

Partnerships Work: Continuing the Success in Swimming and Water Safety

Abstract The purpose of this chapter is to share the continued swimming education community partnership programme success. Pathways were investigated and initiated in 2011 which began a journey of collaboration between Australian Registered Training Organisations (RTO), the local health industry (local leisure and sports centre) and external swimming instructors employed at the venue, local primary schools, and the university sector; Monash University (Gippsland). The programme accentuated the vital role pre-service teacher education can play in the development of children's swimming and water safety knowledge, skills, and understanding within all communities, especially the socio-economically disadvantaged.

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children's swimming and water safety knowledge, skills, and understanding within all communities, especially the socio-economically disadvantaged.

As has been stated throughout this storyline, the units (also referred to as modules in the UK) were offered biennially, that is, units were offered once every two years. The rational for the biennial design was to enable the Initial Teacher Education (ITE) students to cover as many units as possible within the context of having one PE lecturer, who was also the leader and pioneer of the 'Best Start' community partnership. Swimming lessons held in semester one, 2011 were embedded within unit EDF 2611 (Chap. 3). The next time this unit, and subsequently, the swimming lessons could be offered was in semester one, 2013.

ACTORS

Leadership

As it had been two years since the last time swimming lessons were conducted, the leader decided to make one major amendment, to take control of all liaising with schools. In 2011, it was collaboratively agreed that the leisure centre staff would use their established connections with the schools, which although plausible at the time, did prove to be difficult from a university perspective. Details of difficulties that resulted from this process are discussed in Chap. 10.

The leader was required to renew or keep updated qualifications for pathways to remain valid. Renewal of Life Saving Victoria endorsed Service Membership, enabled the pre-service teachers to complete their Bronze Medallion and Resuscitation. This involved the leader completing/updating a Bronze Medallion (accreditation valid for 12 months), a current level 2 First Aid award (accreditation valid for three years) and a current resuscitation award (cardiopulmonary resuscitation [CPR]—accreditation valid for 12 months). Endorsement of the resuscitation (RE) award was vital as it was a requirement for the ITE students (pre-service teachers) to receive their SAT swim instructor qualification (pathway within a pathway).

The leader needed to apply for an updated qualification as a SAT Course Presenter. This was essential for the ITE students to become swimming instructors in the unit pathway. As part of the application, the leader needed to evidence a current CPR, a recent working with children/police check (this was evidenced by current teacher registration within the state of Victoria), swimming professional development undertaken in

the last 12 months, a list of intended swimming professional development planned for the next 12 months, and current Australian Swimming Coaches and Teachers Association (ASCTA) membership. It was a more streamlined process and less time consuming renewing qualifications rather than attaining for the first time.

Partners

Partnerships between Australian RTOs (ASCTA and Life Saving Victoria), the local health industry (local leisure and sports centre) and external swimming instructors employed at the venue, local primary schools, and Monash University (Gippsland) were all strengthened in 2013. The 2013 ITE students (pre-service teachers) had previously heard about the swimming programme and were excited to be given the opportunities of teaching the children and obtaining swimming qualifications. They often asked the leader if the partnerships would be embedded within the unit as was the case in 2011.

This collaborative journey began in semester one, 2011 and culminated in 39 Monash University (Gippsland) students conducting three swimming lessons over three weeks to approximately 80 children. The children were Grades Two and Three (Churchill North Primary School) and Grades Three and Four (Lumen Christi Catholic Primary School). In semester one 2013, the popular swimming programme enrolment increased by 79 % to approximately 70 Monash University (Gippsland) students, enabling swimming and water safety lessons to cater for 140 children. The children deliberately targeted included Preps, Grade One, and Grade Two from Churchill Primary school and Lumen Christi Catholic Primary school, and Prep to Grade Six from Yinnar South Primary school. The increase in pre-service teachers enrolled in the unit reinforced the feedback that it was perceived as meaningful in 2011.

