

Developing Disability Sport: The case for a critical pedagogy

Aaron Beacom¹, Gill Golder¹

¹Faculty of Sport and Health Sciences, University of St Mark & St John

Corresponding author email: abeacom@marjon.ac.uk

Abstract

As a key stakeholder in the development of physical culture and the promotion of inclusive practice, the university sector has the capacity to contribute extensively to expanding and enhancing provision for disability sport at the local, regional and global level.^{1,2,3} Such activity is, in part, predicated on nurturing students as critical practitioners able to challenge established patterns of thinking about disability and traditional models of activity provision. This criticality should inform approaches to programming and promotion of inclusive practice both as part of the university physical activity portfolio and in the practitioner's subsequent work with local, regional and international stakeholders. It should also equip students to challenge the systemic inequities increasingly characteristic of competitive disability sport in local and global settings.^{4,5,6} This paper reports on a small scale action research project, which sought to explore the impact of one University's adoption of a critical pedagogy approach to teaching and learning through a level 6 elective module. The research identified that placement learning provided an impetus for the students to engage in more critical reflection and the notion of a 'lived experience' through the range of elements of the module was essential in developing students' ability to question and challenge established ways of working. It also considers implications for adopting critical pedagogic approaches to teaching and learning for students, academics and administration.

Introduction

This research project reflects in part on the journey of a small higher education institute (HEI) with a sports

specialism, which has recently gained university status and which is orientating itself to the changing role of higher education in wider society (local and global). In relation to sport and disability, a number of questions have emerged from literature and previous research⁷ that have helped frame the research. In particular, how can the study of disability sport be effectively integrated into a wider exploration of an inclusive physical culture within the university sector that takes account of the transient and relative nature of ability? Universities are not only centres for knowledge production and servicing the knowledge economy, but should also engage in critiquing established ways of doing things and exploring alternative approaches to the social order.⁸ It is in this sense that the case for a critical pedagogy is made. From this perspective then, when developing students as the next generation of coaches, development workers and sports strategists, the focus should be on nurturing critically reflective practitioners.⁹ The authors contend that such students require a critical understanding of the essence of disability, including its relative and transient characteristics. They should be able to appreciate the key conceptual and contextual debates relating to disability, including for example, issues relating to power and powerlessness in decision-making processes concerning the resourcing and programming of sport and physical activity.

The reflective qualities suggested above should inform how students individually and universities collectively engage in the promotion of inclusive-sporting forms. In this sense, universities have a role in heightening an awareness of inclusive sport and broadening the participation base in physical activity; for example, through engagement with

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community-based programmes such as the Special Olympics or challenging sedentary lifestyles among community groups such as the elderly. This work can take place at the local and regional level but may also inform engagement with the sport as part of the international development agenda. In this, students should be equipped to challenge practices of exclusion where these become apparent. This includes in a wider sense, engagement with strategic debate concerning global asymmetry in the resourcing of disability sport and the challenges this Global North-Global South imbalance presents for the development of international disability sport organizations. This asymmetry, which now presents a major challenge for the International Paralympic Movement, does merit a separate paper and is currently the subject of further research by the authors.

It is not the intention here to engage in an extended debate concerning what constitutes 'disability' generally and 'disability sport' more specifically. Nevertheless, conceptual clarity is important from the onset. For that reason the paper will adopt the United Nations perspective of disability which contends that, 'persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.'¹⁰ This interpretation emerges from a perspective on disability which focuses primarily on the social and cultural responses to the impairment that have the potential to disable the person.¹¹ Writers such as Shakespeare have written about and expanded upon the limitations of the so-called social model of disability, particularly the insufficient recognition of the unique experiences of individuals with impairments.¹² Nevertheless, the impact of the social model on wider perceptions of disability is generally acknowledged and it forms the terms of reference for legislative developments and a movement toward inclusive education that have enhanced the quality of life for many people with disabilities. While students referred to in the case study are required to approach the conceptual debates critically, the social model provides the starting point for their self-reflection on disability and a basis for exploring the ways in which equity and inclusion are dependent upon addressing the cultural and physical barriers to participation. From this perspective also, ideas of advocacy, self-advocacy and empowerment can be introduced as key features of civic movements aimed at promoting disability rights.

In relation to disability sport, the paper adopts the position of sport broadly defined, encapsulating a range of formal

and informal physical activities which include though are not limited to codified parasports. This broad definition was important given the focus of the case study group since a number of students were drawn from the outdoor adventure programme, which adopted a different perspective on the nature of physical activity. The unifying theme was the promotion of a physical culture based on the psycho-social and physical benefits of physical activity irrespective of ability. In this, students were able to reflect on collective concerns as well as individual interests, for example the global political and developmental significance of disability sport in the context sport for development movement and its attempts to respond to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).¹³

Given the context above, this paper seeks to evaluate the impact on the student experience of developing a critical pedagogy approach to teaching and learning through a level 6 elective module. The wider research question concerns the implications of such approaches for the expansion of the university curriculum and community development portfolio.

Higher Education and the role of the university

Radice argues that there has been a fundamental change in the nature of higher education, since 'the purpose of the university has changed from the education of the elites in business, politics, culture and the professions to the provision of marketable skills and research outputs to the 'knowledge economy.'¹⁴ In an era dominated by neoliberal ideals the public sector has had the values, structures and processes of private sector management imposed upon it. In the case of universities, neoliberalism has taken the form of the so-called 'new public management' (NPM) strategies. According to Olssen and Peters, there are three core dimensions of NPM; 'flexibility (in relation to organizations through the use of contracts); clearly defined objectives (both organizational and personal), and a results orientation (measurement of and managerial responsibility for achievement of).'¹⁵ Neoliberalism has seen an increased focus on practitioner research and a growing emphasis on work-based learning. In the case of disability sport this may involve applied learning experiences linking vocational experiences or awards (e.g. coaching awards) to critical knowledge and discourse. In addition, Olssen and Peters argue neoliberalism has seen a growth in 'alternative sources of knowledge outside the universities and a shift from an elite system of higher education to a mass system of higher education.'¹⁶ The distinction between types of knowledge can be related to this shift with 'mode one

knowledge' needing a protected or privileged area for development and 'mode two knowledge' being much more based in practice.¹⁷ Mode two knowledge has been defined by Bourner et al as;

*...likely to be produced by practitioners through reflection on practice or as a result of learning their way out of problems encountered in situ at work. It is less likely than mode one knowledge to respect traditional academic disciplines, and is work-based knowledge rather than campus-based knowledge.*¹⁸

With this concentration on professional work-based practice (as opposed to academic), neoliberal thinking has encouraged an increasing emphasis on transferable skills and a general shift towards vocationalism and professionalism in higher education. In the context of disability sport, neoliberal thinking would typically encourage a transformed theoretical infrastructure where students and practitioners enhance their professional capabilities by engaging in concepts such as becoming reflective practitioners or using experiential learning, in order to develop a new understanding of academic theory as preparation for the world of professional work. The role of universities in the development of disability sport is thus very much linked to the way in which knowledge is generated and how this knowledge can be applied to the discipline.

