

COMMUNITY COLLABORATION THROUGH SPORT: BRINGING SCHOOLS TOGETHER

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to share how sport was used to build relationships between Monash University (Gippsland campus) pre-service education and six rural primary schools during semester one, 2012. Not only was sport used to build partnerships but also to deliver quality Health and Physical Education lessons, offering children sporting opportunities that they may otherwise not receive.

The goals established at the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, 2008) were “about equity and social justice and improved learning outcomes for our most disadvantaged and isolated students” (Ewing, 2010, p. 127). A commitment to action in achieving these goals included: promoting world-class curriculum and assessment; and improving educational outcomes for the disadvantaged young Australians, especially those from lower socio-economic backgrounds. A large percentage of the Gippsland region population comprises of socio-economically disadvantaged and all six rural schools were located within these areas. Initial discussions with local principals in January (2012) revealed that implementation of the Health and Physical Education (HPE) learning area was carried out by classroom teachers in all but one school, which had a delegated Physical Education (PE) teacher (with no specialist training). Furthermore, some schools outsourced the HPE learning area for the approximate annual cost of \$10 000 through the ‘Bluearth’ program.

A major problem identified in the 1992 Senate Inquiry into Physical and Sport Education was that “suitably qualified physical education teachers are not being employed to teach physical education and school sport to all children” (Commonwealth of Australia, 1992, p.xiv), as many classroom teachers lack knowledge and confidence for teaching PE (Lynch, 2008; Morgan & Bourke, 2005). In Semester One, 2012 as part of the Bachelor of Primary Education course at Monash – Gippsland, a pathway was created to achieve these national ideals and goals. Primary education university students, choosing the Physical Education (PE) major stream, study the unit EDF3619 ‘Sport and physical activity education’. Through amendments made to this unit, objectives involved the implementation of

the Friday Sports program. This program ran over five weeks and was the first program of this nature to be implemented within the Latrobe Valley.

The Friday Sports program enabled Year 5 & 6 children from the six schools to choose a sport that they would like to participate in during the one hour sessions over the five weeks. Each sport group consisted of 20-25 children, were mixed sexes and mixed schools. The aim of the program was to progressively work towards achieving the objectives of the Sports Education curriculum model; "to develop as competent, literate and enthusiastic sportspeople" (Siedentop, 1994, p. 4). Monash University provided the equipment, the human resource of five teacher education students per group who had planned the five week units, and collaboratively with the local health industry (local leisure and sports centre) provided the stadium and field facilities, all at no cost to schools.

Dr Tim Lynch, Senior Lecturer at Monash University reflects on building partnerships between university and the local schools through the medium of sport; provision of quality Health and Physical Education lessons at no cost. He shares: his vision; the benefits for the primary school children; the benefits and interest of the teacher education students; dynamics involved when collaboratively working with a number of stakeholders; and barriers that need to be overcome for future growth and for similar programs to succeed.

INTRODUCTION

Monash University (Gippsland campus) is situated in Churchill, Latrobe Valley, located in central Gippsland, eastern Victoria. A large percentage of the Gippsland region comprises of a socio-economically disadvantaged population (Figure 1). The goals established at the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (MCEETYA, 2008) were "about equity and social justice and improved learning outcomes for our most disadvantaged and isolated students" (Ewing, 2010, p. 127). Goals included:

