

Afterword

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Introduction

We began this text by arguing that the volume and breadth of policy impacting the lives of young people in the UK, and further afield, warranted considerable further discussion than has, to date, been undertaken. This text has sought to comment on the direction and pace of development of relevant policy with a particular focus on how this is shaping the experience of sport, physical activity and play for young people. It has been our intention to bring to the reader a wide range of topics concerning young people's experiences these activity areas. By considering political ideology, interventions and the experiences of young people, the various contributors have richly illustrated the complex tensions which exist between the potential benefits of such activities and the extent to which policy makers help or hinder the process. At time of writing, we are approaching the mid-point of the Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition government. The contributors to this text have argued that matters concerning sport, play and physical activity remain highly pertinent to the lives of young people, although the emergence of amalgamations of Conservative and Liberal Democrat policy appears to have muddied the waters in terms of young people's developmental pathway through these activity areas. In drawing together the work of the various contributors to this text, I ask the reader to consider three of these complex tensions; i) the need for individualised understandings of development in policy making ii) past and present political ideology and iii) the on-going debate between sport for development and the development of sport.

The need for individualised understandings of development in policy making

Inherent to the challenge of effective policy making lies the need to create an all-encompassing strategy designed to shape the behaviour and development of a broad and diverse population. This challenge is underlined by the contributors to this text; numerous chapters highlight the importance of individualised, child-centred approaches to practice. Mark Elliot and Andy Pitchford are particularly lucid in this regard, discussing the FA's approach to enhancing respect within the football community. Whilst acknowledging the importance of the roles spectators, coaches and referees within this process, Elliot and Pitchford point to the FA's (2011) National Game Strategy, suggesting that the most fundamental aspects of this document lie in three core child-centred recommendations: i) the development of flexible, child-centred competitions for Primary School children ii) new player pathways for children built around small-sided game formats iii) the development of an intervention programme which aims to counter the Relative Age Effect (RAE). Simon Padley and I also argue that an individualised, athlete-centred approach to engagement with competition is crucial for the holistic development of young people. Citing contemporary pedagogic theory such as situated learning (see Richard and Wallian, 2005) as a suitable framework for such practice, we also suggest that coaches have a particular responsibility to shape the development of the young people in their care through appropriately framed experiences of sport. This individualised theme is also picked up by Denise Hill, Nic Matthews, Lindsey Kilgour, Tom Davenport and Kara Law in their discussion of the benefit of physical activity programmes for young people with low self-esteem; a chapter which also challenges the coalition's 'competitive sports for all' (DCMS, 2012) mantra. Hill et al. suggest that traditional competitive sports are unlikely to engage all young people and that, for the sake of their long-term physical and mental health, a more individualised approach to curriculum design should be adopted. Matt Lloyd and I are also cautious of the coalition

policy on competitive sport, suggesting that the multi-skills and physical literacy approaches which have developed over the past decade are developmentally appropriate for young sports performers and should not be lost should the upcoming revision of the National Curriculum revert, as expected, to a more traditional games-focussed approach. We agree that the move away from sport-based to more movement-based curricular is beneficial for both the development of sports performance, but also for increasing the likelihood of creating a lifelong, physically active population (Côté, Lidor and Hackfoot, 2009). It appears, therefore, that from a broad theoretical perspective, the individual, child-centred approach is both appropriate and desirable. Policy makers need to ensure that organisations at the heart of delivering policy goals are enabled and encouraged to implement a tailored, individualised, and child-centred approach to practice. This challenge is inevitably more difficult as governments, together with their particular ideologies and philosophies, come and go. It is to the policy-related challenges of negotiating the transition from New Labour (1997-2010) to the current coalition government which we now turn.

Past and present political ideology

The contributors to this text highlight a number of areas which could potentially be labelled ‘under threat’ within the broader political climate of the coalition government and are not enjoying the prominence or support experienced under the previous regime. *Game Plan* (DCMS/Strategy Unit 2002) brought together performance-related sporting targets with more sociocultural factors relating to social exclusion and physical activity for health. Perhaps unintentionally, the health, social inequality and social justice-related implications of *Game Plan* (DCMS/Strategy Unit, 2002) furthered the understanding of a more holistic appreciation of participant development through sport. A number of chapters within this book have emerged, in no small part, due to the political expedience of subject areas such as physical

