

Other People Matter

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Contesting control and domination in Physical Education and sport

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It would seem at first glance that Physical Education (PE) and sport could be inclusive. In essence the underlying philosophical, social and moral base upon which sport is premised provides competitors with an equal experience. For example, rules provide a means through which each competitor has an equal chance to participate. A referee or umpire stands in arbitration to ensure that no one has an unfair advantage. Furthermore, being meritocratic, the winner in a sporting contest should be the competitor or team who demonstrates the most skilful performance.¹ But upon closer scrutiny another side to sport emerges. Players bend and break the rules; sport has the propensity to lead to acts of aggression. In short, sport has its 'ugly side', and it is this aspect of sport that can be exclusionary for some pupils. This chapter looks beyond the way in which PE and sport discriminates against individuals from minority groups and focuses more generally on pupils who find some of the practices and values inherent within PE and sport inhibiting.

Specifically, I refer to a common belief that in order to be successful in a sporting context (a game, match or competition), participants are required to dominate their opponent, to 'manipulate' them in such a way so that they do not pose a threat to the ultimate goal of winning. This is achieved by regulating opponents' movements usually through exerting one's own physicality and psychological will upon the opposition. In one sense, it might be argued that this is what sport is all about, being the better competitor both physically and psychologically. But all too often players come to view their opponents as 'the enemy', as an obstacle that has to be overcome through whatever means possible. The focus of this chapter concerns the nature of participation that emphasises this as the natural and inevitable consequence of participation in PE and sport. I shall call this way of participating in PE and sport 'control and

domination'. I will argue that 'control and domination' is characteristic of a 'performance discourse' (Tinning 1997: 102) that denies some pupils the opportunity to participate fully in the sporting contest and consequently that it serves to exclude some pupils from PE and sport. I will then suggest how, through the teaching of sportspersonship and fair play ideals, this might enable pupils to appreciate that 'other people matter'.

'Control and domination' within sport

In seeking to illustrate how the idea of 'control and domination' might serve to exclude some pupils from PE and sport, it is useful to explore some common ways in which we think about sport and sporting contests. Our understanding of what sport is about, how we view competition between two teams or players is a result of our upbringing (see Fernandez-Balboa 2000). Furthermore, we come to see sport as having certain inevitable and natural characteristics that lead us to accept unquestioningly the culture of sport. It is this naturalness that needs to be explored, because as Dodds (1993) points out, we may not always be aware of the effects our practices have on others.

Arguably at the very heart of the way in which society thinks about sport is the classical assumption that a sporting contest must have a winner and a loser. In this context the zero-sum gain of sport, that if A wins, then B loses, when viewed as the only outcome of taking part in sport can only serve to exclude all those who end up as Bs. Biddle (1997) points out how success in sport is a factor in continued participation. When winning assumes the mantle of success in sport, then inevitably a large number of pupils are doomed to failure. Let me state at this stage that I am not against sporting contests having a winner and a loser. Indeed, I am positively in favour of this as winning (and learning to lose) is an important part of any sport. It is an athlete's attempt to win that enables him/her to engage in sport. It allows a competitor to show what he/she can do, to utilise all his/her skills, to develop the skills that are weak and reinforce those that are strong, to rise to the challenge and to have fun. The important point to consider, however, is that winning is not the only aim, it is one of many. When the desire to win subsumes other goals then the resulting practice can be exclusionary for pupils who lose.

Having acknowledged how winning is sometimes seen as the ultimate goal of participation in sport, it is useful to pursue how, in the quest to win, the nature of the contest between two players can be exclusionary. Specifically, players often come to regard opponents as 'the enemy', an obstacle that has to be overcome. Fernandez-Balboa (2000) points out how sport can become 'us against them'. Furthermore, he states that this can give rise to feelings of 'apprehension, hatred and madness' towards opponents (Fernandez-Balboa 2000: 137). Drewe (1999) provides an example of this in her interviews with college athletes. She reports how,

out of a sense of loyalty to the team, some athletes were prepared to break the rules and even injure an opponent. For many athletes, self-interest (either individual or team self-interest) is assumed to be a central part of participating in a sporting contest. Although all performers do not exhibit this approach to competition there does seem to be a developing body of literature that would support this.

