CHAPTER 10

Overcoming Barriers and Problem Solving

Abstract The purpose of this chapter is to investigate the difficulties within partnerships, the problems to be solved. The UN state that 'partnerships' are essential for implementation of the SDGs but also acknowledge that many barriers must be overcome. This is evidenced by the UN Economic and Social Council special event; '2015 Multi-Stakeholder partnerships: Making them work, for the Post 2015 Development Agenda'. There were many obstacles during the Health, Well-being and Physical Education (HW & PE) project and insights are shared for the benefit of stakeholders in a similar context.

This chapter investigates the difficulties with partnerships, the trials and tribulations. The UN states that 'partnerships' are essential for implementation of the SDGs and continued efforts towards equality in health and wellbeing. However, they also acknowledge that many barriers must be overcome and problems solved as evidenced by the UN Economic and Social Council special event titled '2015 Multi-Stakeholder partnerships: Making them work, for the Post 2015 Development Agenda'. There were many obstacles during the Health, Well-being and Physical Education (HW & PE) project, 'Best Start: A community collaborative approach to lifelong health and wellness'.

Partnerships often fail due to the complex and cumbersome problems that arise, what Leisinger refers to as 'wicked' problems. Wicked prob-

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lems are "not evil, but tricky, devious, messy and big, with interacting and evolving dynamics of social societal context" (Leisinger 2015). This is supported by research by Pattberg et al. (2012) who found that less than one quarter of partnerships output aligned directly with their stated goals.

Overcoming barriers and problem solving has strong connections to the 'how' of partnerships and is often dependent upon context. Context is the sub-heading for the last three stages of the International Civil Society Centre 'Nine building blocks for successful partnerships' (2014, p. 14), referenced throughout the storyline. The building blocks were identified for creating successful multi-stakeholder partnerships based on over 15 years of research from successful and failed partnerships (ICSC 2014).

Context

Meta-governance

> Partnerships are an indication of an emerging property of global governance, namely, fragmentation, which is characterised by uncoordinated and non-hierarchical institutional arrangements, often leading to overlap and competition among initiatives within one and the same issue area. Without coordination, fragmentation could lead to inefficiencies, redundancies, and a seemingly large governance landscape, but with little real impact. (ICSC 2014, p. 28).

The ideal of the community collaborations was to create a 'hybrid space', involving "non hierarchical interplay between academic, practitioner and community expertise" (Zeichner 2010, p. 89). The reality of meta-governance is often the reverse of this purpose, where conflict between stakeholders is experienced with counterproductive results.

Competition and overlap was present from the very beginnings of the project (January 2011). There was initial resistance by the leader to complete the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment as while it was clear that this was the requirement for anyone wishing to become a swimming and water safety presenter, it did seem somewhat inconsistent that previous teaching experience was not recognised as 'training and assessment'. A university lecturer with a number of education degrees—all of a higher AQF Framework level—was then required to complete

further study to demonstrate that he could meet the unit of competencies for a Certificate IV in Training and Assessment. The leader's experience included fifteen years full-time teaching experience in schools; at the time he had two years full-time teaching experience at higher education, over ten years' experience in working in association with swimming and water safety, and he also held current teacher registration. Hence, it did appear that "some policies and regulations governing funding and the delivery of training are seen by rural providers as working against their efforts to supply innovative solutions to meet the training needs of their communities" (Clayton et al. 2004, p. 5). This course requirement for training purposes was at a cost ($1600), was time consuming, and created a definite barrier.

The paradox in ideologies between capitalism of business and social justice of education, specifically the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (December 2008), did not always sit flush when establishing partnerships. On a global scale, a similar polarisation has been identified as a fundamental contradiction between governments and the private sector and one that needs to be reconciled for moving forward with the SDG agenda.