There is general acknowledgement of universities as socially accountable organizations that have to deliver social benefits through their core functions, whilst acknowledging differences in a range of issues, for example on the role of markets and the state in the development of higher education and the balance between public and private goals and the responsibilities for the university in developing an 'employability' programme. This is reflected for example, in a call in 2009 by HEFCE for UK universities to produce more micro-studies demonstrating the public benefits they produce.¹⁹ Each of the areas invited for micro-study could be contextualised in relation to disability and disability sport as follows:

- *Public / community / civic engagement* - the opportunity for sports-based interventions targeted at people with disabilities, could be an example of this; similarly the potential of universities in providing the basis for development of competitive disability sport or students acting as volunteers to work with disabled sports clubs and societies or in schools

- *Engaging in the public policy process* - applying this to the disability sport sphere, public provision can be shaped by academic debate concerning the nature of disability and how best to secure equitable access to disability sport at all levels ensuring that the production and dissemination of knowledge really does inform the nature of provision. Some clear opportunities here link to access to mainstream clubs and parasport classification

- *Student enterprise / social enterprise* - for example developing enterprise opportunities in the field of disability sport and monitoring and supporting student 'start up' programmes and self-employment working in the field of sport and disability

- *Exchanges (people-based)* - for example drawing from the expertise and experience of those working or volunteering in the disability sport field to come and work with students or conversely university staff working in community settings to support provision or opportunity

- *Evaluating impacts* - for example information on value generated from disability sport based interventions would help inform universities as to how best to engage with community based programmes in order to optimise benefits expand partnerships.

In discourse relating to the role of universities in wider society and in promoting ideas of social justice, the term 'public good' as an alternative frame of reference to the dominant neoliberal model, has emerged.²⁰ At the same time, there is recognition that the 'public good' remains a contested term (whose 'public' and whose 'good'?). In an era dominated by neoliberal thinking, it is contended that a balance between market forces and the public good needs to be struck and that indeed the two are not necessarily mutually exclusive. A case in point may be to consider routes to development and promotion of parasport through the market place without losing sight of key values of social justice and disability rights that underpin the Paralympic Movement. There are opportunities to focus on the promotion of an 'inclusive society' as a fundamental tenet of the public good and from there, to enhance the development of recreational and sporting opportunities for differently abled (students as well as local community) as a central tenet of the university mission.

Universities and the idea of a critical pedagogy

The era of neoliberalism has brought with it a perceived move to a 'knowledge-based society and economy'²¹ and

the new role of the university in developing the capacities required of the flexible, 'lifelong' worker/learner.²² This aligns learning in higher education to that of adult education where, as research suggests, the importance of asking questions about processes of social and cultural formation is emphasized.²³ In addition, adult education perspectives emphasize power relations in educational settings.²⁴

Ares suggests that the aim of education is learning that comes from critical examination of the social order that leads to action in service of social justice as the result of the learning process.²⁵ This is supported by Monzó who controversially suggests that 'A fundamental goal of the university must be to advance a democracy based on the socialist principles of freedom and critique.'²⁶ Giroux indicates,

capacities required of the flexible, 'lifelong' worker/learner. This aligns learning in higher education to that of adult education where, as research suggests, the importance of asking questions about processes of social and cultural formation is emphasized.²³ In addition, adult education perspectives emphasize power relations in educational settings.²⁴

Prosser & Trigwell contend that according to the 'conceptions' model of learning in higher education, the highest understanding of learning 'is focused on the importance of knowledge (abstract, relative and contested), which is gained through an ability to 'relate and distinguish evidence and argument' and 'look for patterns and underlying principles.'²⁸

Ideas about how students can be developed as critical thinkers, capable of challenging social mores and institutional priorities, has long been part of discourse around the meaning of higher education.²⁹ Paul suggested that in its strongest sense, critical thinking implies the ability to think critically about one's own position, arguments, assumptions, and worldview.³⁰ Soden and Maclellan contended that critical thinking includes the ability to unpack concepts, recognize contradictions, develop arguments, provide evidence, examine the implications of evidence, question interpretations of evidence, and suggest alternative interpretations.³¹ This argument gains traction when considered in the context of the current political and economic climate, which presents particular challenges for the promotion of critical thinkers where the emphasis is on preparing students for the market place. Challenges are apparent in situations where students are preparing for specific roles; for example, the delivery of

adaptive forms of sport and physical education and where teaching can gravitate toward the development of specific skills sets combined with problem solving. This includes engaging students in thinking beyond the 'technical,' by opening up a range of social and political questions such as the systemic inequity entrenched across global society that impacts the life choices available to people with disabilities.

Pishghadam and Meidani suggested that critical pedagogy is embedded in the notion of critical thinking and is a broad field of theory and practice, which originates from the modernist perspective of the later Frankfurt School, Freirean pedagogy and postcolonial discourse, as well as postmodernism.³² Critical pedagogy challenges our long-held assumptions and leads us to ask new questions, and the questions we ask will determine the answers we get. Freire contended that critical pedagogy empowers classroom participants to critically reflect upon the social and historical conditions that give rise to social inequalities and to question the status quo.³³ Applying critical pedagogy to the study of disability and disability sport therefore seems apt as Nevin, Smith and McNeil state, since models of disability that are needs based, reinforce inequalities.

