University-Led Sports Coaching Academy: A Space for Developing Student Success

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Introduction

United Kingdom (UK) higher educational policy has emphasised the importance of widening access and improving participation for groups of students, specifically from low economic status backgrounds (Bowes et al., 2013; HaymanÇoyles, & Allin, 2021). This has led to an emphasis on substantially improving the student experience and academic support at transition, progression, and employment stages. Numerous HE institutions (HEI's) have included within their strategic planning for sport programmes, partnerships with local communities to support both access to HE and retention/attainment on degree programmes. Sports and exercise spaces are valuable touchpoints for aspiration raising and can widen access to degree programmes by connecting the university to sections of the local community which historically may not have considered HE as a choice.

Aims and Objectives

Explore situated learning theory (SLT) as an innovative pedagogical practice in developing greater connections between sport and exercise undergraduate/postgraduate students', leading to drive student success, widening participation, and social capital.

The rationale was driven towards a particular interest to understand if undergraduate students recognise the benefits of engaging in extra-curricular sports programs that offer opportunities to spontaneously form communities of practice and social networks which support their learning and identity development.

Measure and evaluate an outreach sport and exercise sports academy programme that had emphasis on retention, engagement, and continued professional development (CPD).

Methodology

Project was a mixed methods design measured over two academic years (2020 -2022) using a logic model (Smith, Li, & Rafferty, 2020) and qualitative semi -structured interviews (Smith & Sparks, 2016).

10 students (*n*= 10) from within sport and exercise degree courses at level 4 – 7 volunteered to be interviewed and share their lived experiences, thoughts, and feelings about the project and pseudonyms were used for confidentiality.

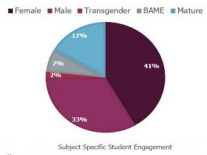
Each participant completed interviews that lasted between 40 and 60 minutes (mean= 44.4, ±6.93).

A thematic approach was used to identify themes and patterns with further Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) applied to better understand and make meaning of how individuals viewed their experiences (Callary, Rathwell & Young, 2015).

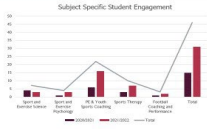
Logic Model

Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Impact

Female	25
Male	20
Transgender	1
BAME	4
Mature	10
Total Students	46



	2020/2021	2021/2022	Total
Sport and Exercise Science	4	3	7
Sport and Exercise Psychology	1	3	4
PE & Youth Sports Coaching	6	16	22
Sports Therapy	3	7	10
Football Coaching and Performance	1	2	3
Total	15	31	46



Results/Findings

Increased opportunities to collaborate through partnership with academic staff, peers and employers (Hayman, et al., 2020).

Increase in student motivation, focus on understanding of theory and practice, and improvement on attainment and overall grades (Hayman, et al., 2020).

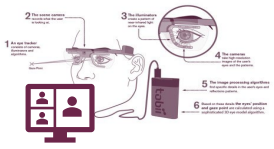
Increased opportunities to engage within a safe environment in various capacities of leadership, communication, teamwork, organisation, planning, innovative and creative thinking (Morley & Jamil, 2021).

Situated Learning theory (SLT) was instrumental to better understand student social learning experiences, informing pedagogy, and key characteristics of the learning environment (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

SLT supported and maintained an effective educational experience that allowed real-world learning to be embedded in authentic contexts of practice, in which students participated in scaffolded complex tasks within communities of practice (Morley & Jamil, 2021).

Impact and Outcomes

Innovative assessment in higher education



- Eye tracking technology allowed coaches and trainee teachers to view strategies in action remotely and in real time
- Presented live real-time assessment and feedback of coaching/teaching practice
- Data identified coaches gaze patterns and fixations during games based activities

Impact and Outcomes

Student engagement through partnership

Small group work allowed opportunities for students to design their practice and workshops, lead sessions, and collaborate with industry partners and stakeholders.

Student academy team leaders worked with academic, technical, and professional services staff in developing contextualised sport and exercise outreach sessions for Key Stage 2, 3, 4, and 5 settings.

Established an advanced mentoring framework as a formalised mechanism to develop professional practice that further provided a platform for peer assisted learning (PAL) that allowed in action and on action reflective practice to occur.

Conclusive Thoughts: what next...

Embed program as pedagogic practice within core models of curriculum in sport and exercise to meet academic professional standards framework (Advance HE, 2023).

Potential to create an institute of youth sport, health, and wellbeing to support a wider area of the community and civic agreements (Thomas, Faccin, & Asheim, 2021)

Opportunities to embed SLT approach to school -wide micro-curriculum that allows students to engage in a supervised practitioner based placement and mentoring programme with university external partners and industry employers (Kaynardağ, 2019).

Prospect to organically grow a formalised student led school -wide outreach programme within a university connected communities initiative that offers further opportunities to increase communities of practice to emerge from subject specific areas of HE (Bell & Bell, 2020).

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Classification: Restricted