Similar to initial contact made in 2011, both ASCTA and Royal Life Saving Society Australia (RLSSA) (Life Saving Victoria) swimming organisations were flexible in their disposition and continued to offer large discounts in courses making them affordable for the university students. Both providers aimed to promote swimming and water safety to its full potential and in a professional manner. Prioritising 'education' was a commonality of both RTOs which enabled strong collaborations with Monash University Faculty of Education.

PROCESS

Goal Setting

The overarching goal for the swimming education partnership was to increase children's opportunity to learn to swim, thus increasing their safety around water, as well as increase pre-service teachers competence and confidence for teaching swimming and water safety. This socially just goal had shifted from the initial goal of having ITE students (pre-service teachers) recognised for swimming pathways covered during course units of work. Research suggests that the more knowledgeable teachers are about swimming and water safety concepts, the more confident they will be in teaching this aspect of the curriculum (Peden et al. 2009). There are a number of barriers for swimming and water safety education in schools, in particular, the cost involved, for which a collaborative approach is recommended (Larsen 2013). Again, it was a goal that there was no cost for children to participate in the swimming lessons, and for some, it was the only swimming and water safety lessons they received. This was important to the leader who was aware of the contextual barriers the Gippsland families faced.

There was increasing concern that water safety education was decreasing (Peden et al. 2009). Within Australia, "over the past 10 years the aquatic industry observed a decline in the swimming skills of children and teenagers and this has been reflected in the national drowning statistics particularly in the 15–24 years age group" (Larsen 2013). In addition, drowning remains one of the largest causes of accidental deaths in the UK (Paton 2014). Recent media articles suggest that such decline is a result of financial difficulties amongst various families and school communities. Many school principals have considered axing swimming for this reason (Paton 2014; Thompson 2012).

Meadow Heights Primary School principal [Victoria, Australia] Kevin Pope said poverty was a major factor in a quarter of his pupils missing out on swimming lessons this year. "A swimming program that costs \$100 a kid, and you've got three kids at the school—to come up with \$300 is very challenging". (Thompson 2012).

Australia is not alone, alarming reports have been experienced in other nations, to even greater degrees. It was reported in England 15 years ago

that hundreds of schools were breaking the law by not teaching children how to swim as part of the curriculum (Russell 2000). More recently, it was found in a study conducted by the English Amateur Swimming Association that 45 % of children aged seven to 11 could not swim 25 metres and that 6.6 % of schools do not teach any swimming (Paton 2014).

It is argued that swimming and water safety is under-represented in the recent Australian curriculum (HPE) and that the diminished role of swimming is paradoxical to the purpose of the national curriculum reform; a socially just education. It is further argued that every boy and every girl deserves the right to learn how to swim and be safe around water, especially in a country such as Australia with a culture closely associated with enjoying water activities (Lynch 2015).

In England, the recent national curriculum emphasised swimming above and beyond any other physical education movement focus area. The English Department of Education expressed “We agree that swimming is an important skill to learn for life, which is why it is compulsory in the national curriculum for primary-age pupils and, by the age of 11, children should be able to swim at least 25 metres unaided” (Paton 2014). The National curriculum in England explicitly states:

SWIMMING AND WATER SAFETY

All schools must provide swimming instruction either in key stage 1 or key stage 2.

In particular, pupils should be taught to:

- Swim competently, confidently, and proficiently over a distance of at least 25 metres
- Use a range of strokes effectively [for example, front crawl, backstroke, and breaststroke]
- Perform safe self-rescue in different water-based situations. (Department of Education 2013).

Australian primary schools often use qualified swim instructors from externally provided programmes. Research by Peden et al. (2009, p. 202) found that “Aquatic activity was outsourced at 88.1 % of primary schools surveyed and were most commonly outsourced to commercial learn-to-swim teachers”. Hence, RLSSA has requested Government assistance through making swimming and water safety lessons compulsory for all

primary school children; financial support for parents struggling with the cost of lessons; and funds for programmes tailoring towards rural, Indigenous, and multicultural communities (Larsen 2013).

