

Program Plan

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Program Plan

The Little League Baseball Volunteer Education Program

A program plan for educating Little League Baseball volunteers to the dangers of professionalized youth sports and to the benefits of educational athletics is presented in this model. The organization and guiding principles for the program planning are based on Caffarella's Interactive Model of Program Planning (Caffarella & Daffron, 2013). Little League Baseball is a global non-profit organization with hundreds of millions of participants. The program presented was envisioned to affect and serve the local community Little League. This is considered the final and most important component of the organizations structure (Little League Baseball website, n.d.). Little League is a program of service to youth that is geared to provide an outlet of healthful activity and training under good leadership in the atmosphere of positive community participation. It is a movement that is dedicated to helping children become good and decent citizens ("General Information," 2014). The purposes of the organization align with educational athletics which are based on professional and scholarly research. These practices are concerned with the positive, broad, and overall long-term development of youth sports participants. In contrast, professionalized youth sports which are characterized by a focus on competitive outcomes and winning represent a danger to the physiological and psychological development of young athletes. The scholarly research is clear that everything possible needs to be done, starting at the local community level, to combat the professionalization of youth sports (Gould, 2007). The Little League Baseball volunteer education program thus represents a research based attempt to address that need.

Context Analysis

Youth sports participation is an important part of our culture. As a result, youth sports coaches often function as surrogate parents and can bond closely and strongly with the people they coach. Coaches and athletic program planners represent a powerful source of authority, influence, and expertise in regards to athletic instruction and development. Researcher Jan Boxill, noting studies conducted by the U.S. Anti-Doping Agency (USADA), in partnership with Discovery Education, concluded that coaches, more than parents, teachers, peers, religion, and school, have the greatest influence on youth sport participants (Boxill, 2013). Focus group interviews conducted by the Institute for the Study of Youth Sports (ISYS) in 2007 indicated that sport for children and youth has become more professionalized and that just because society emphasizes a more professionalized focus, adopting this type of approach is not necessarily in the best interest of young people (Gould, 2007). The millions of parents who choose to have their children participate in both recreational and competitive youth sports programs should take note because it is within this external societal context that they are investing their money, their values, and their child's future. While parents do play a very important and influential role in their child's athletic education, many are unaware of the internal context and degree to which coaches have influence over their children and of the potential dangers to educational athletics and to the physiological and psychological development of their children that the professionalization of youth sports represents. Within the context of a nationally important and influential recreational youth sports setting such as Little League Baseball, parent volunteers also serve as coaches. In these specific settings the parent volunteer's lack of coaching and educational knowledge can produce a wide array of both positive and negative influential circumstances for stakeholders. These are powerfully coercive contextual elements that the planner will need to address.

This current condition within the social and cultural environment of youth sports programs reflects a clear need for stakeholder and especially volunteer education. Perhaps most disturbingly for parents is that the USADA study indicated in their findings that many coaches profess an educational and positive philosophy but they often act in a contradictory manner that can create distrust with young athletes (Boxill, 2013). This difference between espoused and enacted values is an important consideration for the planner to recognize within this context. Many competitive youth sports organizations and programs are for profit businesses that may not have an educationally focused sports philosophy that is concerned with the overall long-term positive development of their clients and participants. It remains likely that many youth sports volunteers do not understand the various aspects of educational athletics nor can recognize what characterizes the processes that define the professionalization of youth sports. All youth sports stakeholders and especially volunteers would benefit from an educational program that introduces them to the dangers of the professionalization of youth sports and to the benefits of educational athletics. Contextually, it is the parent who is in the best position to influence what activities their children participate in. In this manner the planner is challenged because the current youth sports context is a loose but complex mixture of developmental, educational, and business concerns. This example of contradictory and paradoxical contextual knowledge is often encountered in the challenging tasks involving program planning (Caffarella & Daffron, 2013).

The Little League Baseball volunteer educational program's objective is to provide the parents and other important stakeholders who choose to participate and invest in these programs with an educational overview of some of the most important philosophical, psychological and sociological principles of both educational and professionalized youth sports environments. Its intention and goal is to help and perhaps inspire parent volunteers and the other important

stakeholders in Little League Baseball to develop the ethical thinking that will in turn empower them to apply scientific and best-practice knowledge which will help them to better facilitate, problem-solve, and maximize their child's educational athletic development. While there are educational programs available to help coaches and administrators to become better educated stakeholders in youth sports and athletics, there appears to be less emphasis placed on the study of the process and impact that educating parent volunteers might represent in combating the professionalization of youth sport in a recreational setting such as Little League Baseball. Furthermore, it is the hope of the author that volunteer parents, upon participating in such a youth sports educational program, will be more inclined to reflect on their new knowledge not only internally but within a community of practice which includes coaches, administrators, and other parents. Working reflectively within this community of practice might facilitate better problem-solving approaches to the issues that are regularly faced in the growing, competitive, and wider world of both recreational and competitive youth sports. Armed with this educational overview, parents and their children will be more likely to gain a better value from their investment in Little League Baseball participation through developing a more educational, scientific, and community focused mind-set. An educational program that has at its focus providing an overview of the latest research and theory of positive youth development (PYD) through sport would serve as a great benefit to all of the parent volunteers and other important stakeholders who choose to be involved.

