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Article:

1 **Sport, Disability and (Inclusive) Education: Critical insights and understandings from the**

2 ***Playdagogy* programme**

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1 **Sport, Disability and (Inclusive) Education: Critical insights and understandings from the**

2 ***Playdagogy* programme**

3 **Abstract**

4 It has long been held that participation in sport, physical activity (PA) and physical education (PE)

5 can yield valuable benefits for young people (Bailey et al., 2009). Recently, there has been much

6 focus on the role of such activities for moral development in support of social inclusion and social

7 justice agendas, often centred within the broad field of sport-for-development (Coalter, 2013; Rossi

8 & Jeanes, 2016). However, disability, and the social inclusion of disabled people, has been somewhat

9 overlooked by policy, practice, and research in this field. This article considers the findings from a

10 study investigating a sports-based educational programme, *Playdagogy*, designed for use with

11 children/young people and intended to: (1) raise disability-awareness, (2) promote positive attitudes

12 to disabled people and (3) foster inclusion. In focusing on promoting understandings of disability and

13 inclusion through 'inclusive' sport-based games, *Playdagogy* reflects a recognition of the need to

14 critique 'normalized' and exclusionary conceptions and practices in youth sport (Fitzgerald, 2009).

15 While progress has been made to conceptualise 'anti-disablist' or 'anti-ableist' pedagogies within the

16 context of inclusive education (Beckett, 2015), it has been slow to trace this into relevant curricula or

17 teaching/learning strategies (Symeonidou & Loizou 2018). *Playdagogy* can be viewed as an attempt

18 to achieve translation of pedagogy into practice. A mixed method approach was employed to capture

19 experiences of programme staff, educators, and pupils (aged 6-12 years) involved in the *Playdagogy*

20 programme. Findings highlight key issues related to the experience of delivering and undertaking

21 *Playdagogy* activities from all stakeholders' perspectives. In acknowledging claims that educational

22 messages are often inherent but not explicit within these kinds of sport for development programmes

23 (Rossi & Jeanes, 2016), we add to calls for closer examination of the educational process and impact

24 of such initiatives and examine the place of an inclusion/disability focus in future SfD work.

25 **Keywords:** sport, disability, education, inclusion, sport-for-development.

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1 *Sport, Disability and (Inclusive) Education: Critical insights and understandings*

2 *from the Playdagogy programme*

3 *Introduction*

4 It has long been held that participation in sport, physical activity (PA) and physical education (PE)

5 can yield valuable benefits for young people that advance beyond physical health (Bailey et al., 2009).

6 Indeed, this belief has underpinned numerous policies, programmes, and practices within the UK and

7 beyond (Armour & Sandford, 2013; Rossi & Jeanes, 2016). In recent years, there has been particular

8 focus on the role of sport for young people's moral development in support of social inclusion and

9 social justice agendas, often centred within the broad field of sport-for-development (SfD) (Coalter,

10 2013; Rossi & Jeanes, 2016). However, disability, and the social inclusion of disabled people, has

11 been one important social issue which has been somewhat overlooked by policy, practice, and

12 research in this field. This paper critically examines one case-study programme, entitled *Playdagogy*,

13 implemented by the London-based charity Cambridge House, which sought to address that gap in the

14 area of sport, disability and social inclusion. Delivered largely within a school context, *Playdagogy*

15 sought to challenge disability discrimination by promoting inclusion for all within sport/game

16 activities, questioning disabling attitudes, and fostering positive interactions between disabled and

17 non-disabled peers. The goal was to enable and empower disabled children whilst raising awareness

18 of disability discrimination amongst, and creating 'allies' of, their non-disabled peers. Thus,

19 *Playdagogy* can be seen to align with some work within the broader field of physical education which

20 has sought to facilitate inclusion and equity in sport for disabled young people (see also Fitzgerald,

21 2009; Vickerman & Hayes, 2013). In this discussion, therefore, we view inclusion not only in

22 practical terms (i.e., as opportunities for co-participation) but also more broadly as a philosophical

23 concept that embraces notions of self-development and collective education for the common good.