Funding

As was the case in 2011, the resources and skills offered by partners, especially the leisure centre was sufficient. That is, there was no supplementary financial funding necessary to conduct the university unit EDF2611 and/or the free lessons for the nearby local primary schools. The leisure centre again provided swimming and water safety equipment and resources during lessons. Monash University covered regular payments for the pool hire, including the increased number of EDF2611 classes being offered on a Wednesday, and Friday supplementing the original Friday morning sessions. Again, the function room was available for classes, where a portable projector and laptop could be set up by the programme leader.

It was predetermined by the leader that funding would become available with the success of the programme. This did not eventuate; there was no funding or grants for the sports programme despite numerous applications for internal and external funding. Costs for transport did influence the schools invited by the leader. Therefore, only schools within close proximity to the pool (leisure centre) and at walkable distance (Churchill Primary school and Lumen Christi Catholic Primary school) were initially approached, and then schools who could organise transport at no cost (Yinnar South Primary school) were catered for.

Management

As mentioned earlier, enrolment increased by 79 % to approximately 70 Monash University (Gippsland) students, enabling swimming and water safety lessons to cater for 140 children. This tripled the number of classes. In 2011, schools visited on a Friday morning only, and in 2013, classes extended to include Friday and Wednesday afternoons. Furthermore, the leader decided to focus on the early years of schools for the lessons in 2013.

The best time to prepare children for safe aquatic participation is during childhood (RLSSA 2010). This is advocated by Kirk (2005) who states that early learning experiences are crucial to continuing involvement in physical activity. Kirk stresses that currently only particular sections of

the population are in a position to access quality experiences in schools and sporting clubs. In particular, children from lower socio-economic groups often miss out on quality early experiences. Furthermore, there is a growing body of research that suggests health, specifically social, mental, and physical well-being is the result of social conditions and social status (Douglas 2013). This complex situation relates directly to the national HPE Framework. Within Australia, “The most important driver for a National Curriculum should be about equity and social justice and improved learning outcomes for our most disadvantaged and isolated students” (Ewing 2010, p. 127). This is evident through the goals established at the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (MCEETYA 2008) which drives the national reform. Furthermore, a finding of the Gonski report was that “Strategies to address educational disadvantage in school are most effective when integrated with, and complementary to, approaches to support early childhood development” (Australian Government 2011, p. xxxi). It was for this reason that the leader decided to control the ages and schools who were involved in the swimming lessons, so that the early years could be targeted; Preps, Grade One, and Grade Two.

Monash University (Gippsland campus) pre-service teachers choosing the PE major stream studied the unit EDF2611 Experiencing Aquatic Environments. General pre-service teachers could also choose this unit as an elective within their education course. Creating pathways between RTOs, namely, ASCTA and RLSSA, was necessary to enable the implementation of legal, safe, and free swimming and water safety lessons for the primary school children. Such collaborative pathways are recommended for Swimming and water safety; “A collaborative approach is required to tackle this problem and we all need to take responsibility in ensuring that children do not miss out on learning these essential life saving skills” (Larsen 2013). When planning the unit, swimming lessons for the local schools were deliberately held in the last three weeks of semester allowing approximately nine scheduled face-to-face weeks for swimming and water safety workshop preparation. This enables time for building all university pre-service teachers’ confidence and competence in the pool. It also allows time to assess whether each pre-service teacher was ready to implement the lessons with maximum safety.

Again, pre-service teachers were required to plan swimming and water safety sequential lessons for children of a particular age and ability as their first piece of unit assessment. Constructive feedback was provided and

class-time preparation involved sharing lesson segments and activities through peer teaching and learning episodes. This allows time for suggestions, possible alternatives, or improvements to be offered by peers. Hence, the pre-service teachers followed the cycle of four stages for an inquiry approach during the unit: understand; plan; act; and reflect (Queensland School Curriculum Council 1999).