The concept of PYD has been defined as the promotion of desirable competencies that lead to positive developmental outcomes for youth (Camire, Forneris, Trudel, & Bernard, 2011). To facilitate the development of this broader educational concept, program planners, through the development of a Little League Baseball volunteer education program, can emphasize the

promotion of various behavioral, cognitive, intrapersonal, and interpersonal life skill competencies that will help enable participants to better utilize their athletic experiences in order to better succeed in the many different environments that comprise their lives. These competencies represent some of the concepts of educational athletics (Gould, 2007). An athletic skill is generally characterized as a life skill when it can be successfully transferred from a sport setting to non-sport settings. Examples of these types of life skills include communicating effectively, making good decisions, problem solving, goal setting, leadership, and time management (Camire et al., 2011). The strategies that can be used by the planner to facilitate PYD and educational athletics through the Little League Baseball volunteer education program includes carefully developing a coaching philosophy, developing meaningful relationships with athletes, planning developmental strategies in their coaching practice, talking about and practicing life skills, and teaching athletes how life skills transfer to non-sport settings. These strategies can be used by coaches and parents to help nurture the qualities, skills, and attributes necessary for young athletes to become productive and contributing members of society. However, unless Little League Baseball volunteers commit to teaching and communicating these types of valuable life skills on a regular and on-going basis their value diminishes and important and sometimes essential learning opportunities can be lost and long-term development of youth athletes could be unrealized. Parent volunteers can remind their children and other participants of these lessons and can communicate with each other their desire that these types of positive, broad, and long-term developmental outcomes should be a part of their educational and coaching philosophies. The planner must take these broad contextual issues into account in developing a positive and beneficial youth sports education program.

Youth sports volunteers play an important role in in our society as they help to provide millions of children the opportunity to be physically fit and learn sport skills. The parents of young athletes continue to provide these opportunities for their children because of the perceived benefits of athletic participation and therefore play a critical role in the development of these youth sports environments. The youth sport context is a highly desirable setting in which to facilitate positive youth development because it is a valued social activity that attracts a large number of participants and coaches are in a preferred position to use the power of sport to positively influence the lives of their athletes (Camire et al., 2011). Parents play a vital role in the lives of their athletic children and they will influence the development of positive youth sports environments and the educational athletics of the future. Unfortunately, the current reality is that the many volunteers and other important stakeholders do not have formal coaching education and therefore may not have extensive knowledge on how to foster suitable environments for development (Camire et al., 2011). Parents and other important stakeholders often lack access to similar knowledge sources. If this continues to be the norm then the professionalization of youth sports will continue. The increased pressure and expectations that are placed on young athletes, the pressure to specialize early in a single sport, the inappropriate attitudes and expectations of athletes, the unhealthy parental involvement, the overemphasized outcome orientation, and the focus on winning and outcome goals will all continue to perpetuate within our country's athletic communities unless all of the stakeholders can better educate themselves and communicate more effectively with each other (Gould, 2007).

The Little League Baseball volunteer educational program that is designed for the participation of all of the important stakeholders involved with this important and valuable social activity has the potential to provide the most benefit for the positive development of youth.

While the program might have its traditional beneficiaries such as parents and coaches, there is a wider environmental context that is necessary to consider. For example, the local Chamber of Commerce and the City Councils of many areas have contributed tax payer money to building youth baseball facilities in their communities for the economic benefits of a year round and consistently heavy tournament schedule that brings thousands of visitors into the local economy on a regular basis. Local business owners who operate near these venues will be very interested in maintaining a year round tournament schedule that fills the hotels and restaurants near these venues. Recreational sports organizations such as Little League Baseball, YMCA, and Team USA, just to mention a few, would also benefit greatly from having access to such a program for all of their volunteers and even paid employees. Traditional public school athletic departments are constantly at odds with private “select” sports programs because these sports traditionally can interfere with both middle school and high school participation rates due to conflicting schedules and values. Furthermore, the local league’s community financial sponsors would also benefit from an educational program that satisfies and enriches participants by simple association, local word of mouth, and modern social media.