It was during a weekend Presenter course where the AUSTSWIM business ideology was revealed to the leader. AUSTSWIM adopted a business model not consistent to the education (swimming and water safety promotion) that was being proposed by the leader. It was explained that AUSTSWIM was owned by all stakeholders (presenters and qualified swim teachers), where Presenters became franchise owners, who were qualified and registered to sell the AUSTSWIM product (personal communication, February 5, 2011). It was recommended that Presenters charge enrolments $350 of which $215 went to AUSTSWIM for the administration costs and $135 went to the Presenter (personal communication, 16 February 2011). The university proposal therefore required a franchisee (university lecturer with AUSTSWIM Presenter qualifications) presenting at a discounted price. Such a proposal was inconsistent with the business model in two ways; one, it made other Presenters appear to be quite expensive in comparison to the maximum charge for the students of $215, and two, it could potentially deduct business away from other franchisees within the Gippsland region.

Competition had also penetrated deeply within the community. The programme leader was introduced to the Leisure Centre's Swimming Supervisor during the first meeting. The supervisor also supported the

pathways being created although explicitly advocated preference for AUSTSWIM as a provider over the chosen ASCTA SAT. This was to be expected within country Victoria where policies were at times only in place for AUSTSWIM as a swimming provider (Gosper 2012). However, it was surprising for the programme leader as AUSTSWIM had a close philosophical and working relationship with Swim Australia, the Royal Life Saving Society of Australia (RLSSA) and Surf Life Saving Australia (SLSA) (AUSTSWIM 2009).

Furthermore, AUSTSWIM recognised professional development from these organisations for accreditation points towards re-registration and vice-versa. According to "Swim Australia chief executive Ross Gage, AUSTSWIM was blocking other RTOs from licensing instructors" (Gosper 2012), which was illegal. This pathway involved change, which subsequently resulted in benefits for the community and yet within this context was also being perceived as competition. "Competition rather than collaboration is an issue commonly identified in the research on vocational education and training in rural communities" (Balatti and Falk 2000; Centre for Research and Learning in Regional Australia 2001; Clayton et al. 2004; Owen and Bound 1998).

After semester one 2011, the leader decided to liaise with the primary schools in all future collaborations rather than allowing this to be the responsibility of the pool swimming instructor/s. This initial arrangement proved to be problematic and misrepresentative. Confirmation of which schools, classes, numbers, and ability groups attending were left to the very last minute, which was difficult for the author and education students who were preparing lessons and wanted to optimise safety. Another barrier that caused initial damage to the collaborative pathway, and as such the ASCTA reputation, which was difficult to rebuild within the community, was the misinformation the Swimming Supervisor provided the primary school community about the lessons. The first time the author met with the classroom teacher and teaching assistants, he needed to reassure them about the safety of the lessons and defend the SAT Swimming and water safety programme. The Swimming Supervisor referred to the SAT programme the university students were completing as a subordinate programme. Such an action could only be rationalised because "the training market is a competitive one" (Clayton et al. 2004, p. 28). This behaviour was not consistent with the AUSTSWIM proclaimed close philosophical and working relationship with Swim Australia (AUSTSWIM 2009).

During the primary school swimming lessons, there were problems with a Swimming Supervisor advising education students to use strategies that were not appropriate or of quality practice. An example of this was when a child in Year 2 did not want to participate in an aspect of the lesson. The education student was understanding and gently encouraged the child to have a rest and then have another attempt when he felt comfortable. The Swimming Supervisor moved across to the student and child, assertively demanding that the student force him to do the activity and not to give him a choice. The education student knowingly did not respond to the Swimming Supervisor and continued the correct practice. Later it was reinforced by the classroom teacher that the education student had managed the particular child very well and built a good rapport which was evidenced by the child's application. This was one example of the difficulties in attempting to align a four-year university degree, comprising in-depth studies in discipline content and pedagogy, with that of a qualification completed in a weekend and supplemented by 20 hours of on the job experience.

Further, Robertson (2008, p. 19) suggests that even the next sequential qualification from the swimming instructor, the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment, "does not embed the opportunity to develop the suite of knowledge bases required for autonomous training in diverse and complex environments". Naturally, alignment of a tertiary education university degree with the industry course was not flush, an argument that cannot be ignored when marrying up two education disparities.