The focus on people with disabilities, once left to special education professionals and charitable organizations, has been changing from a charity model based on medicalization of disability (i.e., disablement as the source of problems) to an empowerment model based on the relationship between disability and society (i.e., society as much or more a source of the problems as particular impairments).³⁴

Nevin, Smith and McNeil contend that when education becomes a process of empowerment that enables citizens to make choices and influence their world, this suggests that a critical approach to pedagogy has been adopted.³⁵ McArthur notes that 'A common aspect of critical pedagogy is the intention to foster public spaces, in which learning within schools and higher education is not artificially separated from society, but rather engages with the broader society in a creative and transformative dialectic.'³⁶ This is supported by Fobes and Kaufman, who suggest that critical pedagogy is both a form of practice and a form of action; it implores us to use our teaching and learning to effect positive social change, rather than just how to teach and learn or what to teach and learn.³⁷

The teaching of sport and disability in this context requires a consideration of wider social dynamics including locating disability within policy discourses like those related to civil

and human rights. However, such topics cannot be taught in a vacuum, requiring a level of political and civic literacy that must be nurtured across the student's higher educational experience (and preferably grounded in their earlier educational experience) and which in this way, link to teaching of citizenship. The body of evidence developing around disability studies in higher education supports this as Linton explains:

*Disability studies provides the means to hold academics accountable for the veracity and the social consequences of their work, just as activism has served to hold the community, the education system, and the legislature accountable for disabled people compromised social position.*³⁸

The promotion of civic literacy, a particular objective of many concerned with the current trajectory of higher education (advocating education based interventions as a means of challenging perceived decline in civic literacy), is not necessarily predicated on the development of critical thinking. Indeed in relation to disability, adopting a paternalistic approach of traditional public and voluntary service ideas of support (providing assistance to the less able, can in many ways, align to ideas associated with the medicalization of disability, which in turn problematizes disability) may run directly contrary to the criticality associated with more radical and emancipatory perspectives on disability and society, which include engagement with sports and physical activity-based interventions. In this sense, a significant level of sophistication is required to enable students to critically interpret the meaning of civic responsibility and the implication of established power relations in the context of contemporary discourses on disability and society. It is at this point that a critical pedagogy begins to depart from ideas of for example a service learning pedagogy which, with its focus on experiential learning, creates an environment where students can connect theory and practice while at the same time enhancing the transferable skills needed to operate in the contemporary marketplace.³⁹

Teaching disability sport and physical education

The study of disability sport (including parasport), as part of a wider disability studies genre, is a growing area for academic study in part because of the rapidly expanding global interest in the phenomenon.⁴⁰ Shapiro, Pitts, Hums & Calloway argue that it is important for professionals in the field to be prepared to deal with the uniqueness of disability sport, ensuring that they are knowledgeable about its

complexity and its relationship to the wider sports environment.⁴¹ Many degree programmes embed consideration of disability in their curriculum design through three key design features: a) permeated or infused approach, b) specialist studies and c) options.⁴² While having dedicated courses on disability in sport has a place in the curriculum, Shapiro, Pitts, Hums & Calloway suggest that it reinforces the notion that segregation of knowledge about individuals with disabilities is the norm.⁴³ Rizzo et al suggest that infusing or permeating knowledge about disability throughout the curricula should be the goal so as to avoid emphasizing differences or assigning specialists to 'deal with' disability rather than all faculty assuming ownership of disability issues throughout their curricula.⁴⁴ There have been a number of specific benefits to this infusion approach identified in research:

*Specific benefits of infusion include (a) increased knowledge and understanding of disability, individuals with disabilities, and issues of equity; (b) increased commitment to disability issues and concerns of individuals with disabilities; (c) increased collaboration among colleagues; (d) acquisition of new skills by higher education faculty; and (e) increased ownership and commitment to disability and elimination of stigma.*⁴⁵

However, the method of curricular design does not automatically result in development of principals that underpin critical pedagogy. Critical pedagogy focuses on how to create classroom spaces that challenge students to question assumptions, explicitly recognize power relationships in their analysis of situations, engage with other students in collaborative efforts to critically reflect on the embedded network of relationships, and consider alternatives for transformation of that network.⁴⁶

According to Shelton, critical pedagogy has the aim of educating students to take risks, recognising that teaching always entails the transfer of some values; therefore, learning should include the learners' personal background and environmental issues, especially cultural traditions and social practices.⁴⁷ The implication for teachers is that teaching should help students become more questioning of commonly accepted truisms.⁴⁸ Freire proposed that education should be a dialogical process in which students and teachers share their experiences in a non-hierarchical manner.⁴⁹ According to Giroux, students are active participants in that together with the teacher they correct the curricula, share their ideas and learn to challenge assumptions.⁵⁰ Ellsworth develops this theme, suggesting the need to destabilize control by asserting that teachers and

students alike must approach the classroom in the dark about what forms the social construction of difference will take in their work together.⁵¹ Moreover, all participants in the educational process must acknowledge that whatever perspectives they bring to the classroom or acquire, they will by definition be partial, limited, conditional, and 'potentially oppressive to others.' Teaching of sport and disability requires a consideration of wider social dynamics including locating disability within policy discourses, such as those related to civil and human rights.

Research carried out by Pishghadam and Meidani made a number of suggestions of the implications of teaching using critical pedagogy, which were that a) critical pedagogy should become an integrated part of the educational system by ensuring that students should learn critical thinking and develop the necessary skills throughout an extended period from the first years of schooling; b) when teachers introduce critical theories at school or university, cultural and social issues must be taken into serious consideration so as not to have detrimental effects on the students; c) there should be clear planning to find the best time to familiarise students with critical concepts and issues.⁵²

Nocella suggested the emergence of disability pedagogy, which should be thought of as a fundamental challenge to society and an attempt to provide a critical pedagogy into the nature of society's normal relations.⁵³ Disability pedagogy is based on providing spaces for people with disabilities, supports their/our inclusion in society and school, and supports their/our activism that promotes and supports these notions, which includes providing platforms for their/our experiences to be heard and told.⁵⁴ Considering this in relation to teaching students about disability sport, the central concepts need to be seen as a social, political and cultural phenomenon. At the same time, the objectives are the development of critically reflective individuals who question attitudes, practices, legislation, barriers and benefit in the sector and who are able to generate new meaning for policy developments aimed at improving access to sporting opportunities for people with a disability. By doing this they fulfil Nocella's ideas about the purpose of critical pedagogy.

*The central task of critical theorists and critical pedagogues is to analyze and identify the cause, justification, and history of particular oppressions and to provide space for experiences of that oppression to be heard and understood.*⁵⁵

The importance in teacher, coach and sport development education of promoting inclusive approaches to sport and

physical education has never been greater. Goodley suggests that as the number of children with disabilities in mainstream school increases, the pressure on teachers, coaches and other facilitators to be able to develop imaginative and effective adaptive practices that account for a range of conditions, increases.⁵⁶ Rather than needs-based services that focus on helping individuals with disabilities 'cope' with deficits, Nevin, Smith and McNeil support a more empowering person-centered, strengths-based orientation tied to perceptions of the individual as competent and thriving.⁵⁷ The focus on strengths-based orientation supports using more active learning strategies, which incorporate diverse pedagogies to stimulate student engagement.⁵⁸ When considering inclusive sport and disability, it is useful to draw from the debates around inclusive teaching and learning in schools. Norwich and Lewis concluded that a continua of teaching approaches would be useful to capture the appropriateness of more intensive and explicit teaching for children with different patterns and degrees of learning difficulties.⁵⁹ In their work, Norwich and Lewis argue that the emergence of a pedagogy for teaching those children with disabilities or special educational needs should focus on commonality and specialization that highlight the value of the continuum concept and how differentiation or specialization can be seen as a process of intensification.⁶⁰ Similar stages of learning and a continuum for teaching disability studies can be applied to university students as they engage in the breadth of teaching experiences offered.

