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**EXPLORING THE EXPECTATIONS AND EXPERIENCES  
OF  
STUDENTS, EX-STUDENTS AND PARENTS/CAREGIVERS  
OF A SPORT ACADEMY PROGRAMME**

**A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for  
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## ABSTRACT

This case study explored the expectations and experiences that past and current students and parents/caregivers have of a secondary school sport academy programme. These programmes have become increasingly common in the New Zealand secondary school system and are diverse in operation and philosophical underpinning. Yet, despite their popularity, they remain relatively unexplored in terms of the experiences of young people who participate in them.

Current members of a secondary school sport academy programme were interviewed, together with parents/caregivers and a limited number of ex-students. The director and implementers of the programme were also interviewed. Furthermore, observations were completed and documentation gathered on the sport academy programme. Information collated was analysed using multiple data sources that included a combination of quantitative methods in relation to the questionnaires and qualitative strategies for the interviews, observations and documentation.

Analysis revealed that the sport academy was just one of a number of experiences contributing to a member's sporting achievement. Improvement in academic attitude and effort was also not significant. This was almost certainly due to the current selection criteria, as many of the participants had demonstrated athletic and academic talent prior to applying. Investigation of the expectations of the current and ex-members and their parents/caregivers showed that some of these had not been met, including components noted in the sport academy documentation.

A career in a student's chosen sport was not perceived to be a motive to be a part of the programme, but the camaraderie and similarities students shared being athletically gifted, were perceived as important reasons to participate. Self-confidence was an additional positive outcome. A number of concerns were raised by this research. Both the students and the parents/caregivers indicated that they would like NCEA qualifications established as part of the academic curriculum within the sport academy programme. Furthermore parents/caregivers preferred more involvement and communication with the sport academy director.

Results from the study support the contention that sport academy programmes are viable vehicles for those identified as athletically gifted.

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*Ehara tāku toa i te toa takitahi, i te toa takitini.*

Not by my strength alone, but by the strength of the many.

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