Another example of perceived competition occurred during the tennis 'hot shots' programme in 2014. The president of the local Tennis Club immediately contacted the leader upon hearing of the free tennis lesson programme. Initially, she was defensive and curious about the intentions of the school lessons and was concerned that it was going to be competition for the tennis club; even poaching potential tennis players away. After a discussion, the president realised that tennis promotion was the winner and that stakeholders could work together with a shared mission.

Political and Social Context

Collaboration involves a complex process of social relationships and "partnerships are embedded in a political and social context that will influence their chances to thrive" (ICSC 2014, p. 29). There was improvement for

the various stakeholders and most importantly for the children who were provided lessons; however, there was political and social influence.

There were no partnerships between the university, schools, and community organisations when the 'Best Start Programme' began, nor was there a history of partnership success. The curriculum change implemented resulted in curriculum reform for the university students and the primary school children. Ewing (2010, p. 148) describes the terms with clarity:

> Change arguably refers more generally to undertaking something new: a movement from one state, form or direction to another. Curriculum reform implies more than change—it is a direct assertion that this change will bring about improvement or enhancement. Curriculum re-form therefore suggests that students will benefit from the innovative practices, materials or the teacher's change in beliefs and pedagogical approach. In other words, their experiences at school will in some way improve.

There were many obstacles that had to be overcome or evaded to enact what appeared on the surface to be a simple and common sense approach to optimising the HW & PE experience. The intention of the programme was advocated and perceived as being 'in the best interest of the children' which provided a shared mission and motivation across stakeholders.

The drive to continue providing opportunities to develop children's HW & PE was intended to be the localisation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). CRC "is the most recognised international treaty setting out the basic rights of children, along with the obligations of governments to fulfil those rights. It has been accepted and ratified by almost every country in the world." (Garvis and Pendergast 2014, p. 8). The Convention has 54 articles which have four fundamental principles: non-discrimination; best interests of the child; survival, development and protection; and participation.

'The best interests of the child' refers to "Laws and actions affecting children should put their best interests first and benefit them in the best possible way" (Garvis and Pendergast 2014, p. 8). In particular, "article 31 of the Convention of the Rights of the Child, which outlines the right of the child to engage in play and recreational activities, and the outcome document of the twenty-seventh special session of the General Assembly on children, entitled 'A world fit for children' which stresses the promotion of physical, mental and emotional health through play and sports"

(United Nations General Assembly 2015, p. 3), supported that the programme was advocating children's best interest.

The strengths-based collaborations involved HPE curriculum change for schools and university teacher education. Previous teaching experiences would often be reflected upon to maintain realistic expectations in attempt to overcome barriers, to better understand the complexities involved when dealing with many different individuals with at times different priorities, and subsequently to enable sustainability.

The Best Start programme was timely, as community collaboration within the context of Gippsland was strongly supported by the Discussion Paper 'A Tertiary Education Plan for Gippsland, Victoria' (DEECD 2011) and formed Gippsland educational objectives. This was written specifically for the context of Gippsland using recent national and state level developments including the Review of Australian Higher Education. This paper stated that it "encourages building on existing partnerships and strengthening articulation arrangements between providers" (2011, p. 4). Also, light was shed on the difficulties faced by many stakeholders in efforts to do so; however, it was urged that such pathways were essential for sustainability of Gippsland's education.

The Discussion Paper suggested that positive experiences for children and their families built an optimistic image of Monash University within the community. The Discussion Paper listed raising aspirations and improved awareness as a targeted strategy, specifically "school engagement/outreach programs addressing the perception of tertiary education in the primary and secondary school environment" (2011, p. 21).