In teaching disability sport and inclusive physical education, there are a wide range of agendas of worldwide significance. For example, globalization, social responsibility, sustainable environments as well as topical events such as the Paralympic Games or models of disability each require attention as part of the curriculum. A challenge for academics is to assess how these debates can be integrated into a critical pedagogy and how students can be encouraged to think critically about the implications and challenge the status quo. In a period dominated by neoliberal thinking, tensions exist between the emancipatory role of higher education reflected in the underpinning beliefs of critical pedagogy, which according to McArthur stands firmly upon a normative basis which contends that 'higher education should not succumb to narrow, economic interpretations of its role,' and a HE sector driven by economic imperatives to develop 'global, entrepreneurial, corporate, commercialised universities.'⁶¹ According to Stevenson, Burke and Whelan, under such conditions, pedagogies in higher education are reduced to the 'language

of the market, including 'delivery', 'style' and 'distinctiveness' and to notions of consumer demand and satisfaction becomes an educational package provided by universities competing in the business of higher education.⁶²

The university sector and learning about disability sport: the case study

Previous research exploring how undergraduate students generated knowledge of disability focused on mode two knowledge developments where students learnt through reflection on their work experiences, interaction with other students and with instructors.⁶³ In doing this, students were encouraged to identify and use tools for analysing problems or ways of working and finding strategies for challenging their own and co-workers' practices. The process of change identified in this study was extended over several courses and years and was the culmination of a program of study as well as work experience.

Similar research carried out by the authors into pedagogic approaches for developing a critical pedagogy for disability sport followed students across a series of modules and experiences. A year two elective module was selected by some students and followed with a year three module that focused on contemporary developments in disability sport. The module included a placement element where students engaged in a variety of disability sport and outdoor education contexts. A range of pedagogic strategies were used by staff to actively involve students in their own learning which support the discussion about the role of the teacher in critical pedagogy. Table one summarises Aliakbari and Faraji suggestions made about these roles.⁶⁴

In this research, the module team implemented a number of strategies to adopt a critical pedagogy approach to teaching and learning. One such strategy adopted by the lecturers drew on authentic materials such as video and images which according to Ohara, Safe, & Crookes serve as the basis for discussion and critical reflection of the culture.⁶⁵ A second strategy adopted was that of dialogism, which encourages student voice, where as a result of listening to peer discussion around a series of posed questions, they learnt about their understanding of key problems relating to contexts in which they completed placements and debated possible solutions to problems that were encountered. Problem-solving pedagogy was used to explore how students developed their critical understanding of conceptual debates in disability sport through the range of taught and experiential learning experiences. The

assessment activity took the form of a poster presentation where students were required to critically reflect upon contextual developments for their placement provider and on their efficacy as a facilitator in this context. Supporting problem-solving pedagogy, a number of guest lecturers were engaged to involve students in uncovering reality, striving for the emergence of consciousness and critical intervention in reality and developing a more accurate perception of disability in sport and society.

Case study – evaluating the implementation of critical pedagogy approach to teaching sport and disability

Research on effective teaching over the past three decades has shown that effective practice is linked to inquiry, reflection, and continuous professional growth.⁶⁶ Reflective practice has been defined as 'a disposition to enquiry incorporating the process through which student, early career and experienced teachers structure or restructure actions beliefs, knowledge and theories that inform teaching for the purpose of professional development.'⁶⁷

Reflective practice has also been defined in terms of action research. Action research could be most simply described as practitioner-based research, and teachers use such research extensively to improve practice as part of professional development opportunities or higher degrees. 'Action research concerns action, and transforming people's practices (as well as their understandings of their practices and the conditions under which they practice).'⁶⁸ Action research takes as its starting point the belief that part of the purpose of action research is to help us to confront realities about our practice.⁶⁹

Action research can facilitate change among teachers and students because it narrows the gap between theory and practice as well as teaching and research that traditional quantitative research can sometimes create.⁷⁰ McNiff and Whitehead⁷¹ comment upon how action research can be used to help develop and improve personal and professional practices. As such, the intention of this small-scale action research project was to explore the efficacy of adopting a critical pedagogy approach to sport and disability teaching and learning, in developing practitioners capable of engaging in meaningful reflective practice and able to critically evaluate ideas of physical culture as an empowering experience for people with disabilities. In this, the focus of the research was to develop a critical pedagogy in students, in order to provide insights into the hidden subtleties relating to the lived experience of disability that may otherwise be overlooked.⁷²

Table one: Roles of staff and students in critical pedagogy. (Summary of Aliakbari and Faraji.ⁱ)

Teacher – student relationship	Characteristics of the learning experience
Teachers are problem posers ⁱⁱ	Learning through problem solving and practical application leads students to take a more active role in determining their experiences and positions within society ⁱⁱⁱ
Teacher must empower his or her students by raising their awareness of reproducing process of an inequitable status quo in schooling and offer societal institutions ^{iv}	Teachers are <i>Transformative Intellectuals</i> who have the knowledge and skill to critique and transform existing inequalities in society ^v
Teachers learn from students, appreciate their viewpoints and take part in the dialogical process ^{vi}	Teachers enable students to become cultural producers who can rewrite their experiences and perceptions ^{vii}
Teachers help students learn from each other and to theorize and understand how to question the authoritarian power of the classroom ^{viii}	Students are encouraged to act as active agents in their own education and to develop a critical consciousness that helps them evaluate the validity, fairness, and authority within their educational and living situations ^{ix}
Teachers have a central role as they spend the most time with students and have the greatest impact on students and program and how learning occurs in the classroom ^x	Students through reflection can determine the necessary types of action that they should take in order to improve the life conditions of the oppressed groups ^{xi}
Teachers and students as co-agents, that is, teacher's authority directs the class but this authority differs from that in the traditional pedagogy ^{xii}	Students and teachers should engage in questioning knowledge but it is the teacher who helps the students to identify how to move forward critically in their practice ^{xiii}

ⁱ Aliakbari M, Faraji E. Basic principles of critical pedagogy 2nd International Conference on Humanities, Historical and Social Sciences IPEDR. 2011 17: 77-85.