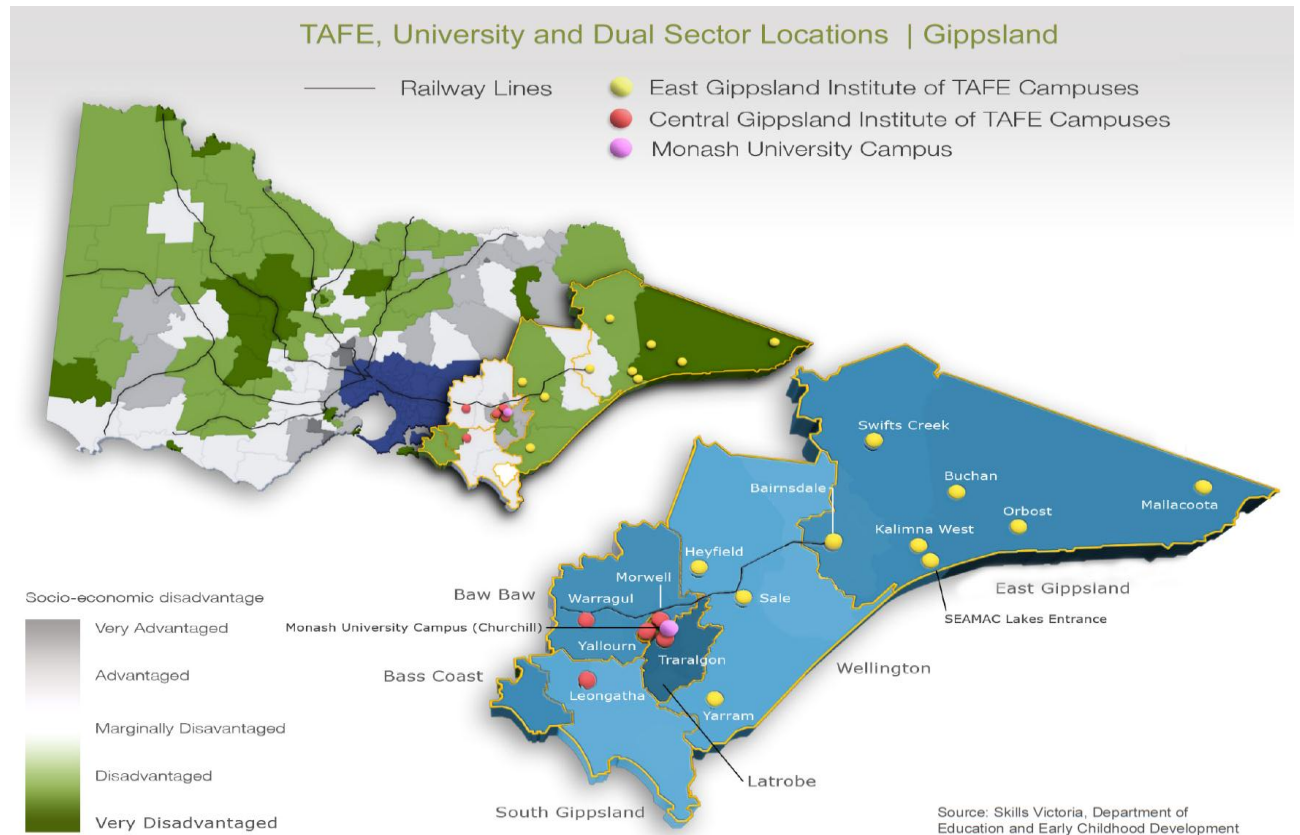
- Goal 1: Australian schooling promotes equity and excellence
- Goal 2: All young Australians become:
 - Successful learners
 - Confident and creative individuals
 - Active and informed citizens

These goals have driven the present National Curriculum reform; supported by socio critical pedagogy in education and underpinned by a socio-cultural perspective. A commitment to action in achieving these goals included: promoting world-class curriculum and assessment; and improving educational outcomes for the disadvantaged young Australians, especially those from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

Primary education university students, choosing the Physical Education (PE) major stream, study the unit EDF3619 'Sport and physical activity education'. Through amendments made to this unit, objectives involved the implementation of the Friday Sports program. This program ran over five weeks and was the first program of this nature to be implemented within the area. The Friday Sports program was designed to enable Year 5 and 6 children from the six participating schools to choose a sport that they would like to participate in during the one hour sessions over the five weeks. Each sport group consisted of 20-25 students, were mixed sexes and mixed schools. The aim of the program was to progressively work towards achieving the objectives of the Sports Education curriculum model; "to develop as competent, literate and enthusiastic sportspeople" (Siedentop, 1994, p. 4). Monash University provided the equipment, the human resource of five teacher education students per group who had planned the five week units, and collaboratively with the local health industry (local leisure and sports centre) provided the stadium and field facilities, all at no cost to schools. Subsequently, the implementation of this sport unit built relationships between Monash University (Gippsland campus) Faculty of Education and rural primary schools.

This was the second of the six units in the Primary Education Physical Education stream to involve local primary schools. In Semester One, 2011 a pathway was created to achieve these national ideals and goals through the implementation of swimming and water safety education in Primary schools. Teacher education students studying the unit EDF2616 'Experiencing Aquatic Environments' as an elective gained swimming and water safety discipline knowledge and subsequently qualifications (a Victorian Institute of Teachers registration requirement) in; the Australian Swimming Coaches and Teachers Association (ASCTA) - Swim Australia Teacher (SAT), Royal Life Saving Society Australia (RLSSA) Bronze Medallion and RLSSA Resuscitation courses. ASCTA is Australia's peak professional swimming body and courses are recognised by the International Federation of Swim Teachers Association (IFTSTA). As part of the SAT swimming and water safety course/ EDF2616 unit workshop pathway; the university students provided low ratio, quality lessons for two of the six local primary schools at no cost for the children.