A high value youth sports educational program would include access to the latest research involved in this field including textbooks and research articles. It would also need to follow closely some of the more important research articles in the field. Essentially the Little League Baseball volunteer program would provide its parent volunteers with access and an introduction to the latest research and theory concerning the professionalization of youth sports and positive youth development through educational athletics. The format would need to be flexible so that the program elements could be delivered to a room full of volunteers at a preseason coaches meeting, a school district policy meeting, or over the course of several weeks

in a community based class given at a local high school or community college. All of these situations represent powerful contextual and influential relationships that planners must be cognizant and well informed about in the planning process (Caffarella & Daffron, 2013). The program planners that are working in these environments to change the way people think and act must successfully negotiate with the people and through the politics that are involved in order to understand whose interests will dominate the planning and whose interests they will negotiate in the planning process (Cervero & Wilson, 1996). Within this complex contextual framework the Little League Baseball volunteer education program can be broadly envisioned to provide it with a local competitive advantage over other youth sports leagues that choose to perpetuate and sponsor more professionalized competitive youth athletic philosophies.

Needs Assessment and Evaluation

Youth sports are widely popular in our culture today. Millions of families choose to invest their time, money, and effort into participating in these important social activities. There is no shortage of both competitive and recreational youth sports programs available throughout most communities for parents to choose from. Sport and athletic activity can provide vital life experiences. However, sport for children has become more professionalized and just because society has emphasized a more professionalized approach, adopting this type of focus is not necessarily in the best interest of young people. While many coaches profess an educational and positive philosophy some act often in a contradictory manner that can create distrust with participants. Daniel Gould, Professor and Director for the Institute for the Study of Youth Sports (ISSY) at Michigan State University, has stated that the research indicates that youth sports are becoming more professionalized with a greater emphasis on winning, scholarships, sports specialization, and declining sportsmanship (Gould, 2007). This trend represents a substantial

threat to educational athletics which in contrast emphasize the long term and broad educational and developmental gains that come from the overall sports experience. The research and focus group studies have indicated that everything possible needs to be done to combat the professionalization of youth sports and that the best place to start is at the local level with coaches and parent education programs (Gould, 2007).

Therefore, the need exists for a local Little League Baseball volunteer educational program that will address the dangers to educational athletics that is represented by the trend in the professionalization of youth sports. Little League Baseball provides baseball and softball opportunities for millions of young players each year and is a community based all volunteer organization. This educational program's objective will be to provide youth sports parents who volunteer their time and effort in their community's local Little League Baseball league with the knowledge to be able to recognize the characteristics and dangers of professionalized sports and the benefits of educational athletics. Specifically, the focus will be on providing the parent volunteers with the best practice knowledge of educational athletics. The program will be administered in the parent volunteer training sessions that these leagues regularly provide prior to the start of their season. Once successfully implemented the local league, its parent volunteers, and its young participants will have their athletic experienced enhanced and overall satisfaction with the local league will increase leading to increased participation and retention.

As an advocate of youth sports and its participants and as a parent organization to youth sports education in general, the ISSY has clearly indicated that there exists a need at the local community level for a parent and coaches education program that addresses the threat to educational athletics that the trend in the professionalization of youth sports represents. However, the ISSY has clearly indicated a need for local parents and coaches to become

involved in this educational process. This, in turn, will require that certain local sports organizations become involved in the process (Gould, 2007). For example, a local Little League Baseball organization may help facilitate this type of program for its volunteer coaches and for its parents. The probability of developing a successful program increases when stakeholders are involved in the planning and cooperate in selecting the services to be offered and the ways in which those services are delivered to them (Posavac, 2011). In assessing the needs of potential program participants both formal and informal assessment instruments can be utilized (Posavac, 2011). For example, a simple formal survey and questionnaire can be presented to these youth sports volunteers and league sponsors as a part of the regular league registration process that would help the programmer to formatively better understand the volunteer's current attitudes and beliefs concerning the goals and desired outcomes of their youth sports experience.