ⁱⁱⁱ Aliakbari M, Faraji E. Basic Principles of Critical Pedagogy 2nd International Conference on Humanities, Historical and Social Sciences IPEDR. 2011 17: 77-85

ⁱⁱⁱ Dewey J. Experience and Education. New York: Collier Books;1963.

^{iv} Kincheloe JL, McLaren P. Rethinking critical theory and qualitative research. In: Denzin N, Lincoln Y. Editors. Handbook of Qualitative Research. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage; 1994

^v Sadeghi S. Critical pedagogy in an EFL teaching context: An ignis fatuus or an alternative approach? Journal for Critical Education Policy Studies. 2008, 6(1).

^{vi} Sadeghi S. Critical pedagogy in an EFL teaching context: An ignis fatuus or an alternative approach? Journal for Critical Education Policy Studies. 2008, 6(1).

^{vii} Giroux HA. Pedagogy and the Politics of Hope: Theory, Culture, and Schooling. A Critical Reader. Boulder CO: West view Press; 1997.

^{viii} Aliakbari M, Faraji E. Basic Principles of Critical Pedagogy 2nd International Conference on Humanities, Historical and Social Sciences IPEDR. 2011 17: 77-85

^{ix} Freire P. Teachers as Cultural Workers: Letters to Those Who Dare to Teach the Edge, Critical Studies in Educational Theory. Boulder CO: West view Press; 1998.

^x Degener S. Making sense of critical pedagogy in adult literacy education. Review of Adult Learning and Literacy. 2001[cited 2014 November 19]; 2(2). Available from: <http://www.ncsall.net/?id=562>

^{xi} Ohara Y, Saft S, Crookes G. Teacher Exploration of Feminist Critical Pedagogy in Beginning Japanese as a Foreign Language Class. Paper presented at the University of Hawaii, Manoa, 2000. Hawaii.

^{xii} Guthrie NH. Necessary Contradictions: Critical Pedagogy and Kenneth Burke's Pentad. {A master's thesis}. University of North Carolina, United States; 2003.

^{xiii} Kessing-Styles I The relationship between critical pedagogy and assessment in teacher education. Radical Pedagogy. 2003 [cited 2014 November 19]; 5(1) Available from: http://radicalpedagogy.icaap.org/content/issue5_1/03_keesing-styles.html

Wink contends the following:

*Critical pedagogy gives voice to the voiceless; gives power to the powerless. Change is often difficult, and critical pedagogy is all about change from coercive to collaborative; from transmission to transformative; from inert to catalytic; from passive to active. Critical pedagogy leads us to advocacy and activism on behalf of those who are the most vulnerable in classrooms and in society.*⁷³

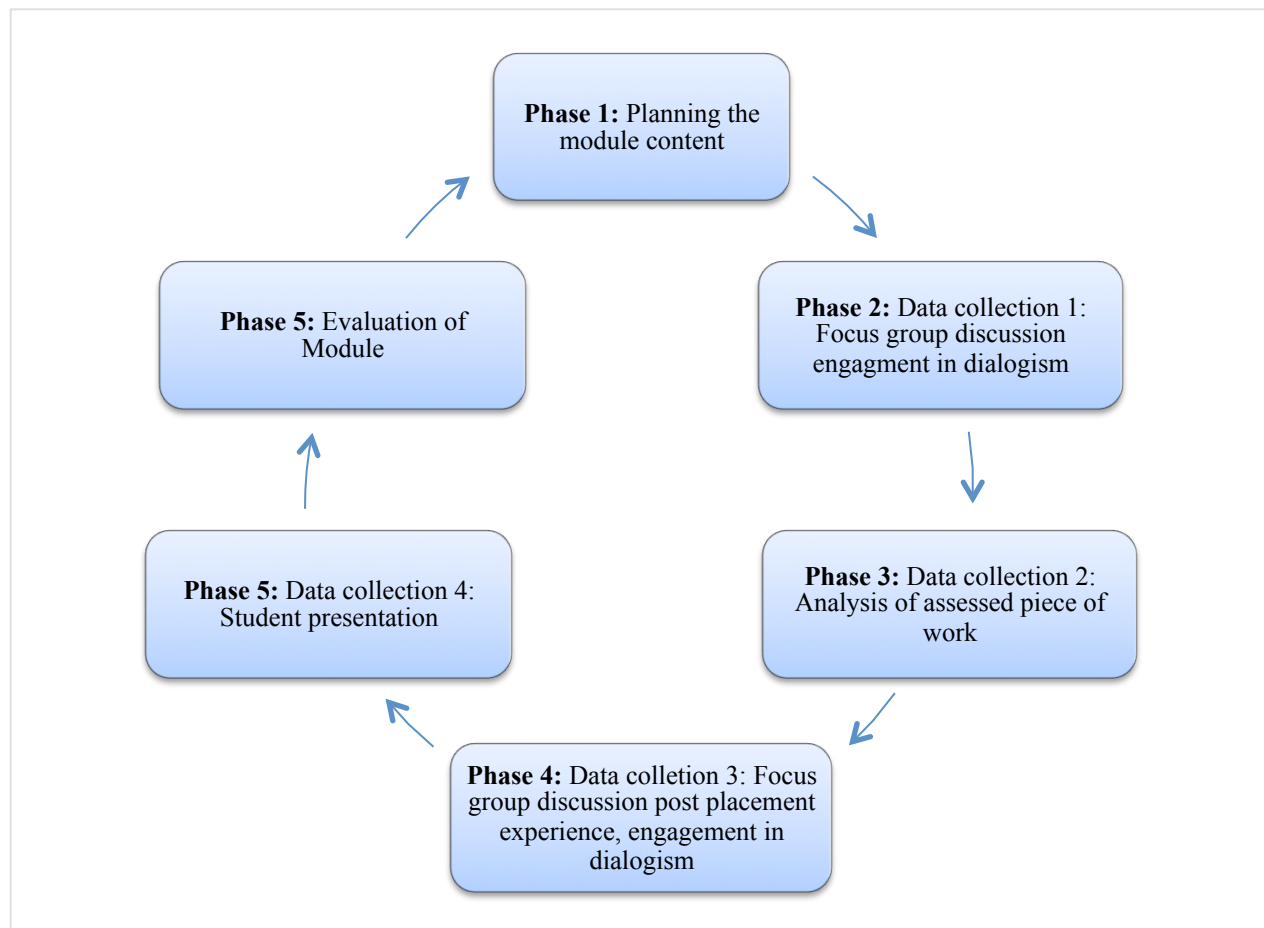
The action research focused on the teaching of and learning experiences through a level-6 elective module titled New Perspectives on Disability Sport, which ran in Semester B with a cohort of 15 students. The module used carefully targeted and calibrated critical readings designed to gradually stretch the student over the course of the taught element of the module. Visiting speakers were also used to enhance the taught component of the module which was then complimented by a placement component. In exploring the extent to which students had engaged in critical pedagogy, they were encouraged to unpick past and present beliefs, values and experiences and consider future

implications to enable them to develop the skills needed to be a critically reflective practitioner. In doing this, students were asked to go beyond reflecting on their experiences in light of comparative viewpoints and demonstrate a deeper level of reflection by reframing their understanding of situations from alternative perspectives. Such a perspective, according to Jay and Johnson, illustrates distinctions between levels of reflection moving from comparative study to considering how their observations relate to their own morals and potential implications of what is happening in their context in relation to wider society.⁷⁴

