

Emerging Strategies in the Search for Effective University-Community Collaborations

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Universities have come to realize and accept their responsibility to communities by collaborating with their neighboring schools and youth agencies (Benson, Harkavy, & Puckett, 1999). Although these university-community collaborations have taken place in areas such as math, science, and social studies, little attention has been given to the potential of physical-activity-based programs. Physical education is behind the times when it comes to forming university-community collaborations, but *JOPERD* has recently recognized the benefits of university-community collaborations in two articles promoting physical activity among adolescent girls (Ryan & Olasov, 2000; Watson, Poczwardowski, & Eisenman, 2000) and in articles connecting school physical education to the community (Cucina & McCormack, 2001; Cutforth, 2000).

Even though university-community collaborations often cost schools and youth agencies nothing, it can be difficult to get these institutions to provide the minimal support needed to create successful collaborations. Often these collaborations focus intensely on youth work but underestimate the importance of receiving necessary site support. Some of the difficulties and frustrations may include: administrators who fail to attend scheduled appointments, a lack of follow-through after a site commits to a collaboration, postponed starting dates,

failure to hand out permission slips, poor youth-recruitment strategies, competition for use of reserved facilities by other programs, and program termination due to a site faculty's low regard for physical-activity-based programs. Certain sites are just not suitable for the attempted type of university-community collaboration. What are the signs that signal a poor site for collaboration? When is it time to leave a site? How does one maximize the chance of creating successful long-term collaborations? These and similar questions require an examination of the subject of site support.

The Youth Leader Partnership

The Youth Leader Partnership (YLP) is a group of six physical education/kinesiology professors: Don Hellison, Nick Cutforth, James Kallusky, Tom Martinek, Melissa Parker, and Jim Stiehl. Although they work at six different universities in five states, they share a number of characteristics, including: (1) targeting children and youth who live in underserved communities; (2) developing, teaching in, and supervising extended day programs and in some cases, in-school programs; (3) capitalizing on the popularity of physical activity; (4) involving university students in their work; (5) engaging in applied research; and (6) using Don Hellison's (1995) personal and social responsi-

bility model as their programs' focus. This group has accumulated a combined total of 70 years of direct experience with the development, implementation, and evaluation of physical-activity-based programs at schools and youth agencies (Hellison et al., 2000). This is the kind of experience that can provide insight into the various aspects of site support.

Based on several conversations, emails, and interviews with the YLP members, this article identifies four critical areas of site support and provides strategies for fostering each of them. The four site-support categories are contact people, policy, youth recruitment, and facilities.

Contact People

The first and most significant category for successful collaboration involves having two levels of contact people at a site. The first level is the initial contact person (ICP), who is an administrator (e.g., principal, vice principal, athletic director). The second level is the secondary contact person (SCP), who has direct contact with youths (e.g., teacher, counselor, coach).

Each of the YLP members described the importance of having an ICP to create a collaboration, develop a systematic way of recruiting youths, help secure facilities, and handle any other logistical aspect that requires administrative assistance. In most cases, the ICP has the authority to establish the

collaboration but is too busy to deal with daily issues. Once the ICP authorizes the collaboration, site-support responsibilities are then passed on to the SCP. The SCP is the liaison person who can help with equipment, spark children's interest, deal with specific youths' issues, and explain the collaboration to colleagues. As Nick Cutforth explained:

It was really important to have the principal on board. She was the gatekeeper for me...Then she passed on the responsibility to a fourth-grade teacher...[The SCP] was wonderful, she really wanted to know what was happening with the kids...When we moved to the high school we didn't have [an SCP] at all...nobody cared, nobody paid attention...if you don't have it [an SCP] you'll see it fall apart.

James Kallusky, however, expressed a different view. While stressing the importance of the ICP, he would rather not have the SCP because of several negative experiences. He explained, "I don't want that person...we've had nothing but problems with these people...we could see right away the attitudes from the [SCP]."