Informally, the programmer can gauge the needs of parent and coaching volunteers as well as the league's community sponsors by simply interviewing and speaking with them without any preconceived notions before the actual educational meeting and volunteer training session begins. This more informal evaluation approach can be a critical component of the planner's responsibilities (Caffarella & Daffron, 2013). Furthermore, from an informal needs assessment perspective, the programmer can continue to formatively review professional research journals and articles that focus on positive youth sports development and can continue to illicit the opinions of other colleagues in the field (Posavac, 2011). By utilizing these formal and informal needs assessment instruments the programmer can better assess what depth and intensity of educational effort will be required in order to help learners reach the desired outcome. These efforts will focus on providing the volunteers with valuable input into the evolving training sessions while also allowing the opportunity for the programmer to continue

the program's formative assessment processes that will help better meet the expectations of these learners. The programmer understands the differences between educational athletics and professionalized youth sports. During the formative process the league could be handed a simple survey or questionnaire that allows them to clarify their understanding of the issues. The planner can customize the program's delivery based on these formative suggestions and comments. The league can also be involved in the summative evaluation efforts as well. Qualitative interviews during the season and also following the season will allow the planner to understand the overall effectiveness of the program over the course of an entire season. Through these formative and summative evaluation steps the planner, the league facilitators, and the parent volunteers will be better positioned to determine whether the design and delivery of the youth sports educational program was effective and whether the outcomes were beneficial to the participants.

These youth sports volunteers rely on a parent organization to provide and facilitate youth sports opportunities. These leagues and organizations will need to be involved in the formative process of the educational programs that they offer as well. Many national level youth sports organizations such as YMCA, USA Football and Little League Baseball have a set of working by-laws and a mission statement that can be used as standards to assess what should be taught to their volunteers (Little League Baseball website, n.d.). The formative goals of this youth sports educational program can be compared with these items from a formative standpoint during the process and then once again following the completion of the program in summative form. The local Little League and its elected board members will be included by the programmer in the decision making process and in any formative and summative evaluation efforts. Ultimately the local Little League will decide if the educational program will be a right fit for them based on their current needs. They will ultimately determine if a parent and coach's

educational program that teaches about educational athletics and the professionalization of youth sports will be effective for what their expectations are for their program and their volunteers. From a formative standpoint, the programmer will want to know what these organizations define to be their problem (if any) with volunteer education, what specific questions that they would like to have addressed, and what data they have and would like to have during the program process. Furthermore, the formative evaluation process could be continued at least once during the actual league's playing season. Qualitative interviews can be conducted and a valid and a reliable questionnaire can be used during the season to gather data in order to see if the league can establish if any benefit to its participants is being realized. The planner and league administrators can also observe the leagues volunteers as they conduct practices and games in order to gauge whether the program's educational efforts are being put into regular use and are perceived to be a benefit to the league and its participants. If volunteers are still utilizing coaching techniques more closely associated with the professionalized youth sports approach then the league may choose to intervene with those volunteer(s).

The heart of program evaluation lies in judging the overall value and worth of a program which is not an easy task (Caffarella & Daffron, 2013). The perceived beneficial outcomes of a youth sports educational program that seeks to combat the professionalization of youth sports through the advocating of educational athletics are difficult to quantify without the summative input of the league officials, the volunteers, and the actual parents of the young athletes as well. The program planner should take advantage of and utilize informal and unplanned evaluation opportunities that take place throughout the season as well as more systematic program and developmental evaluation approaches (Caffarella & Daffron, 2013). Through the use of formative and informal interviews with league officials, parent volunteers, and parents who are

simply participating in the league, the planner can use what they learn to customize the delivery of the program specifics to better effect. Through the use of formative formal surveys and questionnaires the planner can obtain more quantifiable data which can also be used to better understand and respond to the needs and expectations of the program participants. It is highly advisable to seek information on the needs of a program's potential participants so that the planner is able to learn what people need in order to be in a satisfactory state (Posavac, 2011). By including the league facilitators, the volunteers, and the parents themselves in the evaluation processes through the use of both formal and informal formative and summative techniques the planning process will have its best chance of success.

Format and Methods

Before selecting a format for learning the major goals of the program must be clear (Fellenz, 1998). This program's goal is to educate parent volunteers in the community's local Little League Baseball program to be able to recognize the dangers of professionalized youth sports and the benefits of educational athletics. Its objective is to provide a youth sports educational training program for parent volunteers who are participating in their community's local Little League Baseball program. These parents would be able to demonstrate through completion of a written assessment at the beginning of the season, through direct observations made during on the field practices and games, and through the feedback provided by team parents following the season that they are competent to: (1) recognize and define the major indicators of professionalized youth sports and their dangers; (2) recognize and define the major indicators of educational athletics and their benefits; and (3) demonstrate through direct on the field observations that they are able to utilize best practices based on educational athletics.