The action research used a staged approach to data collection, following the action research cycle and building on the experiences of the students through the duration of the module, which is illustrated in Figure 1.

The first method was a focus group interview carried out during the taught element of the module (March 2014). The discussions in the focus group required students to draw from all elements of the taught experience to focus on their own experiences and the experiences of family members in

Figure 1: The Action Research Process



the development of their understanding of disability. This included levels of ability as they shift over time, the notion of able-bodied being a temporary state in the context of the aging process.⁶⁶ Finally it explored the debates around 'objectivising' disability and the idea of the 'hegemony of 'normalcy.'⁷⁵

The second stage of data collection was an analysis of an assessed piece of work. The taught element of the module fed into support for the first point of assessment, an essay, which was about the significance of theory to explaining and understanding the developments in organisation and administration of disability sport.

Students then were engaged in a placement experience for the second half of the module, a wide variety of contexts were used for placements including school settings, YMCA, Special Olympics, residential centres, community settings and sports clubs. On completion of the placement a second focus group took place and formed the third source of data. The focus of this was to encourage students to critically reflect upon their own perceptions of disability and how this has been influenced by the placement experiences. It also encouraged students to reflect upon practices observed, policies underpinning such practices and how this informs and informed their own practice.

The final source of data was a second analysis of assessed work, this time a student presentation reflecting on placement experiences that required them to demonstrate a critical understanding of the nature of disabilities and the

process of adaptation and modification, in addition to the impact on their placement context of structures and classifications of disability and role of theories on disability. The research was carried out by one module tutor and one staff member who was not involved in the module. The university ethical approval processes included an explanation of the project (during which it was stressed, there was no obligation to take part), those students who agreed to participate, were asked to read and sign an informed consent form. The member of the module staff did not engage in any of the data analysis, however the process of this type of research did bring up its own challenges which will be explored later in the paper and which concern the tutor's involvement as a critical pedagogue. The data analysis process drew on Sparkes and Smith's⁷⁶ 6-phase understanding of thematic analysis as it identified, analysed, interpreted and reported themes that emerged from within the focus groups discussion, assessments, reflections and module evaluation.

In carrying out the action research, the data was explored in the context of the depth of criticality. This notion of surface and deep learning suggested by Moon⁷⁷ can evolve from different models of teaching where at the surface level descriptive and reflective conversations may take place, then more in-depth would be comparative reflective conversations than critical reflective conversations. The distinction between these types of conversations in reflective practice were identified using Jay and Johnson's⁵² dimensions and guiding questions.

Table Two: Distinctions between levels of reflection: dimensions and guiding questions (Jay and Johnson, 2002: 77)

Dimension	Definition	Typical questions
Descriptive	Describe the matter for reflection	What is happening? Is it working, and for whom? For whom is it not working? How do I know? How am I feeling? What am I pleased and/or concerned about? What do I not understand? Does this relate to any of my stated goals, and to what extent are they being met?
Comparative	Reframe the matter for reflection in light of alternative views, others' perspectives, research, etc.	What are alternative views about what is happening? How do other people who are directly or indirectly involved describe and explain what is happening? What does the research contribute to an understanding of this matter? How can I improve what's not working? If there is a goal, what are some ways of accomplishing it? How do other people accomplish this goal? For each perspective and alternative, who is served and who is not?
Critical	Having considered the implications of the matter, establish a renewed perspective	What are the implications of the matter when viewed from these alternative perspectives? Given these various perspectives, their implications, and my own morals and ethics, which is best for this particular matter? What is the deeper meaning of what is happening, in terms of the public democratic purposes of schooling? What does this matter reveal about the moral and political dimension of schooling? How does this reflective process inform and renew my perspective?

Very clear from the process of action research was that in order to engender truly critically reflective students, a transformative pedagogy is needed where the process of translating critical reflection into action requires a heightened awareness of potential to act as an agent for change. The inclusion of a placement experience served to provide a context for students to take responsibility for their own learning and enable integration of prior learning.

In the focus group students explored their revised opinions, some showing a more descriptive approach to their reflections, while others moved to comparative and the reflective contributions to the discussion. Below are three examples where in the first the student describes what happens and how they know that; in the second they are considering alternatives and interpreting what is happening by reframing it; and in the final example the student has considered the implications of the matter and establish a renewed perspective.

'Many individuals with disability can cope with the management of tasks and lead an independent life, they explained to me how they adapted to manage daily activities.' (Student 8)

'I'm reflecting on aspects of disability in a different light - my view was changed significantly because a climber who was disabled by having just one hand was actually a far better climber than many of the able-bodied participants, they had learnt to overcome their disability to the extent that it did not stop them from trying new things' (Student 10)

'I was interested in the fact that society was interested in the social model of disability and it was a more realistic view of disability in comparison to the medical model, I thought the Le Clair reading broadened this up and exemplified how living in today's society impacts on this further.' (Student 1)

It was evident from the authors' research that the work placement provided an impetus for more criticality in their discourses, where the teaching of theory was illuminated by the reflection on practice and new knowledge was generated through debating mismatches in observed practice, beliefs and values. A range of reflections emerged from the assignment submitted, which required them to consider implications that emerged from their placement experiences. In the first two the students consider their experiences in relation to models of disability, and learn through problem solving and practical application.

'The placement enforced the recently established bio-social model of disability more than the medical or social model - participants didn't see themselves as disabled as they were all able to do the activities.' (Student 1: - placement experience of organising and managing a multi-sport event for a community club aimed at making sport accessible to 8-30 year olds in East Cornwall)

'Through my position in the company I found that many of the service users go for the company and socialisation as much as for the experience that is gained from each department.' (Student 3: - placement in Robert Owen Communities centre Charity)

In the following examples students are involved more in reflection, which enables them to determine the necessary types of action that they should take in order to improve the life conditions of the disability groups they worked with.