Figure 1: Location of the major tertiary education providers, train lines and SES status, Gippsland. (DEECD, 2011, p. 7).



The ministers of education designed a commitment to action, which act as stepping stones for implementation of the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (MCEETYA, 2008), they include:

1. Developing stronger partnerships
2. Supporting quality teaching and school leadership
3. Strengthening early childhood education
4. Enhancing middle years development
5. Supporting senior years of schooling and youth transitions
6. Promoting world-class curriculum and assessment
7. Improving educational outcomes for Indigenous youth and disadvantaged young Australians, especially those from low socioeconomic backgrounds
8. Strengthening accountability and transparency.

This paper reflects on the 'commitment to action' stepping stones during implementation of HPE sport and physical activities during Semester One, 2012. Thus, relations were further developed between Monash University (Gippsland campus) Faculty of Education and local rural primary schools.

MEETING THE EDUCATIONAL GOALS FOR YOUNG AUSTRALIANS COMMITMENT TO ACTION

1. Developing stronger partnerships

Collaborations involved the local health industry (local leisure and sports centre) and local Primary schools. Although relations had been previously initiated with the sports centre and two of the local primary schools through swimming, these did require strengthening. For four of the schools involved it was the first time they were collaborating with Monash for physical activities and in some instances the first time within any curriculum area.

The local leisure and sports centre expressed their support for the sport activities involving the local primary schools by subsidizing the cost. Monash were charged for two netball courts only and used three courts and the hockey field. This enabled the author's vision of involving local primary schools during the unit at no or minimal cost. This collaboration reinforced a larger partnership established between Monash University, the local City Council and the Australian Government, coinciding with the completion of the local leisure and sports centre redevelopment project in 2011.

Effective communication and effort was essential for this learning opportunity to be created, which involved personal face to face relations. In January this year, during pupil free days, the author visited the three closest, Churchill primary schools to meet the Principal. In some cases the Principal was available and a meeting took place, otherwise an appointment was made and a brief explanation of the project was given to the next person in charge. After the three schools had confirmed their willingness to participate, numbers of children were taken into account. Not having previous knowledge of the children it was decided that upper primary (Year 5 & 6) were developmentally appropriate and best suited to the Sports Education curriculum model unit EDF3619 'Sport and physical activity education' promoted. There were enough Teacher Education students to involve more than the three Churchill schools, all of which were within walking distance to the facilities. The author extended the invitation to other surrounding schools to participate and again visited schools to meet Principals. Having been employed as a Principal of a school, the author valued approaching them first and foremost when contacting schools and made this a priority. A total of ten schools were approached.

2. Supporting quality teaching and school leadership

The axiomatic benefit of the sports program from a university perspective was that the Teacher Education students were provided with an opportunity to teach and reflect on real life experiences, placing the theory into practice. However, equally as important this program provided children in local Primary schools (from a disadvantaged socio economic rural region) with quality health and physical education lessons, whilst at the same time educating and/or reinforcing teachers

within schools with practical quality HPE implementation learning and teaching experiences. A major problem identified in the 1992 Senate Inquiry into Physical and Sport Education was that “suitably qualified physical education teachers are not being employed to teach physical education and school sport to all children” (Commonwealth of Australia, 1992, p.xiv). Furthermore, many classroom teachers lack knowledge and confidence for teaching PE (Lynch, 2008; Morgan & Bourke, 2005) and this is accentuated within rural regions (Peden, Franklin and Larsen, 2009). Furthermore, Whipp, Hutton, Grove & Jackson (2011) found that teachers working collaboratively with external providers (in this case pre-service teachers) is associated with positive perceptions about the value of the physical activity, enables teachers to develop confidence and is less stressful. Within the program the teachers worked collaboratively with the enthusiastic pre-service teachers. It was accentuated from the outset that by working collaboratively would enable the program to be supervised efficiently and the author clarified when addressing the children and teachers that this meant respecting all adults regardless of which school or university they were from.