1   This article is based on our collaborative research with Cambridge House, which included a

2   developmental evaluation (Patton, 2010) of *Playdagogy*, and a subsequent research project to capture

3   participant and wider stakeholder experiences and examine what was working and what might be

4   improved. As we articulate below, the research highlights the value of having a programme

5   underpinned by educational values and perspectives, evidencing how this contributes to challenging

6   normative ideas through critical debate and discussion. However, it also notes the need for

7   programmes like *Playdagogy* to not stand alone but be embedded within a holistic approach that

8   allows for the transfer of learning within and across social context. Our broad aim is to advance

9   understanding of sport's role in promoting the social inclusion of disabled young people. We are thus

10 attentive to the need for researchers to address the significant knowledge and research gaps in SfD

11 with respect to disability, as we outline below. Through examining the *Playdagogy* programme, we

12 seek to advance understanding of how such social inclusion may be pursued through educational

13 initiatives with young people in schools-based contexts and focus, in particular, on the pedagogical

14 processes that underpin such efforts (Rossi & Jeanes, 2016). We are particularly concerned to identify

15 the positive impacts and notable challenges that relate to educational programmes, and to indicate

16 any relevant ways in which these initiatives may be adjusted to be more impactful.

17 In the sections that follow, we first set out the programme's legal and policy context before assessing

18 the main research literatures relevant to the programme. We then introduce the content and style of

19 *Playdagogy* activities and explain our research methodology, before presenting and discussing our

20 key findings. Finally, we identify programme-specific and more general learning from this study and

21 propose avenues for further research.

22 ***Legal and Policy Context***

23 As noted, *Playdagogy* has two core goals: (a) improving access to and inclusion in sport for disabled

24 young people; and (b) utilising sports-based activities as a vehicle for tackling disabling attitudes,

25 raising disability awareness and helping to build an inclusive society. In this respect, it can be seen

to align closely with two key policy documents relating to both international and UK domains: the UN Conventions on the Rights of the Child (CRC – UN, 1989) and the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD – UN, 2006). For example, CRC Article 29 (1a) stipulates that education should develop children's 'personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential', while Article 31 (1) requires governments to recognize all children's right 'to engage in play and recreational activities'. Similarly, CRPD requires governments to enable disabled people: 'to participate on an equal basis with others in recreational, leisure and sporting activities' (Article 30); 'to encourage and promote the participation, to the fullest extent possible, of persons with disabilities in mainstream sporting activities at all levels' (Article 31a); and to ensure 'children with disabilities have equal access with other children to participation in play, recreation and leisure and sporting activities, including those activities in the school system' (Article 31d). CRPD also necessitates that governments *inter alia* to 'foster respect for the rights and dignity of', 'combat stereotypes, prejudices and harmful practices relating to', and 'promote awareness of the capabilities and contributions of persons with disabilities' (Article 8 [1 a-c]). Moreover, it requires national educational systems to foster respect for the rights of disabled people, including through awareness-training programmes (Article 8 [2 a, d]). The latter is also supported, in the UK context, by the Equality Act 2010 and subsequent Equality Duty (effective from 2011), which stipulate that state-funded schools must work to eliminate discrimination, advance equal opportunities, and foster 'good relations' between protected and non-protected groups by tackling prejudice and promoting understanding. Thus, overall, the *Playdagogy* programme's aim is closely aligned with these legal and policy goals at UK and international levels.

Locating Playdagogy within the Academic Literature

Two main literatures enable analysis of *Playdagogy* as a sport-based educational programme: sport-as progress' and 'sport for good'. With regard to the former, as noted, there is much faith in the 'power of sport' to promote positive development for young people (McCuaig, 2015; Jeanes & Rossi, 2016).

Perceived benefits include enhanced physical fitness and literacy, self-confidence, skill-development, and focus/attention, although evidence of positive change is stronger in some areas than others (e.g., Hooper et al., 2020). There is also increasing emphasis on the capacity of sport participation to support values-based education (McCuaig et al., 2015) and social and emotional learning (Hooper et al., 2020) – *the making of model citizens.* Indeed, sport's perceived capacity to teach 'life lessons', foster social skills, and develop moral character is one of the most consistent rationales underpinning public investment in sport (Coalter, 2013). For some scholars, PE is uniquely positioned within the school context to achieve learning outcomes within the affective domain (e.g., Hooper et al., 2020). Accordingly, various models/initiatives that pivot on social development have been designed and integrated within PE and school sport (Armour & Sandford, 2013; McCuaig et al., 2015). Underpinned by notions of critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970) such approaches often facilitate opportunities for inclusive practice by fostering positive relationships and creating spaces for critical discussion and debate. In doing so, it has been argued, they align well with broader social justice agendas, as they look to raise awareness, challenge inequities, and encourage transformative action (Matthews, 2013).