'The school aims to become involved in Project Ability next year. Disabled competitive sport has been highlighted as an area of improvement by the school, so I undertook some research to explore the barriers in the school and in the community sports centre to increasing competitive opportunities for disability groups.' (Student 5: mainstream secondary school in Cornwall)

'Being disabled myself I have noticed how different disabilities need different assistants, also working with disabled adults is very different to working with disabled children as they want something different from taking part.' (Student 9: working with County Sports Partnership)

The final examples from the students' academic presentations illustrate them being active agents in their own education and to develop a critical consciousness that helps them evaluate the validity, fairness, and authority within their educational and living situations.

'Experiencing sport in a disabled-specific environment rather than as an aspect of a mainstream event showed how much more beneficial the environment was for disabled people and how much more experience they were able to gain. The event enabled disabled people to take part in competitive sporting activities in a safe and structured manner that reinforced the concept of sport for all.' (Student 2: - placement experience of organising and managing a multi-sport event for a community club aimed at making sport accessible to 8-30 year olds in East Cornwall)

'There were many rewards for the students to earn, but it could be questioned if these rewards are appreciated and why well-behaved mainstream students are not rewarded in the same way.' (Student 3: – placement experience in a 11-16 special school for emotional and social difficulties 'out and about activity' in Walsall)

The opportunities to reflect on placement experiences supports the belief that critical pedagogy should challenge conventional views of the relationship between student and teacher and involve the learners in the generation of knowledge. In the placements a number of students felt confident challenging the ways in which different environments operated, policies and practices they adopted 'I learnt from the instructors and I think they learnt from me.' (Student 10 Outdoor adventure centre) Other ways in which this manifested itself in the research carried out by

the authors can be aligned to suggestions made in research about the role of the student in critical pedagogy summarised by Aliakbari and Faraji. Table three outlines key aspects of these role and examples of how this manifested itself in this case study.⁷⁸

Engaging with a critical pedagogy can introduce particular challenges to the learner. A study by Pishghadam and Meidani found that 'While the ultimate aim of critical pedagogy is emancipation, the results revealed in this study give a rather dualistic view on this issue. Whereas some students reported how they felt empowered by learning to take a more active role in their lives, others became handicapped and perplexed by the new notions that critical theories had taught them. Thus, for some, critical pedagogy became a medium of oppression, rather than emancipation.'⁷⁹

Table three: The role of the student in critical pedagogy

Students' role	Example from This Case Study
Active participants in that together with the teacher they correct the curricula and that they share their ideas and learn to challenge assumptions ^{xiv}	Focus group discussions (dialogism) theme themes emerging from these where: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Wanting to understand effects and impact on disable athletes •Societal views on disability •Cultural differences and disability •Barriers for access •Models of disability
Students contribute to curricular decisions and determine the areas of study and the associated reading materials ^{xv}	Key readings – at the start of the module enabled students to select topics for discussion. Then explore these from their own context e.g. the outdoors, school, coaching.
Offer good reasons for their ideas and can correct their own and others' procedures ^{xvi}	Poster presentation and rationale document focused on their placement experience from the perspective of key issues that formed part of module delivery – in particular, impact of legislative and policy developments, as well as an analysis of the organisation and reflection on their role in the organisation.
They should engage in social criticism in order to create a public sphere in which citizens can exercise power over their own lives and learning	Essay provided students to design context for response based on organisation and administration of inclusive physical activity programmes. In doing this, they reflected upon the relationship between the changing conceptualisations of disability.
Learners are not recipients of knowledge rather they become creators ^{xvii}	Module evaluations suggested that pedagogic strategies involved enabled fluid relationship between learner and teacher and enabled students to develop their own views and perceptions.

^{xiv} Giroux HA. Pedagogy and the Politics of Hope: Theory, Culture, and Schooling. A Critical Reader. Boulder CO: West view Press; 1997.

^{xv} Degener S. Making sense of critical pedagogy in adult literacy education. Review of Adult Learning and Literacy. 2001[cited 2014 November 19]; 2(2). Available from: <http://www.ncsall.net/?id=562>

^{xvi} Lipman M. Critical thinking- what can it be? Educational Leadership. 1988 46(1): 38-43.

^{xvii} Freire P. Pedagogy of the Oppressed. New York: Continuum; 1970.

The evaluation of the module identified that this was evident in the research carried out by the authors. In particular when some students were asked to engage in dialogism, three students withdrew from discussion completely and two focused very much on describing what was happening and felt uncomfortable unpicking, critiquing or judging their experiences.

One way of addressing this challenge may be to introduce the idea of praxis into the teaching and learning process. Research on teaching over the past three decades has shown that effective practice is linked to inquiry, reflection, and continuous professional growth. This has been further reinforced by ETUCE who suggest that effective teaching is built 'on a concept of teaching as praxis in which theory, practice and the ability to reflect critically on one's own and others' practice illuminate each other.'⁸⁰ Lather cites Buker's contention that the requirements of praxis are identified as 'theory both relevant to the world and nurtured by actions in it, and an action component in its own theorizing process that grows out of practical and political grounding.'⁸¹ When evaluating the module it was noted that the research carried out by the authors encouraged students to be actively involved in their own education. In doing this, they sought to bridge the gap between theory and transformational action, which according to Aliakbari and Faraji is the aim of praxis in education.⁸²

To support the self-creative generation of knowledge, opportunities need to be afforded to learners to learn in different 'spaces'; McArthur suggests that 'higher education needs to provide a particular combination of space; one which allows for complex ideas to be debated and generated while also linked to the wider society,'⁸³ to enable learning to be diverse and complex, considering new forms of knowledge and creating new ways to generate knowledge. The taught experience in this university on the module designed specifically to focus on disability sport provide one 'space' for learning. However, the university as a community provides a far bigger 'space' where disciplinary and interdisciplinary opportunities exist. Hardman and Pitchford assert that 'As students enter the increasingly competitive and consumerist higher education market place, there will be a need for academics to find ways of teaching that support good scholarship, employability and the development of global citizenship.'⁸⁴ Meaningful engagement with the community based on the development of long-term relationships presents such opportunities. However, to be truly transformational, such engagement must operate within a learning environment rooted in a critical pedagogy.