During the period of swimming lessons, the children were placed by their class teacher in swimming ability groups (beginners, developers, established for age) of approximately four. The pre-service teachers, on average, worked in pairs and were responsible for the same group of children, for 30-minute lessons each week over the three weeks. Each pair of pre-service teachers would take two 30-minute lessons during the workshop. Hence, a ratio of at least 1:2 swim teachers to children was maintained. As mentioned previously, in 2013 early years' children were targeted for the lessons as this was consistent with research as the best time to introduce children to enjoyable experiences in the water (Kirk 2005; RLSSA 2010).

Monitoring, Reporting, Evaluation, and Learning

Feedback from all stakeholders overwhelmingly evidenced the success of the university unit and swimming lessons. The SETU, university pre-service teacher overall satisfaction with the quality of the unit, continued to improve. The introduction of the pathways and lessons for local primary school children saw a 100 % improvement in overall satisfaction with the quality of the unit from 2009 to 2011, and this increased quality trend continued in 2013. The pathways (ASCTA and RLSSA) have also resulted in pre-service teacher improved resources, meaningful feedback, and practical value (Table 8.1).

Comments within SETU advocated meaningful learning experiences throughout the unit, "Getting to teach students swimming lessons was a highlight as we were all contributing to the children's learning and helping them to achieve skills that they would otherwise not have the chance to practice" (SETU EDF2611 2013a, b, Q11). "Learning through experience, including teaching children first hand" (SETU EDF2611 2013a, b, Q11), "Organising and implementing swimming lessons" (SETU EDF2611 2013a, b, Q11). "The partnership with the Churchill Leisure Centre was fantastic, having the swimming lessons in the pool was a great learning experience and the chance to complete swimming qualifications

Table 8.1 Student evaluation of teaching unit

| <i>Year EDF2611 offered</i> | <i>Overall Satisfaction with quality (5— strongly agree, 1— strongly disagree)</i> | <i>The learning resources in this unit supported my studies (5—strongly agree, 1—strongly disagree)</i> | <i>The feedback I received in this unit was useful (5— strongly agree, 1— strongly disagree)</i> | <i>This unit made a positive contribution to my experiences during practical (5—strongly agree, 1—strongly disagree)</i> | <i>Overall impression of the ASCTA SAT course (5—excellent, 1—unsatisfactory)</i> |
|---|--|---|--|--|---|
| 2009 | 2 | 3.1 | 2.63 | 2.33 | No course |
| 2011 (First year of community collaboration) | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4.3 | 4.7 |
| 2013 (Second year of community collaboration) | 4.4 | 4.61 | 4.22 | 4.75 | 4.8 |

More than 15 enrolments and 10 or more completed surveys

was great." (SETU EDF2611 2013a, b, Q11). "The best aspect was that we could put the theory into practice rather than just assume what would happen" (SETU EDF2611 2013a, b, Q11). "Really enjoyed taking the students (children) for lessons and being able to offer a lot of my previous experience with swimming to my class" (SETU EDF2611 2013a, b, Q11). "Putting what we learnt into practice—being given opportunities to teach kids how to swim" (SETU EDF2611 2013a, b, Q11). "Swimming lessons with the students, having the option to do Swim Australia qualification and bronze medallion" (SETU EDF2611 2013a, b, Q11).

In the 2011 ASCTA SAT course evaluations summary, pre-service teachers remarked that the course pathway was a very positive experience. This was consistent with the feedback in 2013 where pre-service teachers commented that the best aspects were: "The supervision and assistance provided throughout" (SAT evaluation 2013, p. 1), "The assistance of the leader and the amount of equipment available at the venue" (SAT evaluation 2013, p. 1), "The resources and feedback provided" (SAT evaluation 2013, p. 1), "Doing the course over a period of time" (SAT evaluation 2013, p. 1), "Demonstrations and explanations of things in and out of the pool" (SAT evaluation 2013, p. 1).