Whilst much is invested in sport's role in young people's progress, insufficient attention is paid to what precisely these benefits might be (Bailey et al., 2009). Here, we recall Sutton-Smith's (1997) classic work, which cautioned against the repurposing of play to produce ideal youths and future citizens, and which is echoed in more recent, critical perspectives on sport's role as a positive force (Jeanes & Rossi, 2016). For example, sport may encourage conflict and discourage mutuality and co-operation (Valet, 2018); foster negative behaviours (e.g. cheating, bullying, self-interest); and, reproduce and idealise a narrow range of human attributes, reinforcing 'ability-expectations' (concerning others and ourselves) and 'ableism' (a system that perceives certain abilities to be essential) (Wolbring, 2012). In this respect, it has been suggested that such aspects of sport can marginalise some young people – including disabled youth – and work actively against inclusion agendas (Giese & Ruin, 2016). It is also pertinent to note here that, in respect of disability and disabled

young people, 'positive youth development' initiatives have tended to be segregated, and, as some have noted, to adopt a deficit-model approach, by highlighting their 'therapeutic' or 'rehabilitative' aspects (Wozencroft et al., 2019).

When considering 'sport-for-good', the transnational field of 'sport for development' (SfD) - also known as 'sport for development and peace' [SDP]) – also extends the 'power-of-sport' approach, but with more of a 'community' than individual emphasis. SfD focuses upon how sport/PA may contribute to wider social goals, including the social inclusion of young people marginalized on the basis of disability, gender, 'race' and ethnicity (Coalter 2013; Collison et al., 2019; Giulianotti, 2011; Rossi & Jeanes, 2016). Research on SfD highlights a diversity of programme approaches, delivery techniques, and developmental priorities (Coalter, 2013). Crucial differences arise over how various development goals/issues are addressed. While many programmes engage with themes such as gender, crime reduction and conflict resolution, there has been limited focus on educational and inclusion work regarding disability (Giulianotti et al. 2019; Howe, 2019). That is not to say that *no* work has been undertaken in this area. In 2015, for example, a special issue of the *Journal of Sport for Development* sought to initiate discussion of disability and/within SfD. As Brittain and Wolff (2015) state, however, 'further research and programs are needed' to test sport's potential for addressing the many challenges faced by disabled people. Two years later, Devine et al. (2017: 4) concluded that there was still 'little evidence' demonstrating 'whether and how sport for development can be disability-inclusive'.

This SfD disability gap is surprising given that the UN has embraced both SfD and its potential benefits for disabled people. The UN recognizes disability as an issue crosscutting all 17 of its Sustainable Development Goals, and references disability *inter alia* with respect to education, the need for schools to be sensitive to disabled students, and for inclusion and empowerment of disabled people. Further, the UN CRPD Committee endorsed the idea that sport has the potential to empower disabled people during its Twelfth Session, June 2019. Largely absent from UN policy is discussion

of *how* sports activities might empower disabled people. Partly, this is due to lack of certainty: existing 'evidence' suggests that sport is not the most obvious vehicle for empowering disabled people. For example, the empowerment of elite-level Paralympic athletes may not work positively for the vast majority of disabled people who are not competitors (Purdue & Howe, 2012); and the dominant, 'super-crip' narrative on disabled athletes – highlighting a conquering of individual limitations and personal tragedy through hard work and determination (Ellis, 2015) – fosters unrealistic expectations of disabled people (Grue, 2015). Thus, the intersection of sport and disability is a troubled and troublesome one.