Each sport group consisted of five Teacher Education students and 20-25 children, were 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 11:30am and the children had the choice of four sports; netball, basketball, tee ball and cricket. The second session was between 1:15 and 2:15pm and the sports offered included netball, basketball, football (Australian Rules) and soccer. There were, therefore, 20 Monash university students in each session, which was designed to coincide with their unit tutorial/workshop times, and approximately 100 children. Schools were aligned with the session time that the author had established with the Principals during the initial meetings as most suitable (Figure 2).

The Monash students chose their own groups (of five students) and as a group decided on a sport that they felt comfortable to implement considering the facilities and equipment available. Also, a sport they believed would be beneficial for the children. The group worked cooperatively in implementing the sessions and prepared a unit ‘sequence of lessons’ outline. Lessons were required to be flexible and inclusive, there was to be a particular skill that would frame the focus for each of the five week’s lessons and each Teacher Education student was required to take leadership for a particular week and plan the lesson’s activities in detail. While the aim of the program was to progressively work towards achieving the objectives of the Sports Education curriculum model; “to develop as competent, literate and enthusiastic sportspeople” (Siedentop, 1994, p. 4), there were salient social benefits for the children within this context.

Figure 2: Program details for Schools and University students.

Monash University/Latrobe Valley Term Two Friday School Sports – Year 5 & 6

What

Friday Sports is an opportunity for the Monash University Education students (who have chosen units of interest in Physical Education) to conduct modified sport lessons for Year 5 & 6 children in the local area.

Where

These lessons will be held at the Latrobe Leisure Centre Churchill, both inside the stadium and on the Hockey Field. There is no cost for the use of the facilities and in the case of rain all sports will be conducted within the stadium.

When

The first five weeks of term two: Friday April 20, 27 and May 4, 11 & 18. Some schools will attend between 10:30 and 11:30 am, others will attend between 1:15 and 2:15 pm.

Why

The children benefit and the university students (future teachers) benefit.

How

There will be 4 sports for the children to choose from during their school's session. This will be prepared before the first week so that schools are evenly mixed together. The children will remain in their particular sport for the five weeks.

Monash University will provide the equipment, facilities and the university students who have planned a five week modified sport unit. The schools will be responsible for the implementation of their own school excursion policies (drink bottles, permission forms, first aid and teacher supervision). While the university students are very capable and have a great deal of potential, they are not qualified teachers and their experience is limited.

Each school is responsible for arranging their own transport to and from the Latrobe Leisure Centre – Churchill.

Proposed Schedule – Latrobe Leisure Centre Churchill

<u>Time of session</u>	<u>Schools</u>	<u>Number of children</u>	<u>Modified Sports</u>
10:30 - 11:30	Lumen Christi (Yr 5 & 6)	40	Netball, Basketball Tee Ball & Cricket
	Churchill North (Yr 5 & 6)	39	
	Yinnar South (Yr 5 & 6)	1	
		80	
1:15 -2:15	Churchill (Yr 5 & 6)	55	Netball, Basketball Football & Soccer
	Hazelwood North (Yr 5 & 6)	35	
	Thorpdale (Yr 5 & 6)	<u>16</u>	
		106	

This learning and teaching strategy is supported by Monash University Teacher Education student feedback which indicates that the learning becomes meaningful and the theory more relevant for the university students. In the Student Evaluation of the Teaching Unit (SETU) for EDF2611 'Experiencing Aquatic Environments' for Semester One, 2011 (Gippsland) students stated the best aspect was teaching children:

Learning how to teach swimming and the opportunity to teach kids how to swim in prac. All aspects that we learnt about related to teaching primary kids (which hasn't happened in the last 2 yrs of PE). The Unit co-ordinator's explanations and teaching was fantastic with the use of his prior experiences etc. and also his hard work to help us reach success in all tasks. (personal communication, September 2, 2011).

Similar to the student feedback evaluating the swimming unit, students valued the opportunity to provide learning and teaching opportunities for the children when studying unit EDF3619. Student Evaluation of the Teaching Unit (SETU) EDF3619 in Gippsland evidenced further university student support. The best aspect of the unit included: "Spending time teaching kids and seeing them grow along with ourselves"; "Being able to take what we have learnt in the unit and actually teach primary students"; "I enjoyed having the kids from local primary schools coming in so we could work with them and put our lesson plans into action to see what worked and what didn't"; and "The practical interaction with the students was great. I felt this experience was very valuable and I had the opportunity to learn much more than listening to theory in a tutorial. This was my favourite unit this semester." (personal communication, August 2, 2012).

