Tip #1149: Building Student Ownership Through Recreation

Overview

Student ownership of physical activity programs is one of the strongest predictors of sustained participation. When students have a genuine say in what activities are offered, how they are run, and how the spaces they use are organised, they develop a sense of investment that keeps them coming back and encourages them to bring their peers along. Schools that deliberately create structures for student ownership produce recreation cultures that are self-sustaining and resilient to changes in staff or resources.

Key Teaching Ideas

Student ownership develops through a progression of responsibility rather than a single handover. Teachers can begin by forming a student advisory board with a defined scope, for example, recommending two new activities per term and gradually expand the board's authority as students demonstrate capability and commitment. Allowing students to lead warm-ups for lunchtime activities is a practical early step that gives students a visible role without requiring extensive preparation. Giving students control over equipment selection, activity scheduling, and space design produces a program that reflects genuine student preferences and builds the kind of ownership that sustains participation over time.

Practical Application

- **Student Advisory Board:** Establish a student group with a defined brief to recommend, plan, and review recreation offerings each term, with expanding authority as the group builds capability.
- **Student-Led Warm-Ups:** Give interested students the responsibility of leading the warm-up for lunchtime activities, providing a visible leadership role with clear expectations.
- **Activity Selection Rights:** Allow the student advisory board to select at least one new activity per term from a shortlist of feasible options, connecting student voice directly to program decisions.
- **Space Design Input:** Involve students in decisions about how recreation spaces are set up, including equipment placement, zone boundaries, and signage.

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- **Ownership Handover Events:** Mark the transition of a program from teacher-led to student-led with a brief ceremony or acknowledgement, reinforcing that the ownership shift is real and valued.

Next Steps

Anywhere PD has resources on student ownership models and co-design in HPE programs.

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