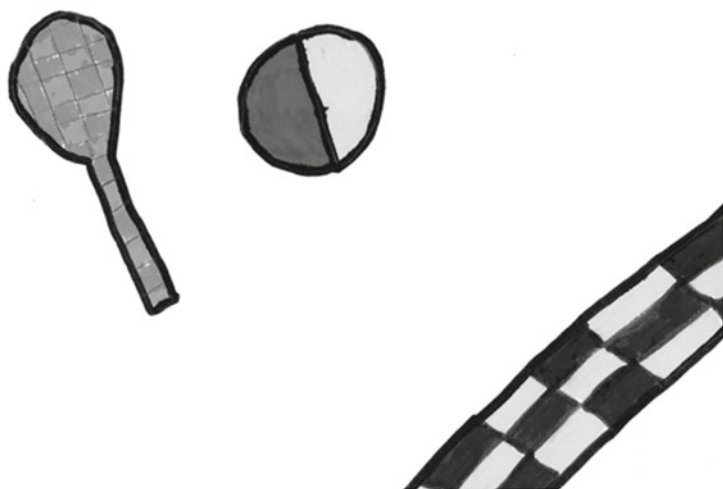


Fig. 9.1 A letter of thanks from a child

learn a lot about tennis. I had a great time” (personal communication, 19 June 2014). Teachers also offered very positive feedback to the tennis programme: “The program gave both students [children] and pre-service teachers a chance to develop new skills. The students [children] were always engaged and they looked forward to going” (personal communication, 23 June 2014). Another teacher commented that it was an inclusive programme that reached out to the non-sporty children, who “were given some one on one attention and allowed them the chance to ‘shine’”. Some of my less sporty children loved the sessions and a few were keen to start playing. One girl who normally does not enjoy physical activities, brought a racquet from home and was playing at recess time” (personal communication, 4 June 2014). Also, another teacher commented, “The kids absolutely loved it and were engaged for the whole time—even some of my girls who never do sports” (personal communication, 4 June 2014).

While many benefits of the ‘Best Start’ programme have been recognised within the first six stages of the ICSC ‘Nine building blocks for successful partnerships’ (2014, p. 14), the last three stages in the nine building blocks relate to context, problems, and overcoming obstacles.

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