Shields and Bredemeier (1995) emphasise how participation in sporting activities can lead to what they have called 'game reasoning', a form of 'bracketed morality' which is separate from everyday life. For Shields and Bredemeier 'bracketed morality' refers to the way in which players justify ways of behaving in sport that would be unacceptable in other contexts. Consequently, 'game reasoning' explains how players are more accepting of injurious and/or aggressive acts when they are part of a sporting experience than they are when this type of behaviour is propagated in situations outside of sport. Thus, the strategies and tactics players adopt in their quest to win can become a salient factor in determining the extent to which sport is inclusive. These strategies and tactics range from employing *only* skilful performance in order to outwit an opponent or team, to using a combination of skill *and* unfair and illegal practices. Frequently, deception of the referee and opponents through various forms of cheating and the use of aggression² is tolerated (to varying degrees). We should all recognise and abhor aggression within sport, such as when a player deliberately fouls an opponent, and make our condemnation known to the perpetrator. 'Lesser' acts, however, such as a player playing on after he/she (and his/her opponents) knows the ball has gone out of play might not draw as much criticism. Moreover, because of the way in which we are socialised into sport (see Stroot 2002) acts such as these might even pass without comment, as they could simply be seen as 'part of the game'. At the very least we ought to recognise that acts such as these are unsporting, but would we acknowledge them as exclusionary? There are two reasons why we might. First, when a player privileges his/her self-interest in pursuit of victory to the extent that he/she engages in acts such as over aggression, or cheating (for example), this violates the principle of fairness that is assumed to have been agreed upon when entering into the game (Leaman 1988). The perpetrator of the unfair and illegal act does not allow his/her opponent an equal opportunity to participate in the sporting contest. He/she is 'freeloading', accepting that an opponent will play fairly but not making the same commitment (Wigmore and Tuxill 1995). Consequently, what both players put into the game is uneven. Second, they serve to provide some pupils with a negative experience. As Penney (2002: 112) states, 'children are not equally positioned to participate in Physical Education and sport'. Consequently, those pupils who do not identify with this way of participating in sport might come to believe that they do not have what it takes in order to be successful in the sporting domain. Sport therefore becomes an unattractive pastime.

Not all practices that young athletes employ in pursuit of winning are examples of cheating, yet some might still serve to exclude certain pupils from sport. For example, consider the actions of an athlete who 'stares out' an opponent or competitor, or one who points out to a fellow swimmer how he/she is going to be placed well down the field. Acts such as these, like many others, are not neutral, they can be the attempts of one athlete to impose his/her power and authority over an opponent, a form of dominance. We might recognise these acts as gamesmanship, but they are not against the rules. Moreover, bowling a bouncer in cricket is also not against the rules, but is clearly intended to intimidate the batter. Again, we might recognise acts such as these as an inevitable part of sport, but do they exclude others? I think the answer is yes, for some children they do. Involvement in acts of cheating, gamesmanship and intimidation may well present some pupils with the view that this is a natural and inevitable part of sport. As Penney (2002) reminds us, exclusion is based upon assumptions that some people 'just haven't got it'. For those pupils who do not identify with this way of participating, then they might come to believe that PE and sport is not for them.

Having illustrated some common assumptions about the nature of sport and how this might serve to exclude some pupils, I now turn to the notion of 'control and domination'. 'Control and domination' as I use it here refers to a way of participating in sport that athletes employ in their desire to win. But, more importantly, it relates to a way of participating in sport (in which players use a range of strategies such as, but not limited to, those that I have outlined about) that serve to restrict the opportunity of an opponent to take part in a sporting context. Moreover, it is based upon features that are evident within professional models of sport, which are often characterised by a 'win at all costs' approach. If, as I have stated here, strategies aimed at 'control and domination' marginalise the experience of an opponent, or deny them the opportunity to take a full part in the sporting contest, then we can begin to see how sport played in this way is not inclusive.

Thus far in this discussion I have focused on sport. I turn now to consider PE. One objection to the line of reasoning I present here might be that the notion of 'control and domination' is a characteristic of sport and is unlikely to be reflected within a school context as there are marked distinctions between PE and sport.³ The discussion that follows, however, seeks to highlight how the relationship between PE and sport is likely to perpetuate the notion of 'control and domination' within PE.

PE and school sport

Proponents of the view that PE and sport are different might argue that, because of the educative nature of PE, winning does not assume as high a priority, therefore it does not reflect the aspects of 'control and

domination' that are characteristic of sport. There is some merit in this argument as PE and sport played within some schools is not as 'serious' as that played within the wider social context, but I am concerned to pursue the extent to which we might find aspects of 'control and domination' within PE and school sport. As Zine (2001: 239) reminds us, within any discourse there are 'often conflicting goals and interests vying with each other for limited spaces', which gives rise to competing discourses with some given more prominence than others (Penney and Evans, 1999).