A successful collaboration has contact people who support, understand, and take the time to become familiar with the collaboration. Successful long-term collaboration is less likely if the contact people do not put forth this effort. Most YLP members attempt to find both levels of contact people to maximize the success of university-community collaborations.

Strategies for Establishing Positive Relationships with Contact People

1. In planning the initial meeting with a site, request the attendance of all individuals who will be facilitating the collaboration. This first meeting is the orientation time for discussing the goals, needs, and roles in creating a successful collaboration.

2. To avoid miscommunication, provide a written agreement of the responsibilities for both sides of the collaboration. Include the secured facility dates and times, proper youth recruit-

ment strategies, and equipment needs.

3. Become part of a site's culture by spending time in the youths' academic environment. Also, ask to be invited to functions such as assembly, report card day, graduation, and field trips. This signals to the ICP, SCP, and other site faculty that you are interested in more than just physical activity.

4. Build relationships with the ICP, SCP, and other site faculty by having informal and formal meetings. Doing so can become the key to receiving all the support needed for successful collaborations. These meetings can be the time to discuss the site support that is not being met or to provide accolades for positive support received. It could also be the time to discuss the goals, successes, failures, and possibilities for the collaboration.

The collaborations often underestimate the importance of receiving necessary site support.

Policy

The YLP members have a far more progressive philosophy for their physical-activity-based programs than most institutions, which often causes disparities with current policy. Their programs focus on children's strengths; attempt to meet their social, emotional, and cognitive needs; empower them to make important decisions within a framework of clear expectations and values; and help them expand the possibilities of their futures, along with ways of reaching their goals (Hellison et al., 2000):

The YLP members focus on the *process* of the physical-activity-based programs rather than the *outcomes*. The current policy of outcome-based assessments or mandated test scores

negatively affects physical-activity-based programs. According to Tom Martinek:

I don't blame them...They're in survival mode right now...they're going to do whatever it takes to get these kids reading...When you get a top-down test score approach that comes from beyond the site, it's got consequences, principals get fired, teachers get moved around and maybe fired...it really marginalizes anything that doesn't directly have to do with test scores...we almost have to put some literacy in our programs...Sport programs like ours may not have the same importance in the eyes of the administration...test scores will eventually fade, but right now that's the 'in' thing.

The YLP members suggest four possibilities that allow for successful collaborations despite the mandated test-score policy:

1. Sites view physical-activity-based programs as a catalyst for better test scores.

2. Sites view physical-activity-based programs as beneficial, thus allowing programs to be initiated or continued despite the current policies.

3. Sites have a "benign neglect" approach in which they want programs, but only during youths' discretionary time.

4. The YLP members appease a site by making modifications to their programs.

Site policy on mandated test scores is often viewed as hindering physical-activity-based programs; however, these collaborations have a greater success rate if they are viewed as helping youngsters' performance on tests or appear beneficial despite the test-score mania. A site with a "benign neglect" approach (#3) does not prioritize the collaboration, and one that requires a modification of these programs (#4) does not value the main intent of the collaboration. In either situation the collaboration is not as strong as in the former possibilities (#1 and #2), but they can still work under these conditions.

Strategies for Improving Policy Issues

1. Create workshops and newsletters for the ICP, SCP, other site faculty, and parents and relatives that explain the goals of the collaboration. The more they know about a quality collaboration the more it is valued.

2. Establish connections with the goals of the schools and/or youth agencies. Collaborations aiding their mission will be viewed as an asset.

Youth Recruitment

The YLP members attempt to keep program numbers small (approximately 15 students per teacher) to create a sense of belonging, encourage participation over a long period of time, and develop close personal relationships with the youths. They identify a supportive site as one that systematically recruits youths who can attend programs regularly. Until a program is firmly established, they would like site faculty to encourage and remind the children to attend the program. Once a core group of children is established, the site's youth recruitment responsibilities diminish. Don Hellison described a variety of youth recruitment experiences:

I've had way different approaches to recruiting kids. Not much help to a lot of help, and very rarely do they remind the kids once we get going. Once a kid gets in my program it's up to me to keep him there and I don't get any other help. I just tell em, 'you gotta make it again if you want to be in this [program].'