Introducing Playdagogy

The *Playdagogy* programme, designed by Play International for use with children aged 6-11 years, has been implemented within many French primary schools and adapted for application in non-educational settings. It is described as a teaching methodology that seeks to convey educational messages via the medium of games and physical activities, providing young people with an active and fun pathway to learning. Cambridge House (CH) collaborated with Play International to bring *Playdagogy* to the UK, adapting it for use with young people aged 5-13 years, with a specific focus on disability and inclusion. CH modified the key *Playdagogy* messages to reflect UK disability politics, which differ from those in France, adopting a social model understanding of disability (Oliver, 1983; 1990). The social model is the 'big idea' (Beckett & Campbell, 2015) of the UK disabled people's movement which has been globally influential. It distinguishes between impairment as the 'the functional limitation within the individual', caused by physical, sensory, cognitive, psychosocial factors or neurodiversity, and disability as the 'loss or limitation of opportunities to take part in the normal life of the community due to physical and social barriers' (DPI, 1981). Disability, according to this model, is what happens when a person who has an impairment, encounters barriers within a disabling society; it is a form of oppression (UPIAS, 1976).

In launching *Playdagogy*, CH had high ambitions: to help reshape the culture around disability and

sport; and reduce disability discrimination within and beyond sport, thus contributing to the creation

of a more equitable and socially just society. As noted, the *Playdagogy* programme sought to

challenge disability discrimination and foster positive interactions between disabled and non-disabled

young people Further, CH hoped that *Playdagogy* would increase the capacity of educators to address

issues around disability with children, and enhance their understanding of disability, the needs of

disabled children, inclusion, equality, and adaptation (of sporting activities).

In addition to these social justice goals, our own analysis of *Playdagogy* determined that it was

grounded in sound pedagogical principles. Specifically, in offering opportunities for young people to

play together, learn with/from each other and engage in debates that challenged disability

stereotypes/social biases, it was evident that the programme was underpinned by ideas relating to

constructivist perspectives of learning (MacDonald, 2013), play-based education (Henricks, 2015),

inclusive education (Slee, 2011) and a form of anti-oppressive education (Beckett, 2015). The

educational focus of *Playdagogy* also embraced the role of the practitioner, and teachers/coaches were

supported to deliver the programme via training sessions (in which they discussed issues relating to

disability, impairment and the underpinning principles of the programme) and the provision of a 'tool

kit', which comprised both practical equipment and activity cards for the various games. Fig.1

outlines an example lesson, which reflects the programme philosophy and method. [INSERT FIG 1

HERE]. As can be seen in this example, *Playdagogy* involved simulation of both impairment (such

as wearing blindfolds) and disability simulation (encountering barriers in the social environment).

The use of simulation in disability awareness training caused some initial worry, as it is a much

criticised and contested practice (a useful summary of the debates in this area can be found in Herbert,

2000). Proponents of simulation argue it can foster insights and empathy, support the exploration of

personal values and be a useful strategy to convey social messages – this certainly appeared to be the

underlying justification of it within *Playdagogy*. However, mindful of the claims that it can also

perpetuate a tragic view of disability (ibid), such issues were discussed with CH as part of the

1 developmental evaluation and efforts to attend to 'best practice' guidelines with regard to the use,

2 purpose and critical understanding of simulation were made.

3 **Methodology**

4 The research employed a mixed methods approach, predominantly qualitative, to explore the

5 experiences and reflections of four stakeholder groups involved in *Playdagogy*: programme staff,

6 trainers/educators, teachers, and young people (Armour & Sandford, 2013; Coates & Vickerman,

7 2013). Our aim was to seek out, hear, and acknowledge the voices and perspectives of these

8 stakeholders, and make space for critical discussion concerning, among other things, the content of

9 *Playdagogy* sessions, the impact of activities on individual and collective understandings of

10 disability/inclusion and the potential development of *Playdagogy* moving forward. Our study was

11 underpinned by participatory research, particularly its focus on the "co-construction of research

12 through partnerships between researchers and people affected by and/or responsible for action on the

13 issues under study" (Jagosh et al., 2012 p. 311). We thus worked collaboratively with Cambridge

14 House, maintaining an ongoing conversation, with a commitment to sharing information that could

15 assist in refining programme objectives, activities and intended outcomes. Further, we worked

16 collaboratively to construct a clear programme 'theory of change' (Weiss, 1998), focusing not just

17 on 'what works', but 'why' and 'in what contexts'. In this way, the research acknowledged the

18 importance of 'context' in attributing 'cause', which is central to understanding the "theory of an

19 initiative" (Blamey & Mackenzie, 2007 p.445). This cumulative approach to generating knowledge

20 was valuable in enabling learning to be accrued processually, "rather than delivering big bang answers

21 to questions of programme effectiveness" (Blamey & Mackenzie, 2007 p.447-8).

