

Creating Pathways for Swimming and water safety within Teacher Education:

A University Perspective

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In Semester One, 2011 at Monash University (Gippsland) as part of the Bachelor of Primary Education course, it was decided a pathway be created through the implementation of swimming and water safety education in Primary schools.

Introduction

Monash University (Gippsland campus) is situated in Churchill, Latrobe Valley, located in central Gippsland, eastern Victoria. Primary education university students, choosing the Physical Education (PE) major stream, study the unit EDF2616 Experiencing Aquatic Environments. It is a requirement within this unit and also for Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT) teacher registration that PE graduates from initial teacher education programs in the primary school have a current teacher of swimming and water safety qualification (VIT, 2008). The unit at Gippsland campus previously required that students complete this during their own time and presented evidence of this qualification which cost them approximately \$350. However, the question was asked by the Gippsland unit co-ordinator, that if the students were attending a one hour lecture and a two hour workshop each week focusing on outcomes relating to aquatics and water safety education then with a carefully designed unit workshop programme why couldn't a pathway be established to meet the swimming and water safety course units of competency at the same time?

This question initiated the 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. Through implementing 'hands on' practical teaching and learning experiences for the university students, subsequently the workshops enabled the

provision of quality lessons at no cost for local primary school children (from a disadvantaged socio-economic Gippsland region), who otherwise would not have received swimming lessons. This was of particular benefit as although, a considerable amount of work has been attributed to educating the Australian public about swimming and water safety awareness in a commitment to reducing drowning fatalities, research suggests that rural and isolated schools find it most difficult to conduct aquatic activities. Furthermore, the best time to prepare children for safe aquatic participation and provide the skills and knowledge needed to have a lifelong safe association with water is during childhood.

The discussion paper released in August 2011 titled 'A tertiary education plan for Gippsland, Victoria' (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2011) supports such pathways as it 'encourages building on existing partnerships and strengthening articulation arrangements between providers'. In the written submissions for the discussion paper specifically focussing within the Gippsland context suggests that 'the need for additional training capacity and improved collaboration between providers of tertiary education and industry was identified as a major concern'. There are five key outcomes identified by the Gippsland tertiary education plan project, a derivative of the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians, and it is specifically the third key outcome that supports the unit co-ordinators holistic vision:

3. Improved participation in education and training more generally for the community.

Collaboration with ASCTA

Once the decision to create a pathway had been made, the next stage involved choosing an Australian Swimming and water safety provider. Programs associated with courses and qualifications for teaching Swimming and water safety that were most suitable included:

- Australian Swimming Coaches and Teachers Association (ASCTA) Swim Australia Teacher
- Austswim training of teachers of swimming and water safety

The third provider contacted was Royal Life Saving Society Australia (RLSSA) which in the state of Victoria is known as Lifesaving Victoria. Courses in relation to Swimming and water safety that Lifesaving Victoria provide include; Keep Watch, Swim and Survive, Bronze Medallion, Junior Lifeguard Club and Grey Medallion.

Correspondence with providers was initiated and it was anticipated that they would share similar swimming and water safety educational aspirations.

The response from ASCTA and RLSSA was very optimistic and built the foundations for strong partnerships. Both organisations were flexible in their disposition (within reason) and offered affordable courses for the university students. It was evident that ASCTA and RLSSA clearly valued the opportunity to promote swimming and water safety. Staff appeared to be personal and understanding in their dealings with the Gippsland unit co-ordinator, moved hastily to recognise the unit co-ordinator's prior learning (RPL) and to have the courses fully prepared so that success for all stakeholders was optimised. It was axiomatic that both providers aimed to promote swimming and water safety to its full potential and

Registered Training Organisation (RTO)	Austswim	ASCTA
Course	Austswim Teacher of Swimming and water safety	Swim Australia Teacher (SAT)
Minimal cost required by provider	\$215	\$100
Cost for university students	\$215	\$100
Amount of time valid	3 years	4 years
National recognition	RTO 104975	RTO 20948
International recognition	-	International Federation of Swim Teachers Association (IFTSTA)
Units of competency	SRC AQU 003B SRC AQU 008B SRC AQU 009B SRC AQU 0110B SRC AQU 0111B SRC AQU 013B SRC CRO 007B	SRC AQU 003B SRC AQU 008B SRC AQU 009B SRC AQU 0110B SRC AQU 0111B SRC AQU 013B SRC CRO 007B

Table 1 - Comparison between providers

(Australian Government, 2011)

in a professional manner. Prioritising 'education' was a commonality of both RTOs which appeared to enable strong collaboration with Monash University Faculty of Education.

With both Swimming and water safety courses offering identical units of competency (Table 1), the difference other than price was that ASCTA duration was four years rather than Austswim's three. Hence, the provider chosen for the purpose of education was ASCTA and the course was Swim Australia Teacher (SAT).

ASCTA is Australia's peak professional swimming body and courses are recognised by International Federation of Swim Teachers Association (IFTSTA), thus providing a world class curriculum for all stakeholders in support of the commitment to action in achieving the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (December, 2008). As part of the SAT Swimming and water safety course the university students provided low ratio quality lessons for local Primary school students over three weeks. Research conducted by Peden, Franklin and Larsen (2009) suggests this was to be of great value as implementation of the Health and Physical Education (HPE) learning area within Australian rural and isolated primary schools and specifically swimming and water safety often presents obstacles.

Pathways created included the opportunity for the university students to obtain qualifications in Australian Swimming Coaches and Teachers Association (ASCTA) -

Swim Australia Teacher (SAT), Royal Life Saving Society Australia (RLSSA) Bronze Medallion (BM) and RLSSA Resuscitation (RE) courses. The students were required to have current resuscitation accreditation to obtain a Swim Australia Teacher qualification, so this enabled a pathway within a pathway.

Benefits of creating pathways

From a Gippsland tertiary education perspective, aquatics educational perspective, Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians, rural and isolated schools and university perspective, the effort of creating pathways is well justified and rewarded. The process has begun, involving collaboration between RTOs, the local health industry (local leisure and sports centre), local Primary schools and the University sector; Monash University - Gippsland. A process that can be reflected upon, reassessed, amendments made and relationships strengthened.

Feedback from the Primary schools and education students was very encouraging and evidenced that they found the pathways to be meaningful and valuable. The unit co-ordinator was commended by the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Swim Australia (ASCTA) based on feedback the education student participants expressed in the SAT student evaluations summary (personal communication, June 24, 2011), which was reinforced in the university unit evaluation completed by the students where the best aspects of the unit included:

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).

The children from the local Primary schools were excited to be taught by the education students during each of the three weeks. 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 wrote; "My kids had a ball with the swimming. They were disappointed that it was only for the extra two weeks (one week was a holiday for this school). Like I said to you then, any time you need children feel free to approach us. We are very willing to assist." (personal communication, July 23, 2011).

Positive experiences for children and their families promotes Swimming and water safety and builds aquatic confidence for the Primary School children, University students and Primary School Teachers. Implementation of swimming and water safety into the school curriculum enables children to become aware of water safety, subsequently decreasing drowning fatalities in the short and long term. Furthermore, it builds an optimistic image of Monash University within the community.