A typical issue with youth recruitment is the loss of children to other programs, which YLP members refer to as "turf wars." According to Jim Stiehl, "We definitely have turf wars; we're experiencing that at three elementary schools...[site faculty] feel that they own the place and we're kind of infringing on their territory." Melissa Parker noted, "It does affect us because if something else is going on, something pops up and they have these kids going to another program, we'll lose some kids that way."

The YLP members need youths who

are free of schedule conflicts and will potentially commit for several years. Supportive faculty at a site advocate for, and remind the youngsters about, a program. When a core group of youths attend a program on a regular basis, a foundation has been created, which then requires the YLP members to provide a service that the youths want to be a part of and possibly commit to for several years.

Strategies for Improving Youth Recruitment

1. Before a program begins, be specific about the age, gender, grade level, and number of youths recruited. On the first day make sure the site followed through on the requests. It is easier to make the needed adjustments right away rather than several weeks later.

2. Talk to the ICP, SCP, and other faculty who run programs at a site about possible schedule conflicts and turf war issues. Support other programs by not recruiting their youths; this may promote reciprocal treatment.

3. Talk to the youths about commitment to a program; sometimes they want to wander from program to program.

Facilities

Most physical-activity-based programs require certain facilities in order to be successful. For the YLP members, the aesthetics of a facility did not seem to matter; the main concern was to have consistently reserved space. James Kallusky said, "I'd rather have the support of the administration than a big gymnasium for the kids." All of the members attempt to find some form of a facility that is not shared during their program time because distractions often result in the children losing focus. Don Hellison explained:

We don't need pretty gyms, we don't need much, but we do need reserved space...sharing a space with others is also a major issue, especially when so much dialogue goes on in our programs.

The YLP members would rather have supportive administration than

an immaculate facility. As one member stated, "The bent rim is part of the deal." Whatever the conditions of a facility, having a consistent place for a program allows the YLP members to properly plan and also provide youths with a regular place to meet. For some, this is as minimal as a parking lot, a classroom, or a backyard.

Strategies for Improving Facility Issues

1. Check the facility in the initial meeting. Make sure it fulfills the needs for a successful collaboration.

2. Find out what programs are run before and after your program. Develop a systematic way for starting and ending that minimizes interruptions.

3. Be strict about needing reserved space; sharing space makes programs difficult to run.

4. Find out whether you need to bring your own equipment or if the site provides it.

Conclusion

Universities have the potential to make significant contributions to their neighboring communities, but successful collaborations, even with trained staff and energetic students, take patient and careful planning. The four critical categories that play a major role in successful university-community collaboration for the YLP members are contact people, policy, youth recruitment, and facilities. Each member views supportive contact people as the most important factor, which may be universal to all types of university-community collaborations. Most of the YLP members want to collaborate with sites that provide two levels of contact people who understand and value the essence of physical-activity-based programs despite the current accountability of outcome-based assessment. The YLP members are full-time university professors with other responsibilities; their collaborations take place on a part-time basis, which require sites to systematically recruit youths within a certain age range and encourage them to regularly attend the program until a foundation is developed. The YLP members also need reserved space without distractions;

If other programs are run in the same place and time, the ability to create a deep connection with the youngsters becomes limited. Regardless of the type of university-community collaboration one is attempting to create, the insight of the YLP members outlined in this article will help in the planning of site support, thereby increasing the chances for a successful collaboration.

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Garcia

Continued from page 31

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Huettig

Continued from page 35

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Senne

Continued from page 49

teaching portfolio as a marketing tool, (3) interview strategies and guidelines, (4) job search techniques, and (5) available resources.

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