The intended outcome is to improve and enrich the overall athletic experience of the leagues participants in order to increase their overall satisfaction with the program so that overall participation will increase on a yearly basis. This program's design is based on the overall purpose, goals, and objectives of the youth sports educational program and its context to ensure transfer of learning (Caffarella & Daffron, 2013). Working with the local Little League Board of Directors the planner will schedule and organize three informal youth sports educational sessions for the league's volunteers. Another session, if deemed necessary by the board, might envision bringing the league's community financial sponsors together with the planner/facilitator separately. This session would serve as an informal introduction to the program for the sponsors. The first educational session for the volunteers will occur prior to the beginning of the season, the second will occur at the midpoint of the season, and a third session will occur at the completion of the regular season. These sessions will ensure transfer of learning and will enable the leagues coaching volunteers to understand the programs objectives, apply their learning directly to on the field practices, and then discuss what worked for them throughout the season and what did not. In this manner the program's planning does not simply attempt to share information with its participants but includes their actual on the field experiences as a part of the learning process. The program's format thus intentionally reinforces and facilitates actual transfer of learning through experience and action (Caffarella & Daffron, 2013). These three educational sessions will be held at the local Little League facility where volunteers are used to meeting and interacting with each other. The local league's board room usually has adequate space and resources to serve larger groups of the program's volunteers. If not, then another meeting location will need to be secured prior to the season to give adequate time to schedule the three planned educational sessions.

A critical step in the planner's process of formulating an educational or training program for adults is the selection of appropriate formats for learning (Fellenz, 1998). The first informal educational session will occur prior to the beginning of the leagues regular season in the form of an informal lecture and discussion (Caffarella & Daffron, 2013). This session will allow the volunteers and the instructor/planner to become introduced to each other and for the program's goals and objectives to be discussed. Today the majority of learning activities organized for adults are often structured as a lecture, class, or group training session (Fellenz, 1998). However, a lecture may be too formal of a format for this program. Many adult learners might prefer a more informal format that focuses on discussion rather than lecture (Caffarella & Daffron, 2013). The focus of this initial educational session will be to provide a general introduction to the importance of youth sports to its participants and the wider community. It will clearly define what the professionalization of youth sports represents and what its defining characteristics are. An emphasis will be placed on clearly communicating what the dangers of the professionalization of youth sports are and why they are dangerous to the positive development of youth. Additionally, this initial session will include a discussion of what educational athletics represent and why they are essential to the positive development of youth. Following this presentation there will be a brief question and answer session to clarify key concepts and to actively engage the league's parent volunteers (Caffarella & Daffron, 2013). This presentation will also be simultaneously provided by a simple and concise PowerPoint presentation as such visuals will help illustrate the content and meet different learning preferences (Caffarella & Daffron, 2013). During this session participants will also be provided hard paper copies of the major research articles that discuss the most recent developments in positive youth sports, educational athletics, and the professionalization of youth sports. The

resources will also be emailed as attachments directly to the parent volunteers using the contact information that they provided on the league's standard registration and volunteer forms. These vital professional resources represent the very heart of the program's educational focus and purpose and will connect the volunteers to the professional research and theory that will further enrich their learning experience.

The volunteers will then be encouraged to use the concepts in their on the field practices and in their overall planning processes. The instructor/planner will also engage and encourage the volunteers to share and reflect upon any critical incidents that they may have encountered as youth sports volunteers (Caffarella & Daffron, 2013). At the conclusion of this session a short quiz will be administered to measure how well the basic concepts of this introductory session were conveyed. At the conclusion of this initial session the volunteers will also receive their field marshal schedule. These marshalling duties are a regular responsibility of Little League coaching volunteers that requires them to be observers at games other than their own during the season. They usually are there to simply assist umpires, parents, coaches, and others if problems or disputes arise during games. While performing these duties during their scheduled time the volunteers will be asked to use the knowledge that they are learning to make observations of what aspects of professionalized youth sports and educational athletics that they might encounter (Caffarella & Daffron, 2013). The volunteers will then be asked to take simple notes on what they observe and be prepared to share those observations with the larger group of volunteers at the second educational session which will occur at midseason which will further the transfer and reinforcement of their learning experiences.

A second informal educational session and discussion will occur at the midpoint of the league's season. This second session will serve as a follow-up to the initial session and will

include another critical incident discussion of what practices the coaches have been using and a review of the key concepts of both professionalized youth sports and educational athletics.