Real change involves transformation of people's beliefs about their surroundings which can be threatening and stressful for the teachers involved (Sparkes 1991). Furthermore, transformations often result in conflict, loss, and struggle which are fundamental to successful change (Fullan 1982). The appellation 'real change' is referred to by Dinan-Thompson (2001, p. 9) more appropriately as 'authentic change' which includes the "important elements of emotion and the role of interactions in teacher change". Hargreaves (1997, p. 109) warns that if emotional dimensions are ignored during curriculum change then "emotions and feelings will only re-enter the change process by the back door". Therefore, authentic change takes into consideration the micro-politics which often cause change to fail (Datnow 1998; Dinan-Thompson 2002; Sparkes 1990). Community partnerships may be perceived as stressful and threatening for

various stakeholders. Hence, for partnerships and relationships to be sustained requires time, understanding, effort, and personable attributes on the behalf of the leader, but most importantly, it requires all stakeholders to believe that the efforts are worthwhile.

Dynamics are involved when collaboratively working with a number of stakeholders and when changing curriculum. There were barriers that needed to be overcome for future growth and for similar programmes to succeed. Initial problems did appear to relate to the busy nature of schools. There were schools where every effort was made by the author to invite them to participate but no interest was expressed. Ten schools were approached and six agreed to be involved. Dissimilar to the author and many of the Principals, not all school leaders valued this opportunity. One school's secretary made the decision of 'no interest' on behalf of the school and the Principal did not reply to telephone calls, e-mails, or three personal visits. At times, teachers had not read e-mails and one school chose sports for the children randomly (Friday Sports programme) and then requested that they could change sporting groups the following week.

As previously mentioned, choosing stakeholders and partners wisely was an important strategy. Partnerships with a win–win result were carefully sought. Relations could not be forced, neither could trust as stakeholder commitment and belief was essential. This was the situation for Swimming Australia and Tennis Australia, who were undeniably the strongest partnerships established.

Problem Structure

> It is important not to design all partnerships according to a pre-set template, but rather to explore its envisaged functions and then determine what the most appropriate structure is. (ICSC 2014, p. 32).

The author approached the community collaborations with realistic expectations of the possible micro-political dynamics involved in establishing relationships requiring change. Interestingly, within this 'Best Start' programme journey it was not such identified complexities involving relationships that were the major impediments. Generally, the willingness of stakeholders to be involved within the partnership was an imminent strength. Rather, it was the systems in place, also referred to as the prob-

lem structure. Structural problems existed within the university, schools, leisure centre, and educational policies.

"The literature on vocational education and training in rural and remote communities identifies a series of barriers that impact upon effective training delivery." The following complicating factors were seen to be influential in training delivery in rural communities:

1. Smaller numbers in training meant that, generally, the finances, resources and infrastructure for supporting such delivery were correspondingly limited.
2. Isolation created particular problems in terms of accessing training and finding the qualified teaching staff to provide training. Lack of public transport was a major factor in lack of access.
3. The impact of outside training providers was controversial. While their value was acknowledged for the expertise and facilities that they could bring to the community, they were not seen to have the community's best interest at heart, due to their lack of one-on-one interaction and failure to generally follow up.
4. 'Thin' markets—or markets characterised by low activity and thus lacking depth and volume—meant a lack of diversity in training programmes able to be offered, with funding being the main barrier to the provision of a broader range of programmes.
5. Access to relevant workplaces was problematic, not only from the viewpoint of finding places but also because of the problem of public liability and the high increasing cost of insurance.
6. Coordination, promotion and marketing of training packages across all businesses and education and training sectors within rural communities is not sufficiently effective. (Clayton et al. 2004, p. 7).

In reflection, the arrival of the author, his efforts to supply innovative solutions to meet the training needs of the Gippsland community and the introduction of ASCTA may have been perceived at times by the local community as that of an 'outsider'. With an open training market, it is possible for training providers who are registered to deliver within a state or across several states, to bid to conduct training anywhere within their scope. Inevitably, this brings some external training providers into rural communities (Clayton et al. 2004, p. 19). While their value was acknowledged for the expertise and facilities that they could bring to the

community, they were not seen to have the community's best interest at heart, due to their lack of one-on-one interaction and failure to generally follow up.