• To begin with, I point to the way in which the boundaries between PE and sport have been drawn closer together over the last decade. This has been particularly evident both within government publications (DNH, 1995; DCMS, 2000) and the wider PE literature (Siedentop, 1994). In many people's eyes, therefore, pupils' in particular, PE and school sport is seen to reflect wider connotations of sport and all that this entails. Indeed, as Fernandez-Balboa (2000) reminds us, PE cannot divorce itself from the influences of the wider societal context within which it sits. Links between PE and sport, therefore, appear strong.

• A further reason as to why we might find practices linked to the notion of 'control and domination' within PE and school sport is to do with the process of socialisation. All PE teachers will have been, and perhaps still are, sports participants themselves, and, therefore, engender the values that they have learned through sport. PE teachers are therefore, products of their sporting experiences, they have been socialised into the game. Consequently, some practices might be so ingrained into teachers' consciousness that they are unquestioningly natural. For example, take the pushing and shoving that goes on within football, that is seen by many as 'all part of the game'. Several years ago whilst on a Football Association coaching course, the instructor told the group of which I was a part that when marked tightly, to create space, an attacker should 'move away from the ball and then check back into the space created to receive the pass'. That seemed like good advice, but here is the catch. When checking back into the space the instructor told us that an attacker should 'just give the defender a little push to get him/her off balance'. For years I taught this to attackers, and could not understand why some pupils would get upset with opponents when others were pushing and shoving them off the ball. 'It's all part of the game', I would tell them, 'get used to it.' Sport is replete with examples such as this. As I have illustrated above, however, this way of playing sport is not inclusive.

• The final reason I give for why 'control and domination' might be evident within PE and school sport relates to how traditionally elitism has become the dominant discourse (Tinning 1997, Penney 2002). If Tinning and Penney are correct, it seems reasonable to assume that one would also find values and ideals that are characteristic of participation in this manner, that is 'control and domination'. For Thomas (1993), the

introduction of the Education Reform Act (DES 1988) meant that the focus on elitism within PE and school sport became a marketable asset for both PE departments and schools. Indeed, as I have argued elsewhere, in the era of 'open enrolment' and schools' 'marketability' the pressure on PE staff to produce winning teams is leading to the adoption of some practices from elite sport (Theodoulides 2002: 17). As one teacher confided to me:

It's the league tables . . . we're no longer in the situation of [simply 'playing the game'], we're all at such a level it's not good enough for us to turn around now and say, 'Well look we are one of the better schools, we will win 80 per cent of our games every year.' It's not like that. We've got to get every single edge we can, from hospitality of referees, by making sure we have someone to meet them and greet them [when they arrive]. But it might count for three points somewhere in the season. And specifically talking to the players and saying, 'Well the referee is on the right of the scrum, let's go left.' Why are we doing this? We're looking to maul as opposed to ruck, because if we maul the ball and they drag it down that's potentially three points. Now that's not a positive encouragement of the game, but it's gamesmanship because if you need three points you're going to maul the ball as opposed to ruck it because the opposition have got more chance of giving away a penalty. We teach that heavily.

(Malcolm, Head of Games)

It seems clear, therefore, that, along with some of the practices that might be associated with elite sport, 'control and domination' has become a more salient part of pupils' experience of PE and sport. Furthermore, I have shown how PE and sport, when seen in terms of 'control and domination', has the potential to be a negative experience for many pupils. One frequently hears arguments in favour of PE and sport, however, which attempt to justify what I have argued here are exclusionary practices. For example, it might be argued that aggression is part of sport, indeed part of society, and sport is a good way for pupils to learn that they need to stand up for themselves and strive for what they want, to work hard for their success. This propagates 'the survival of the fittest'. Those pupils who are excluded are expected to find another physical activity to participate in where they will find success. Or worse still, they look for something outside of PE and sport to which they are more suited. It is these pupils who are excluded from participation because they do not identify with this notion of 'control and domination'. Yet it does not have to be like this, as this is only one way of viewing PE and sport (albeit a common one) and one that can be challenged. Yet, adopting a critical approach to PE and sport and 'undertaking the difficult task of confronting our biases and perceptions' that seem so natural and inevitable

is not easy (Fernandez-Balboa 2000: 139). So what can PE teachers do about this? How can they get across to pupils that 'control and domination' do not have to be a natural and inevitable part of sport, and that if, as I have argued here, this serves to exclude some pupils from PE and sport, a more inclusive pedagogic strategy could be adopted?