Following this discussion, the instructor/facilitator will also organize buzz groups to facilitate transfer of learning (Caffarella & Daffron, 2013). The volunteer coaches will be broken up into groups based on the age group of their respective divisions. Each group will then recognize a lead volunteer to serve as facilitator of the discussion who will then interact with the instructor as the group encounters questions with the exercise (Vella, 2002). The purpose of the exercise will be for each group to discuss and provide a list of what key concepts of educational athletic practices have worked and what aspects of professionalized youth sports may still exist in the league's practices up to the midpoint of the season. These groups will also discuss what was observed with coaches, parents, players, and other participants as they conducted their observations during their regularly scheduled marshalling duties and these observations will also be added to these lists. The program's content objectives may best be served through such interactive small group formats (Fellenz, 1998). Furthermore, learning will be enhanced when peers are able to debate and challenge their knowledge with each other (Vella, 2002). The final lists will then be presented by each group's table leader/facilitator to the larger group as a whole. These lists will then be collected by the facilitator and then compiled by age division then organized into a document that will be emailed to all of the league's volunteers. As these lists are presented the facilitator will encourage dialogue and question and answer opportunities as needed between the sessions participants. This engages the learners by allowing them to pull from their own knowledge and allows them to take ownership for their own learning and the effort to change their youth sports experience and environment.

The third and final educational session will occur immediately before the completion of the league's final regular season game but before the leagues playoff and All Star season begins. This will ensure that volunteers will be more likely to attend and participate in this final session and will give the coaching volunteers enough time to have their team's parents fill out the final survey. Again, the facilitator will open this final session with a critical incident discussion concerning events that occurred during the season. A question and answer session will follow in order to allow the league's volunteers to address and speak about any of the other important issues that came up during the season. The instructor will then have the group of volunteer coaches break up into smaller suggestion circles of no more than 10-12 people (Caffarella & Daffron, 2013). The groups will then be asked to decide on a particularly important or serious issue or problem that was brought up during the final critical incident discussion and then discuss it. The group will then nominate 2-3 people to provide their solutions and comments to the larger group as a whole. This third and final educational session with the volunteers will then be ended with a brief set of closing statements from the instructor reiterating the dangers of professionalized youth sports and the benefits of educational athletics. Volunteers will then be asked to complete a survey where they will identify the characteristics and dangers of professionalized youth sports and the characteristics and benefits of educational athletics. A section of the survey will ask volunteers for simple suggestions, comments, or criticisms of the youth sports educational program, its content, and its instruction. Finally, the league will hand out the parent survey and feedback questionnaire to the volunteer coaches. The coaches will then hand them out to their parents in their final meeting with them, have them complete the survey and feedback form, then return the completed surveys back to the league.

At the conclusion of the season the league's volunteer coaches should have acquired the knowledge to recognize and define the major indicators of professionalized youth sports and their dangers, to recognize and define the major indicators of educational athletics and their benefits, and to demonstrate through direct on the field observations that they are able to utilize best practices based on educational athletics. Transfer of learning is defined as the effective application by program participants of what they learned as a result of attending an education or training program (Caffarella & Daffron, 2013). The youth sports educational program has utilized multiple methods to assist participants with the transfer of learning objectives that will help them in applying the relevant concepts to their youth sports coaching and volunteer practices for the current and future Little League Baseball seasons. Each of the program's educational sessions included informal lecture discussions, simple question and answer sessions, critical incident discussions, a buzz group session, and a smaller suggestion circle all of which can help with the transfer of knowledge and help to create a community of practice (Caffarella & Daffron, 2013). Additionally, the initial session's PowerPoint presentation as well as the relevant research articles were all presented and provided to participants who will serve to help illustrate the sessions content and meet different learning preferences (Caffarella & Daffron, 2013). The traditional group format selected for the three educational selections is appropriate because these types of formats dominate adult education programs, are accepted methods to deliver content, and many adults like and expect them because they can provide social interaction as well as intellectual stimulation (Fellenz, 1998).

Logistics: Scheduling, Staffing, and Marketing

Making decisions concerning the program's formats, scheduling, and staffing is an important part of the program planning process (Caffarella & Daffron, 2013). Little League

volunteers are required to participate in various meetings and training sessions throughout the regular season. Generally these meetings begin several weeks prior to the start of the regular season and can be scheduled during the early evenings after most people get off from work or on weekends when availability and potential participation is easier. The selection and organization of teams, the communication of fund raising activities, and the scheduling of concession stand and marshalling duties, as well as field maintenance, all require that volunteers meet together. The youth sports education sessions for the leagues volunteers will be scheduled at the beginning, the middle, and just before the end of the regular Little League season. The most common time to schedule volunteer meetings in this format will be on Saturday early afternoon at the league's board room or other field facilities. The sessions will be in addition to the league's other required meetings it schedules for its volunteers.