The choice in ASCTA SAT nationally recognised course RTO20948 was an easy one to make, but again one that was made difficult due to change caused for organisations within country Victoria (Gippsland), where policies were at times in place for only AUSTSWIM as a swimming provider (Gosper 2012). The paradox in ideologies between capitalism of business that some providers adopt and social justice of education, specifically the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (December, 2008), did not enable particular partnerships to be established.

Specifically within education, ideologies between capitalism of business and social justice of education, do not sit flush (Lynch 2012). This is a contentious issue not only amongst various stakeholders when creating pathways and negotiating articulation arrangements, but is exasperated within the university sector itself. Universities are committed to excellence in research and education; in particular, Monash University has academic strengthening initiatives that have seen it recently rise considerably in international university rankings. However, while the university "strives to embrace social justice through practical pathways for engagement, the drive for excellence is [remains] the primary mission of the university" (personal communication, October 13, 2011).

From a university perspective, there were also structural barriers to contend with within the Faculty of Education. The six units offered to the primary education university students, choosing the PE major stream were discipline units managed from another Monash University campus and designed for industry (Sport and Outdoor Recreation) and/or secondary education. They were not primary education focused which required careful manipulation so that the original objectives were met. This is often difficult as the unit needed to be developmentally appropriate for primary children without changing the set assessment. Each unit of work had unique dynamics that required unique structures. Another barrier was within the structure of the PE major stream where the unit is only offered biennially. Having units offered only once every two years was not ideal for establishing ongoing relationships with schools and personnel.

The major problem for the community collaborations and partnership growth was funding. However, this was not an issue as much with relations to the provision of swimming lessons. It was surprising at the time

that there was no funding available for either unit in Gippsland or equipment for the development of such a well-received programme despite numerous applications for internal and external funding. The Health and Physical Education community collaborative lessons were espoused by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) School Centre for Teaching Excellence initiative, yet this did not prosper any financial assistance.

When approaching schools situated a distance from the venue for the Friday Sports programme the cost of transport was a barrier. While the three Churchill schools were able to walk to sessions, other schools' only option to participate was to travel distances of up to 30 km by bus. Thorpdale primary school children were required to pay $7.50 each week over the five weeks to attend the Friday Sport sessions which was an unfortunate expense. Purchasing equipment was problematic and even more so when some equipment went missing from the community stadium. The issue with funding has been stressed by the Gonski report which found that similarly "school funding is not simply a financial matter. Rather, it is about strengthening and securing Australia's future." (ABC News 2012) It is argued that, "every child should have access to the best possible education, regardless of where they live, the income of their family, or the school they attend." (ABC News 2012). Strengths-based partnerships will often require financial assistance for initial course development, extension, and sustainability. Plans were made to continue to develop swimming and sport sessions within the schools and to extend HPE learning opportunities across primary schools' HPE curriculum. The innovative UK ITE successful PE programme received funding and also had a full-time administrative position within the department, who played a substantial role in partnership establishment and organisational tasks.

Unbeknown to all stakeholders there were plans made by Monash University and governments that offered an explanation for the lack of funds and which eventually led to the demise of the 'Best Start' programme and the introduction of Federation University. Again, this decision did appear to be built on a financial platform.

Finally, finding resolutions to barriers situated within policies and systems is time consuming. Time is needed to meet with schools and Principals, to negotiate with RTOs; to complete further qualifications; to negotiate with the local health industry; to complete funding applications; and to calculate one's approach to overcome obstacles, problem solve, and satisfy stakeholders. While there were a number of obstacles and barriers

to overcome and problems to be solved, efforts and time invested were greatly valued by all stakeholders.

Responses from stakeholders suggested that they all valued the enhanced learning community collaboration generated. The children from the local primary schools were excited, parents attended lessons in support and comments from teachers, teaching assistants, parents, and the children expressed gratitude. We are reminded by Lawrence (2015) that different interests will always exist and they are not a barrier to success, rather "different interests create the intellectual tension that allows you to find better ways to solve problems".

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