The key findings from the action research of adopting a critical pedagogy approach to teaching and learning can be clustered into three key themes: a) Implications for the students' learning experience; b) Implications for adopting this approach for academic staff teaching on the module; c) Implications for the administration of teaching and learning. For the students, the breadth of academic attainment in the module was consistent with previous years but with an increase in numbers of students achieving highest grades; the Module evaluation process suggested that there was particularly positive feedback concerning the use of visiting speakers and the contribution of the placement to the taught elements of the programme. The delivery style required students to engage in more self-directed and reflective practices drawing from the breadth of experiences offered in a wide range of different contexts (workshops, placements, seminar activities, directed tasks, readings, discussions and debates), to this end they need to be active participants in the generation of their own knowledge. The concerns around this focus on self or shared discovery is that personal opinions, values and beliefs are challenged and unless a safe and secure environment is developed to facilitate this some learners may feel ostracised or oppressed.

The implications for the academic staff delivering on the module were two-fold; firstly as researcher, secondly as module tutor. As researcher, it challenged very basic positivist assumptions about the capacity of the researcher to act in a detached and objective manner. In fact, the nature of the research required the authors to adapt their practices as the learning evolved. From the point at which they committed themselves to an investigation of the student experience on the module, the researchers began to influence the structure and content of the module and to develop a heightened awareness of what they should be seeking to achieve through the module. The implications of the pedagogic processes engaged in the module were to ensure suitable experiences were built into the design and included extending the programme of visiting speakers to involve more discussion from students about their own perceptions of disability and how this has been influenced by experiences. Requiring students to focus on their own experiences and the experiences of family members if they are to understand disability was intensely personal, and required the establishment of trust between lecturer and student. The lecturers also had to work with students and placement coordinators to embed suitable placements in the module that enabled them to engage in meaningful reflective practice and to critically evaluate ideas of physical culture as an empowering experience for people with disabilities.

Implications for administrative processes were three-fold: firstly, minor modification of the learning outcomes of the module to focus on developing practitioners capable of engaging in meaningful reflective practice; secondly, modification of assessment titles, which were about the significance of theory to explaining and understanding developments in organisation and administration of disability sport; thirdly, the generation of the established 'Learning Space' virtual learning environment to support all elements of the module, including the Edu Blog platform for reflective journaling, placement learning guidance, directed readings and tasks as well as lecture and visiting speakers' notes.

Conclusion

Castells, in his analysis of the changing role of higher education in society, argues that as well as emerging as a key actor in driving and managing scientific and technological change, the university also becomes a 'critical source of equalisation of chances and democratisation of society by making possible equal opportunities for people – this is not only a contribution to economic growth, it is a contribution to social equality ...'⁸⁵ Challenges continue to face people with disabilities living in an uncertain global environment, such as contested views on meanings attributed to inclusion, the equitable distribution of resources and the role of education in civic as well as technological and physical literacy. Consequently, universities have a central role to play in fostering attitudinal and material changes, which predicate their inclusion in society.

The paper has explored the contention in relation to the role of the university in the development of an inclusive physical and sporting culture by first considering the issue of the curriculum and promotion of intellectual debate necessary to encourage a critical pedagogy of disability and sport. The research involved taking account of the intellectual, social and emotional development of individual students and ways in which curriculum can contribute to the promotion of the civic and physical literacy, which predicate an inclusive physical culture. From there, the paper explored how these pedagogical considerations are translated in the university setting into action that is supportive of people with disabilities engaging in physical activity and sport. It took into account through action research, the experiences of a group of level six (Honours) students approaching the subject of disability sport and examined the efficacy of a variety of teaching and learning strategies designed to prepare them to facilitate inclusive sports initiatives. It

examined the role of the student placement in that process and suggested that through the process of critical reflection on practices of themselves and others, students can determine the types of action needed to affect a change in the field of disability sport. It supports suggestions by Lucas and Leng Tan that the capacity to reflect underpins professional judgements and ethical awareness and the development of academic performance is affected by placement learning as a result.⁸⁶

From investigations of the teaching and learning process (albeit in one institutional context) and wider engagement with administrators and academics, some tentative suggestions can be made:

- An individualised approach to learning should factor the lived experience of individual students, their rationale for engagement in study and their physical and emotional investment in the process, since individual perceptions of disability and understanding of the challenges facing people living with disabilities will differ greatly from student to student.
- Programmes of study should consider carefully how a critical pedagogy is translated into effective engagement with university-based initiatives supportive of people with disabilities. While experiential learning may form part of this, its location within the programme is not a foregone conclusion since the linear movement from theory to practice does not take into account the previous experiences of students nor their capacity to grasp the intellectual debates underpinning current practices.
- Students should be aware of the relationship between the lived experience of individual athletes and global political issues that characterise competitive disability sport. Criticality should include being prepared to challenge governance issues at every level of disability sports.

In the context of structural developments:

- University sport and physical activity programmes should in themselves seek to be more inclusive of diverse student needs. The recent Sport England Activation fund provides the potential for university sport departments to engage in more inclusive practices. However, its implementation will need to be monitored carefully in this context.
- While the development of expertise in the area of disability sport requires a concentration of resources and a critical mass of intellectual capital, too much concentration

into very few universities increases the impediments to accessibility which the disability sport movement is, as an advocacy body, committed to challenge. Sharing best practices and developing provisions in regional centres where local and regional demand from individual athletes and clubs can be best served, can be part of an alternative perspective.

The challenge of working in a higher education environment driven by the neoliberal impulses of increased competition and marketization, while encouraging increased specialisation and development of expertise in areas such as sport development, can stifle co-operation across the university sector. While there are strong grounds for seeing universities as making significant progress in the promotion and development of disability sport, it may be equally argued that such progress has been part of the wider shift toward a neoliberal sporting environment within which commercial operators, sponsors and universities as competitive organizations fight for market share in the new disability sport market place. Building on the argument of civic literacy, universities have a responsibility to encourage debate concerning inclusion as an aspect of citizenship and civic values and to relate this to inclusive practices as they develop their role in community sport provision. An inclusive culture is, however, not limited to participatory sport and physical activity. Inclusive practice in sport incorporates opportunities for differently abled athletes to achieve their potential in a competitive setting and given their resourcing, networks and research agendas, a number of universities have the potential to play a leading role in this aspect of sport development. As centres for technological development, universities form an important element in the research and development, coaching programmes and infrastructure support increasingly associated with successful engagement with parasport. Universities also provide a forum for engagement in debate concerning the equitable governance of competitive international disability sport.

If universities are to serve the public good locally, regionally and globally, sharing information and expertise across the sector can provide the basis for a more accessible disability sport environment. However, such an alternative vision is predicated on the development of students (whether coach or teacher education) as critically reflective practitioners prepare to challenge established practices and explore new ways of delivery.

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