3. Strengthening early childhood education

While this sport program did not specifically involve early childhood education the collaboration initiated has enabled opportunities for future partnerships between Teacher Education students and schools, involving delivery of quality Health and Physical Education lessons for children in early childhood education within the strands of Health, Personal Development and Physical Activities.

4. Enhancing middle years development

Initial discussions with local principals in January (2012) revealed that implementation of the Health and Physical Education (HPE) learning area was carried out by classroom teachers in all but one of the six schools, which had a delegated Physical Education (PE) teacher (with no specialist training). Furthermore, some schools outsourced the HPE learning area for the approximate annual cost of \$10 000 through the 'Blueearth' program. Hence, collaboration is seen to be advantageous for all stakeholders and for future provision of quality HPE lessons at no or minimal cost.

5. Supporting senior years of schooling and youth transitions

The optimum time for children to learn and refine their motor skills, be introduced to positive HPE experiences and get active is during preschool and early primary school years (Branta, Haubenstricker, & Seefeldt, 1984; Commonwealth of Australia, 1992; Espenschade & Eckert, 1980; Lynch, 2008; Mackenroth, 2004; Raitakari, et al., 1994). Hence, by instilling enthusiasm for wellbeing beginning in the early years of Primary school assists with supporting the students at later stages of their development including senior years.

6. Promoting world-class curriculum and assessment

This HPE Sports program was designed using international 'best practice' within Physical Education Teacher Education (PETE). Data was gathered by the author in January this year, investigating the England and Wales Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) Outstanding 2010-2011 awarded Bachelor of Education (Hons) Primary Physical Education course in the UK. This course implemented 'hands on' practical learning and teaching experiences for the Teacher Education students involving children from local primary schools. Furthermore, this course design is endorsed by the National Education Physical Education Teacher Education Advanced Standards (USA). The Advanced Standards document states, "This integration of content and pedagogical knowledge results in and contributes to the development, application and communication of a teacher candidate's PCK (pedagogical content knowledge), which, in turn, advances the candidate's expertise and enhances student learning." (National Association for Sport and Physical Education, 2008).

7. Improving educational outcomes for Indigenous youth and disadvantaged young Australians, especially those from low socioeconomic backgrounds

A large percentage of the Gippsland region comprises of a socio-economically disadvantaged population (DEECD, 2011). Through implementing 'hands on' practical teaching and learning experiences for the university students, subsequently the sports program workshop sessions enabled the provision of quality lessons at no cost (excluding transport) for local primary school children who otherwise would not have received such experiences. Rural communities are defined by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) as "being not metropolitan; not major regional centres; not remote; and having a population within town boundaries of less than 10 000" (Clayton, Blom, Bateman & Carden, 2004, p. 6). The towns of Churchill, Yinnar, Thorpdale and Hazelwood North where the primary schools were located all meet the definition of rural communities.

Table 1: Rural community size and distance to travel to venue

Locality	Persons (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1996)	Distance from Churchill (km)
Churchill (3 schools)	4882	0
Yinnar (1 school)	477	13
Thorpdale (1 school)	447	27
Hazelwood North (1 school)	1220	6.7

8. Strengthening accountability and transparency

Through implementing ‘hands on’ practical teaching and learning experiences for the university students, subsequently the workshops enabled the provision of quality transparent lessons in that they demonstrated the university students’ course content and pedagogy knowledge to peers, teachers, teacher assistants and parents from the local schools. They were also conducted in a public Leisure Centre facility open for interested parties to witness. Teachers’ collaborating with external providers is associated with positive perceptions about the value of the physical activity, enables teachers to develop confidence and is less stressful (Whipp, Hutton, Grove & Jackson, 2011). Hence, it can be argued that the same positive perceptions can be developed through the collaboration with the university students.

It is envisaged that through identifying how the Monash University (Faculty of Education) and six local rural primary schools’ partnership addressed the ministers of education commitment to action, the education goals are illustrated in practice and the value of building relations between universities and schools is accentuated.