These sessions will be coordinated with the leagues other training sessions and with consideration for any actual conflicts with scheduled games that coaching volunteers must attend. The planner will work closely with the leagues administrative volunteers in using the master schedule to set up the program's three training sessions. Furthermore, it is likely that not all of the leagues coaching volunteers will be able to attend all three of these sessions due to various conflicts. Therefore the instructor and the league will need to consider whether to schedule two separate meeting times for each of the three educational sessions. For example, for the initial session simply provide a meeting time for Saturday and a second meeting time for that Sunday. This will allow some flexibility in scheduling the sessions for the leagues volunteers which could potentially lead to more participation. A simple sign-up sheet for the two possible sessions can be provided at the time that the volunteer registers to participate. The program planner must make these considerations in order devise a program schedule that fits the formats

chosen, the specific activities planned, and the participants' personal and job commitments (Caffarella & Daffron, 2013).

Once the meeting times have been established it is important to consider how they will be staffed (Caffarella & Daffron, 2013). Most Little League volunteer training and scheduling meetings will be attended by members of the local board of directors. With this particular local program the planner will also be the instructor. However, consideration must be given to training more volunteers to be able to deliver the programs basic components and learning objectives at some point in the future. Since all Little League volunteers and personnel are not paid there will be no impact to the leagues budget. While it may be possible to eventually bring in paid subject matter experts in the field of educational athletics, these three sessions will not utilize any outside expert speakers. However, it should be the leagues intention to acquire as many educationally trained and focused volunteers as is possible. Although this specific objective is not initially a part of this program's planning process, it is implied that the leagues volunteers will have become better educated in positive youth sports development upon completion of this program and some of them could possibly learn to train other of leagues volunteers in future seasons. The local Little League could consider making this a required certification program for its volunteers.

Whatever the context, training and education in any organization must produce results, presumably that are aligned with its objectives (Watkins & Sechrest, 1998). The league's board as well as many of the leagues sponsors may also need to attend these sessions in order to gauge how well their expectations align with the program's objectives and educational philosophy. While the league's board members would have already signed off on using the program in the planning phase, some of the league's financial sponsors from the community may want to make

sure that their values are in agreement with any new training program. These sponsors should be allowed to participate and attend the sessions like any other community member who volunteers their time and money to the league. However, from a logistical standpoint, the local Little League's community financial sponsors may require a separately scheduled session that introduces them to the educational concepts that will be presented to the league's volunteers. This particular session would fit more appropriately, from both a logical and scheduling standpoint, to occur at the beginning of the leagues season. Allowing the opportunity for the creatively develop and build the economic community's buy-in and may lead to further sources of miscellaneous income for the program and league (Watkins & Sechrest, 1998).

While not all of the league's parents actually serve as an active volunteer that help in the leagues seasonal operations, the marketing plan for the program should include considerations for the parents who represent Little League Baseball's consumer or customer (Havercamp, 1998). A major consideration for Little League in recent years has been that its participation rates have been falling as many parents are choosing to pay for their children to participate in the more competitive select and academy youth baseball formats. It is essential that the league's volunteers are involved in the marketing of the youth sports educational program (Havercamp, 1998). Organizing marketing tactics that will assist the league in achieving a competitive edge with other organizations who serve a similar population is an important marketing consideration (Caffarella & Daffron, 2013). This line of reasoning suggests that parent volunteers must be considered in marketing both Little League Baseball and the volunteer education program. While this may seem somewhat outside of the program's logistical considerations it is essential to consider when word of mouth and modern social media either favors or does not favor a youth sports league or organization. Recruitment of future participants might depend rather heavily on

how well the league's current participants communicate their satisfaction with the program. The Little League volunteer education program can thus be a valuable recruitment tool if its participants deem it to be a favorable experience and share this with their wider community of friends. In this manner the program could be seen to provide the local league with a competitive advantage over other youth sports programs in the area.

While many of those parents who have left Little League may be unlikely to return, it is in retaining its existing parents that the program's marketing will best align with the program's intentions of improving yearly registration rates. Retaining its current participants by providing highly rewarding and beneficial educational and social experiences for their children can eventually lead to recruitment of new participants through positive word of mouth and social media activity. Many parents choose the more competitive formats over recreational baseball because of coaching ability. They reason that if recreational baseball is not competitive and not educational (even from a simply athletic standpoint) then they will choose to invest their money and time elsewhere. These realities should stress the need for the league and the program planner to obtain information on the wants and needs of its participants and to bring inventiveness into marketing and sharing the vision of Little League Baseball with its participants.