Changing the nature of participation in PE and sport

Although 'control and domination' might be seen as a natural and inevitable part of playing sport it is not, it is only one way, albeit a popular one. Other alternatives can be sought which might prove more relevant to the current debate. In particular, Tinning (1997: 103) maintains that PE ought to focus more on 'participation discourses', which are 'about inclusion, equity, involvement, enjoyment, social justice, caring, co-operation, movement and so forth'. Thus, in order to focus on a more participatory form of taking part in PE and school sport, a useful strategy might be for staff involved in teaching PE and sport to pupils in schools to focus on other ways of participating in which players come to appreciate that 'other people matter'. What I am suggesting here is only one way of making PE and sport *more* inclusive for some pupils; it will not make PE and school sport *totally* inclusive for everyone. Dodds (1993: 31) draws our attention to how teachers should be proactive in 'recognising and being sensitive to equity issues in their own classes; developing specific strategies to interpret inequalities and address oppression'. I aim to conclude by exploring how, through a greater focus upon sportspersonship and fair play values, PE and school sport can be made a more positive experience for a greater number of pupils.

To begin with it is useful to consider that any commitment towards teaching an 'alternative' way of participating in sport requires teachers to show resolve in meeting their goals in this area. Often when 'new' initiatives are put forward they fail because, for a variety of reasons, teachers are resistant to change. As Ennis (1992) points out, teachers' values are central to the learning experience they provide pupils. Furthermore, Fernandez-Balboa (2000) states how making PE and sport more equitable requires physical educators to take a long, hard look at the practices in which they are engaged. In this context, this will require teachers to consider their own values about how players should compete in a sporting contest. This 'alternative' that I aim to explore is not new, but requires teachers to make a greater commitment to what is already part of the PE rationale. By focusing on the teaching of social and moral issues within PE and school sport, and, more specifically, notions of fair play and sportspersonship, this might help us to clarify to pupils how participating in PE and school sport can provide a positive experience for both the player and his/her opponent. But the development of sportspersonship and fair play does not occur automatically within PE and sport. Although the

teaching of social and moral issues within PE is often believed to be a central part of the rationale for PE,⁴ there is little empirical evidence to suggest that these aims are being met (Theodoulides and Armour, 2001). That does not presuppose, however, the possibility that they might not be met in the future. Fernandez-Balboa (1997: 123) has argued for changes in PE and sport in order to be more 'socially critical', to challenge 'the status quo and construct new avenues for integration and possibility' within sport.

Having acknowledged how 'control and domination' refers to a form of participation through which players aim to dominate an opponent it is useful now to explore how a greater commitment to teaching sportspersonship and fair play ideals might serve to make PE and school sport more inclusive. Shields (2001) alludes to the inadequate use of language within sport to refer to the different values that people hold with regard to what sport entails. He provides a distinction between two important concepts, what he calls competition and decompetition. This distinction is useful in that it presents a means of separating different ways of taking part in sport. Like 'control and domination', decompetition refers to the playing of sport in which players are involved in a battle, opponents are rivals, officials obstacles and rules there to be broken. But it is his notion of competition that is particularly useful. He writes, 'Competition reflects a metaphor of partnership. By this metaphor, each competitor is viewed as an enabler (in the positive sense) for the other; each requires the other to bring out the best in each' (ibid.: 3). Through this metaphor of partnership an opponent is no longer 'the enemy' but someone who players participate with in a co-operative activity. In this way of playing the game players become predisposed to consider their opponents and his/her experience of the sporting contest. It is the player who appreciates that other competitors have the right to participate in a swimming race without being subjected to derogatory comments about how they are going to be well beaten who makes taking part more inclusive in the school environment. Thus, pupils can come to learn that one can still set out to win, but do so in a manner that enables an opponent to gain a positive experience rather than one in which he/she is subjected to the potentially harmful effects of 'control and domination'. Furthermore, Shields continues, 'Competitors are fundamentally guided in their actions by the ideals of fairness and non-injurious play ... Upholding the ideals of fairness, non-injurious play and the spirit of competition – even when not required by the rules – is the core of sportspersonship' (ibid.: 4). So it is with regard to the ideals of sportspersonship and the social and moral basis upon which it is premised that we might find one opportunity to provide a more inclusive experience for many pupils within PE and school sport. Through an understanding of sportspersonship and fair play ideals pupils should come to realise that 'other people matter'.