BENEFITS AND BARRIERS

Strengthening relations between university and the local schools through the medium of sport had many benefits. The author believed in the program as his primary education was not dissimilar to that of the children’s. When in Year 5 and 6 he lived in another rural community in north central Victoria. The town, St. Arnaud had a population at the time of approximately 3000 people and the school had a comparable enrolment of to that of the schools involved in the partnership (less than 150 students). The author created the opportunity through reflection on his childhood interests and experiences in a similar context. The sports program was designed with the intention that all schools could benefit and all children could benefit despite the diverse HPE curriculum implemented and experiences they may have had. Feedback from various stakeholders evidenced that such effort was appreciated. This was informal feedback from teachers, children, parents and Teacher Education students during and at the conclusion of the program. The children from the local Primary schools were excited to be taught by the Teacher Education students during each of the five weeks. Parents came to support their children and comments from teachers, teaching assistants, parents and the children expressed their gratitude for the lessons provided.

This feedback was reinforced in the university unit evaluation completed by the students. Student Evaluation of the Teaching Unit (SETU) for EDF3619 'Sport and physical activity education' indicated that the Teacher Education students had similar meaningful experiences to that of the swimming unit in 2011, where lessons were taught to children. The student overall satisfaction with the quality of the unit received a median of 4.56 out of 5. The last time this unit was offered at the Gippsland campus was in semester one in 2010 and the overall satisfaction with the quality of the unit median was 2.5 out of 5. It is envisaged that this collaboration of quality teaching, bridging relationships between the university and local schools, would become an annual event and develop in the range of Health and Physical Education learning experiences offered. The author's short term intention is to continue building and establishing relations with the six schools who were interested in collaboration. In the long term other schools may be given the opportunity to be involved. Also, by promoting and sharing the steps involved in Gippsland's collaboration offers a model for other similar rural contexts, both nationally and internationally.

Positive experiences for children and their families, builds an optimistic image of Monash University within the community. The discussion paper 'A tertiary education plan for Gippsland, Victoria' (DEECD, 2011) 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" (p. 21). This was raised as a priority as "low aspirations and attitudes towards education in Gippsland are a major concern" (p. 22).

Dynamics are involved when collaboratively working with a number of stakeholders and when changing curriculum. There were and are barriers that need to be overcome for future growth and for similar programs 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. 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 and then requested that they could change sporting groups the following week.

When approaching schools situated a distance from the venue the cost of transport did become 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 30km by bus (Table 1). Thorpdale primary school children were required to pay \$7.50 each week over the five weeks to attend the Sport sessions, an unfortunate expense and one that every effort is being made to limit. Another barrier has been obtaining funding so that such programs can be conducted regularly with minimal transport costs. Furthermore, funding will enable purchasing equipment so that

optimal development is possible. It is envisaged that possible grants will assist such schools in the short term with transport or associated costs, with continued benefits resulting in school budgets catering for such valuable educational experiences. This is similar to the budget amendments schools make to allow for the 'Blueearth' program.

From a university perspective there were also barriers to contend with. The six units offered to the Primary education university students, choosing the Physical Education (PE) major stream are discipline units designed for industry (Sport and Outdoor Recreation) and/or secondary education. They are not primary education focused which has required careful manipulation so that the original objectives are met. This is often difficult as the unit needs to be developmentally appropriate for primary children without changing the set assessment. Another barrier lies within the present structure of the PE major stream where the unit is only offered biennially. Having this unit offered only once every two years is not ideal for establishing ongoing relationships with schools and personnel. It is planned for adjustments to be made as a requirement of the national reform accreditation process, which will enhance such collaborations within the primary education course. The other impediment for a small minority of students was that they were required to attend all classes.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this paper is to shed light on efforts to build relationships between Monash University (Gippsland campus) Faculty of Education and local rural primary schools during semester one, 2012. Health and Physical Education lessons involving sport were used to build partnerships and meaningful learning experiences for the primary children, Teacher Education students and school teachers. Regardless of the school's HPE curriculum program the Friday Sports sessions were perceived as beneficial. Subsequently, the implementation of HPE lessons during the unit EDF3619 'Sport and physical activity education', utilised strengths within the community, thus building relations between the university sector and rural schools. Furthermore, this paper reflects on promoting the 'commitment to action' towards the national educational goals established at the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (MCEETYA, 2008).

It is paramount that collaboration is viewed as a learning process. The Discussion Paper 'A Tertiary Education Plan for Gippsland, Victoria' released in August (2011) supported such initiatives and endorsed that they were essential for educational sustainability within this rural area. The university/school 'hands on' learning and teaching experiences has begun a process that can now be reflected upon, reassessed, amendments made and relationships strengthened for the benefit of all education stakeholders within the Gippsland region.

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