The Little League Baseball volunteer educational program will utilize some simple but inventive forms of marketing its benefits to the league's participants. Utilizing common and accepted marketing techniques and strategies for a nonprofit organization such as Little League Baseball will help change participants beliefs in order to accept and come into better alignment with the youth sports education program for the leagues participants. Through the regular registration process which requires both participants and potential volunteers to fill out various waiver and general information forms the league could begin to compile a marketing database

(Havercamp, 1998). The program will utilize the initial registration process to obtain email contact information where the program can advertise its objectives and intentions to participants in the form of electronic brochures or newsletters on a regular basis beginning at the start of the season and continuing until its end. The league might be willing to invest a small amount of funding for even providing a single page flier detailing the program's intentions and main objectives. The program planner and the league could conceivably utilize this inventive marketing approach to keep its participants initially and then regularly informed of the program's focus and any new information that should be shared with them.

Electronic mail utilized in the program's marketing strategy may help the league retain and even grow its registrations as people will generally talk with others about their positive, beneficial, and educational experience with the league and its youth sports educational program (Havercamp, 1998). Another potential marketing opportunity is for the league to sponsor a booth for the youth sports educational program at one of its regularly scheduled and league wide fundraising events such as at a Fun Day carnival. Such educationally focused programs will likely garner the continued interest of the leagues participants and perhaps even represent a possible revenue stream as sponsors will likely want to attach their names to such a positively oriented community program. Aligning sponsors away from professionalized youth sports philosophies towards educational athletics will likely be no different than with the parents. Marketing an educational program can lead to increased participation and can help to develop and maintain the credibility of the associated organizations which could lead to further funding opportunities (Caffarella & Daffron, 2013). Once the dangers of professionalized youth sports and the benefits of educational athletics are made apparent to both the sponsors and parent volunteers of Little League Baseball then the stakeholders can make better informed decisions

about their participation in youth sports and thus make better investments of their time, their money, and their children.

Final Considerations

Little League Baseball is being challenged by more competitive formats. The professionalization of youth sports is continuing and in many respects with the full participation and financial support of the parents of young athletes. At younger and younger ages parents are choosing to place their children in highly competitive, expensive, and developmentally dangerous youth sports environments. The Little League Baseball volunteer education program represents a small local step to combat professionalized youth sports in a recreational setting. Many parents are attracted to the highly competitive sports programs for their promises of potential college scholarships and professional contracts. These promises can nowhere be found in Little League Baseball. Locally, a program as thus presented in this plan, has a greater chance of success than on a national level. More consideration is needed to involve the national and international level of the organization. Better marketing of their product is needed. As a counter to the professionalized competitive “select” and academy baseball formats, Little League could better recognize, align, and market themselves with educational athletics. This, essentially, is where the program could be further developed but on a more local marketing scale and model. All education programs that the league utilizes could be better marketed. Perhaps one might consider making such training required.

In analyzing the context of modern youth baseball this plan was specifically chosen to be introduced to the local Little League Baseball organization because its espoused values align well with educational athletics and it is organized and ran by parent volunteers. It was envisioned to focus on youth sports education for the parents of young athletes. In the far more

competitive “select” and academy youth baseball settings this plan would need significant modification to work in a professional coaching environment with parents who may have significantly different goals for their children’s athletic participation. Recreational youth sports are complicated social activities and competitive environments would introduce significantly different considerations for the planner. More contextual investigation into the needs of participants and stakeholders in these types of environments might significantly magnify the complexity of the paradoxical environments where professionalized youth sports and educational athletics come into contact. These considerations would significantly alter any educational plan that had similar objectives as the plan presented in this assignment.

In this plan the needs of the league’s financial sponsors could use significantly more development. How to include them in the formative and summative processes as well as how much effort the planner should devote to obtaining their buy in might depend on the dynamic that exists between them and the local board of directors. These sponsors might require a separate educational session to gauge and develop their buy in which would be a significant consideration for the league which depends on such contributors. Furthermore, the specific details of the formative and summative processes used to evaluate the program’s effectiveness would need to be further developed. For example, the specific questions and format of the league questionnaire and survey were not presented in the plan’s content. The results of these would be valuable to the involved stakeholders. A specific plan would also need to be devised to track the discussions that occur during the three education sessions. These notes would be valuable to further the transfer of learning for the league’s volunteers if they could be compiled and presented in a more formal form such as a newsletter or other document. Including feedback in regards to the volunteer coaches direct on the field observations of their peers during the

season would also benefit from a more detailed treatment. A detailed listing of the specific research articles and scholarly research was also not presented in detail. There was also no discussion given to track the long term results of the program's participants to see what effects their participation had on the development of their child. Logistically there could be more development given to understanding the local Little League's board of directors input into the program's development and in addressing volunteers that cannot or did not attend the educational sessions. Finally, there is much potential in developing what might be called a Positive Youth Sports certification for the local league and its volunteers.

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