activity for health (see Owens, Crone and James), play work (see Lester and Russell), volunteering (see Farooq, Moreland, Parker and Pitchford; Mawson and Parker) and sport for development (see Annett and Mayuni). However, the publication of *Playing to Win* (DCMS, 2008) evoked some fundamental political and developmental questions; the overt separation of physical activity-related and performance focus marred the nature of the policy-related bond between sport, physical activity and play. The social inclusion focus, so prevalent in *Game Plan* (DCMS/Strategy Unit, 2002) had been entirely eliminated. Furthermore, Green (2009) suggests that it was the New Labour principle of New Public Management (NPM) which led to a focus on podium athletes to the detriment of genuine holistic development and societal enrichment. This challenge was furthered by *Playing to Win* (DCMS, 2008), where the outcome of sporting performance appeared to matter more than the holistic development of the participant. The direction of late New Labour and current coalition policy has seen a diminishing focus on the importance of holistic development. Subsequently, some areas of study face a particularly challenging period. For example, Stuart Lester and Wendy Russell highlight that the coalition government has distanced itself from the New Labour play policy, considering it to be something for local communities, rather than for central government. There appear to be both positive and negatives to such a move. Almost all aspects of sport, physical activity and play need the support, and funding, from central government in order to thrive, yet in doing so are usually challenged by utilitarianism and instrumentalism (Houlihan and White, 2002). By considering alternatives to Bauman's (2003) framework, Lester and Russell call on policy makers and play workers to reject the notion of play as totalising and to embrace the respecting of children's otherness, their competence, the value of uncertainty and disorderliness, and the complex interrelationships between children and their physical, social and cultural environments. By considering play spaces as disorderly, unfinished *terrains vagues*, Lester and Russell encourage us to have faith in children to develop their own ideas,

rather than have a particular purpose or outcome associated with their play. Given the coalition government's enthusiasm for passing the play work agenda to local communities, Lester and Russell further argue that the issues they discuss have potential resonance for David Cameron's Big Society (see Cabinet Office, 2010). The somewhat illusive Big Society receives considerable attention in this text, most notably from Hannah Mawson and Andrew Parker who question the wisdom of placing so much emphasis on the success of this initiative in the hands of local volunteers, yet cutting the funding for organisations such as Timebank, Capacitybuilders and V who specialise in the training and deployment of such individuals. Mawson and Parker offer a tentative suggestion that although the predictors of volunteering remain relatively consistent, there is some evidence to suggest that minority groups are beginning to be better represented. Samaya Farooq, Ben Moreland, Andrew Parker and Andy Pitchford offer a unique and fascinating account which helps to explain the volunteering experiences of such minority groups, particularly focussing on 'old migrant' and 'new migrant' youth. Farooq et al. suggest that whilst there are benefits to the individual who volunteers, the process does not always empower those experiencing multiple social deprivations. This appears to be particularly true for new migrants such as asylum seekers or refugees. The lack of clarity concerning the developmental pathway for new migrant youth through volunteering furthers the broader uncertainty surrounding the future of this enterprise outlined by Mawson and Parker. The uncertainty surrounding the future and direction of areas such as playwork and volunteering may be due to a hangover from the shifting policy priorities of New Labour and the result of an imperfect union of Liberal Democrat and Conservative philosophies. These two tensions further illustrate the ongoing debate between whether government see sport as a tool for development or as a means to an end in itself. Numerous contributors to this text have postulated how this debate is playing out in contemporary policy; these views are considered in the next section.

The on-going debate between sport for development and the development of sport

The consensus in this text is that contemporary policy is not well aligned. Mike Collins is particularly critical of the current position, arguing that sport policy for young people over the last decade has been largely ineffective, particularly concerning participation and societal inequalities. Collins contends that there is a perception of gender equality within youth sport, but that this is an 'illusion'; furthermore, he suggests the physical activity participation targets set over the past decade were, at best, foolhardy. The lack of progress towards the participation targets underlines the impact of the tension between a policy focus on sport for development or the development of sport. Green (2009) suggests New Labour's governance principle of NPM with its principle of evidence-based policy making and accountability in exchange for freedom in decision making, did little to unite National Governing Bodies (NGBs) in the UK, who remain fiercely independent and exclusive. Further to this, there remains considerable confusion in the UK regarding which key institutions are responsible for leading which aspects of sport policy (Grix, 2009). This fierce independence of NGBs considered alongside the lack of a cohesive governance system directly hinders many areas of sport and physical activity. Collins refers to de Bosscher et al.'s (2009) work proposing there is a 'global arms race for medals' and that, in line with Côté, Coakley, and Bruner's (2012) work, this has led to an inappropriately narrow focus of youth development, without a holistic focus. Christopher Owens, Diane Crone and David James' chapter outlines why the loss of the holistic aspects of sport-related policy, evident in *Game Plan* (DCMS/Strategy Unit, 2002), but absent in *Playing to Win* (DCMS, 2008) and *Creating a Sport Habit for Life* (DCMS, 2012), are potentially so damaging to public health in the UK. Owens et al. summarise the empirical evidence surrounding physical activity and sedentary behaviours in adolescents, revealing how little is really known in this area. Research reveals mixed findings relating to sedentary behaviours and a dearth of evidence emanating from

longitudinal findings. Owens et al suggest population-based longitudinal research designs need to be adopted to further our understanding in this area and highlight what evidence there is reveals a concerning relationship in adolescence with both screen time and physical activity.