Responses from stakeholders during the culminating lessons suggest that they all valued the enhanced learning community collaboration/partnerships generated. The children from the local primary schools were always excited to be taught swimming lessons by the university pre-service teachers. This observation was evidenced by teachers' and children's comments; "The swimming program was highly beneficial for the students in my class. It gave many the chance to experience the water in a controlled and safe environment, one that some rarely get to engage with" (personal communication, June 13, 2013). Children were quoted as stating "It was fun because we learnt to swim. I liked the games" (personal communication, June 13, 2013); "It was like fun because all the things we learnt about swimming. I got to swim with my friends. The swim teachers were kind and sweet" (personal communication, June 13, 2013); and "I felt happy because I got to do swimming on a Friday too. The people were nice to me" (personal communication, June 13, 2013).

Parents came to support their children and comments from teachers, teaching assistants, parents, and the children expressed their gratitude for the lessons provided. One teacher stated that many parents "commented that it was good that the children were able to access the lessons and that they were free" (personal communication, June 13, 2013). The Yinnar

South Primary school principal contacted the local newspaper to share the programme with the wider community and was quoted in the article; “For our (students) to get one-on-one water experience is great; the parents have given really positive feedback and it’s been thoroughly enjoyed by everybody” (Symons 2013).

The Churchill Primary School Prep-Grade 2 team leader summarised the benefits of the programme and gratitude within this context:

It was a fantastic opportunity for our students as many have never had formal (swimming) lessons before. The low socio-economic situation of many families in this area means that many students are not able to have the opportunity of learning about water safety with instructors. While Churchill Primary School does offer a swimming lesson program we often find that those most in need of lessons find the price too high. By offering free lessons through the University program we had 100% attendance from Prep/One/Two, which is amazing!

The children were very excited about going to the swimming lessons and were looking forward to going each time. They enjoyed getting to know their instructors and it was good to see the university students grow in their confidence of dealing with junior primary school children. Relationships between the instructors and students were just beginning to develop, so it was a shame there weren’t more lessons.

We have also received many positive comments from parents about this wonderful opportunity. Many were amazed that the lessons would be offered free of charge. One family has three children in the Prep/One/Two area and normally sending all three to swimming lessons is too expensive. However, this time because they were free, all three children were able to go. Their Mum was so happy she didn’t have to exclude any of her children from the lessons. (personal communication, June 13, 2013).

Methodologies for monitoring and evaluating the learning during the swimming programme included a reflective journal maintained by the leader, ongoing observations, and regular informal interviews held with all stakeholders; namely the pre-service teachers, teachers, school principals, leisure centre staff, children, and parents. Once again, the leader deliberately chose not to discuss data gathering with stakeholders, as there were always new teachers being introduced to the ‘Best Start’ programme and trust was being built. However, suggestions were continued by the leader for future grant applications with teachers and principals where relations

were established. Such suggestions were received encouragingly by the teachers and principals involved, and discussions disclosed that this may possibly involve some research.

Transparency was a key theme throughout all lessons within the 'Best Start' programme. Swimming lessons were conducted in a public Leisure Centre facility during the day, open for any interested parties to witness; swimming instructors, parents, leisure centre staff, university students, and community members. Further transparency was achieved in a paper presented and discussed at the '28th Australian Council for Health, Physical Education and Recreation (ACHPER) International Conference, Melbourne (Australia)' in November, 2013. The paper was also published in the conference proceedings. (Lynch 2013)

Communication of successes and drawbacks was also presented and discussed during the Teacher Education Research Group (TERG) programme of events, University of East London (UK), 15 January, 2014. The leader was kindly invited and the title of the presentation was 'Community education collaborations: Health and Physical Education (HPE)'. The presentation and data shared was warmly received by various educationalists and encouraging feedback was given to the leader. It was during this visit to the UK, which involved gathering further data from the ITE Ofsted 'outstanding' PE primary programme, where problems with implementing swimming in English primary schools were revealed to the leader. Media reports about schools not meeting curriculum requirements were bountiful in British media reports. Such reports were encouraging for the leader at the time. They assisted him to realise the power of community in addressing this issue of swimming impediments for children and inspired him to continue with his efforts.

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