When played in the spirit of competition as outlined above, sport has the potential to be more inclusive. In particular, the idea that PE and school sport requires a player to develop strategies aimed at 'control and domination' becomes less salient when players appreciate how their actions impact upon an opponent. So, for example, a player will come to realise that playing on after the ball has gone out of play is a selfish act, and one that has consequences for the other players involved. Thus, the player develops an appreciation of how what they do is part of the larger process of interaction between sporting competitors and how each player has a responsibility to those he/she competes with. Furthermore, as Feezell (1998) suggests, sportspersonship by winning through skilful means becomes a more valued outcome than winning through cheating. Feezell goes on to state that unsporting actions tend to 'arise from an excessive seriousness that negates the play-spirit because of an exaggerated emphasis on the value of victory' (ibid.: 158). Furthermore, in this light we can see how acts of intimidation also appear out of place within PE and school sport. For instance, the example given above of the bowler that bowls a bouncer to intimidate a batter becomes inappropriate when players are taking part in an activity that is non-serious and play-like. Played in this manner, sportspersonship and fair play ideals play down the notion that PE and school sport is congruent with self-interest in a way that encourages children to reflect upon the idea of how 'other people matter'. In addition, PE and school sport becomes more magnanimous and reflects further the values of equity, fairness and justice. It is this idea that 'other people matter' which can serve to make PE and sport more inclusive.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown how a popular way of viewing participation in PE and sport presupposes that competitors strive for 'control and domination.' Yet, as I have also stated, this is only one way of participating in sport and, whilst it is not indicative of all sporting contests, it might serve to exclude those pupils who fail to identify with this way of taking part in sporting activities. Thus, 'control and domination' is one example of the unconscious way in which PE and sport continues 'perpetuating that which is damaging and degrading' for some children (Fernandez-Balboa 2000: 135). A more inclusive approach to PE and school sport requires that both PE staff and pupils give greater attention to the way in which players participate within a sporting contest so as to consider the notion that 'other people matter'. In this way players are encouraged to consider what an opponent gains from his/her sporting experience. Consequently, this might provide a more positive experience for those pupils who find the aggressive and 'win at all costs' nature of PE and sport a negative experience. This, however, will require a more proactive approach from some teachers, as there is a general belief amongst teachers of PE that pupils learn sportspersonship and

fair play simply by taking part in PE and sport. When we examine this more critically we become aware that, just as pupils might learn about sports-personship and fair play, so they might come to see PE and sport in terms of 'control and domination'. With the introduction of citizenship onto the key stage 3 and key stage 4 curriculum in England in September 2002, there is an opportunity for PE and school sport to help 'Create a society where people matter more than things' (Archbishop Desmond Tutu, quoted in DfEE/QCA 1999b: 13). This may provide a good opportunity to review the way in which PE and school sport can contribute to a more equitable society within the framework of democratic rights.

Reflective questions

- 1 Consider your own sporting values. How do you view your opponent(s) within the context of a game or a match? What factors might impact upon the way in which you view the opposition?
- 2 Do all sports and physical activities give rise to forms of 'control and domination', or are they likely to occur in some sports more than others? What reasons would you give for this?
- 3 Reflect upon different ways in which 'control and domination' might manifest itself upon the manner in which pupils participate in PE and sport. List the type of behaviours that it might give rise to. Are all of these exclusionary? Give an example of how 'control and domination' can serve to exclude some pupils within the context of their PE lessons.
- 4 Pupils come to PE with their own idea vis-à-vis what sport is about. How might you challenge these ideas to get across to pupils that 'other people matter'? What learning and teaching strategies might you use?
- 5 Reflect upon the concept of citizenship. What does it mean to you? How might PE contribute to citizenship?

Notes

- 1 Skilful performance presupposes an accompanying level of fitness and psychological characteristics.
- 2 I believe that this is an impoverished way of viewing participation in sport, but it is one that nonetheless is commonly held. Drewe (1999) highlights the way in which some athletes reason about aggressive acts and cheating within sport and come to see it as 'all part of the game'.
- 3 I do not want to explore in detail alleged differences in definitions of PE and sport, although it is worth pointing out that I do not believe that any perceived differences are as great as sometimes professed. At this point I merely point out that this is an on-going debate within the PE profession.
- 4 See the NCPE (DfEE/QCA 1999a: 8) or the PEA UK (www.peauk.com/menu/html)

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