Mike Collins is also critical of the impact of policy on addressing the inequality of provision in sport and physical activity for those of low social status; suggesting this remains the most fundamental predictor of exclusion. Numerous chapters within this text tackle concerns relating to this issue. Andrew Parker and Rosie Meek discuss how sport might impact re-offending rates amongst young people in custody. Their fascinating and unique chapter focussing on the 2nd Chance Project and illustrates the dramatic effect that involvement with meaningful sporting experiences can have on such individuals. Parker and Meek reveal physical, social and psychological benefits of involvement with the 2nd Chance Project, suggesting this represents an illustration of the type of multi-agency, integrated initiative which can address some of the common criticisms of the criminal justice system in the UK. The key to this initiative appears to be empowering those young people in custody sufficiently through building a more positive outlook on life, the re-building of broken family relationships and enhancing self-esteem to enable them to make the step away from a likely return to criminal activity. This discussion differs somewhat from the element of Farooq et al.'s chapter in which new migrants to the UK felt insufficiently empowered by their engagement with volunteering to enable a change in their marginalised status. Involvement with sport and physical activity can offer marginalised youth the opportunity to alter their life circumstances; i.e. sport for development can be an effective policy strategy. Despite this, the relationship between offering marginalised youth engagement with meaningful sporting experiences and alteration in social status is far from a simple transaction and requires

considerable thought from policy makers to ensure such young people have the best possible chance to change the direction of their life.

A further blow to those advocates of the sport for development policy is the loss of the Physical Education, School Sport and Young People (PESSYP) strategy. This appears likely to be replaced by a more traditional emphasis in schools on competitive games at all levels of education. Matt Lloyd and I suggest that Physical Education and School Sport (PESS) practitioners will need to resist reverting to sport-based curricular and maintain a more developmentally-appropriate movement-based approach. Movement-based curricular should build on the successes of the past decade by continuing to offer opportunities such as Multiskills clubs/academies (see Morley, 2009) and retain an appreciation of the concept of Physical Literacy (see Whitehead, 2010). Mike Collins agrees that the loss of funding for PESSYP could result in a significant backwards step, although is confident in the merits of the Youth Sport Trust to ensure some financial support for PESS is retained. Collins is also concerned by the low prominence of playwork within UK sport policy; despite this, Nic Matthews encourages us to look to the impact of the European Union (EU) in shaping sport, playwork and physical activity policy more positively. Matthews suggests the EU has changed the relationship between member states and the way policy agendas are constructed. In particular, she contends the health-related implications of the physical activity agenda and the human rights-related issues concerning the playwork debate have benefitted the young people of Europe in terms of policy focus. Elizabeth Annett and Samuel Mayuni are equally positive about impact of ‘Sport Malawi’ – a sport-for-development programme focussed on training local people in the power of sport to ignite economic development, relieve poverty, facilitate health benefits, build communities, promote equality and advocate justice. This is one of a number of chapters in this text which have addressed the relationship between faith

and sport for development. Annett and Mayuni highlight the importance of engaging local Malawian people to ensure the effectiveness of such sport development programmes, particularly emphasising the understanding of cultural norms, values and traditions in the phases of design, implementation and evaluation. Farooq et al. suggest that volunteering experiences of young migrants can often be linked to their ethnic, religious or faith groups. Collins also suggests that discussion surrounding the physical activity provision, particularly in relation to young Muslim women, is an important contemporary policy-related discourse. PEES, play and faith represent three contemporary issues which face challenges over the next few years to keep moving forward within the context of uncertain policy focus and government support.

Summary

It appears numerous tensions are apparent when discussing policy in relation to sport, physical activity and play. In all three primary activity areas, there is a need for policy makers to ensure that practitioners are encouraged to adopt a child-centred approach; embracing holistic development and tailored, individual provision. Numerous contributors to this text are critical of the effectiveness of policy over the last decade and highlight the discrepancy in underpinning philosophies that have been apparent through the course of the previous New Labour government and the current Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition. This discrepancy has, perhaps, exacerbated the on-going debate between sport for development or for sport's sake. Nonetheless, the contributors to this text affirm that sport, physical activity and play remain highly pertinent topic areas for young people in the UK and beyond. Whilst the developmental pathways for young people may not be particularly cohesive within the array of policy, it is clear the contributors to this text believe there is great value in engagement with sport, physical activity and play.

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