22 It is important to note that the study was undertaken by three (two female, one male) able-bodied,

23 majority white, adult, UK researchers. Most of the data collection and analysis was carried out by

24 Author 1 and Author 2. The research brought together our three fields of critical social scientific

25 expertise: Author 1 on physical education with young people, particularly marginalized social groups;

Author 2 on disability, young people, and social exclusion; and Author 3 in sport for development (SfD), particularly with marginalized young people. We have an underpinning, shared commitment to the critical investigation and analysis of social and cultural institutions (such as in education, sport, physical activity, and play), and their potential contributions in tackling forms of exclusion, marginalization, and intolerance through the promotion of inclusive cultures, practices, and experiences. Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the relevant Ethics Committees of the two Universities involved (Leeds and Loughborough). All relevant protocols relating to safeguarding, consent and anonymity were followed throughout. Fieldwork was conducted over a 12-month period (January – December 2015) and a range of methods were employed to generate data with different stakeholder groups, as follows (see also Figure 2):

- Pre- and post-training surveys for adults (hereafter 'educators') who led activity sessions (n=58 for pre-training survey and n=56 for post-training survey). These educators included coaches, youth workers and informal educators from various clubs and organisations based in the area in which the case study schools were located. These focused on the impact of the training on individuals' understanding of and preparedness for delivering *Playdagogy*;

- Observations of activity sessions in 6 case study schools (n=10) to examine *Playdagogy* 'in action'. All schools were co-educational and based in areas of high social deprivation in inner-city London; five were primary schools (ages 5-11) and one was a secondary school (11-16 years). All schools had a higher-than-average number of pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND);

- In-depth individual interviews with key stakeholders (including programme developers, deliverers and lead teachers from participating schools, n=4). These sought to explore individuals' understanding and perception of *Playdagogy*, and the perceived impact of the programme on participants;

1. • Focus group discussions with young participants aged 5-12 years (n=11, involving 50 pupils from across the 6 schools[i]). These explored individuals' thoughts about/experiences of Playdagogy and what they felt they had learned (see also Beckett, 2016; Sandford & Giulianotti, 2016).

5. [INSERT FIGURE 2 HERE]

6. The fieldwork generated a large quantity of rich data. The quantitative data relating to participants' responses in the pre- and post-training surveys were entered into Excel and descriptive statistics generated. Qualitative data from interviews and focus groups were audio-recorded and then transcribed. These transcriptions, along with the open-ended responses from the pre- and post-training surveys and observation fieldnotes, were collated and analysed using a constructivist grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2014) in combination with thematic analysis. Following a process akin to that outlined by Harry, Sturges and Klingner (2005), this involved the researchers reading and re-reading the data to identify, interpret and, finally, report patterns of meaning. More specifically, it included initial coding and memo-ing of broad concepts, followed by constant comparison of codes to bring related ideas together to form coherent themes. For example, broad notions of values, empathy and collaboration were collated around ideas of contextual experiences, whole school approaches and shared understanding to ultimately coalesce around the theme of 'Transfer of Learning'. This approach facilitated a reading of the data in line with key programme features and evaluation aims (informed by the researchers' experiences), as well as affording opportunities to identify novel or unexpected outcomes (Armour & Sandford, 2013). Within the following section, key findings are presented from the data generated via the surveys, interviews and focus group discussions. We supplement this with observations from our fieldwork diaries.

Findings

13

Within this section, data are presented in two broad sections: adult perspectives and youth perspectives. In presenting the adult data first, we do not seek to privilege these experiences at the expense of the youth participants. Rather, as the survey and interview data deal with broader (and, in part, earlier) aspects of the *Playdagogy* programme it provides valuable context to aid reading of the pupil data. Allowing space for the adult and youth voices to be heard separately also helps to highlight key issues for these different participant groups, although we recognise that they do at times talk to the same broad themes. As such, within the subsequent discussion we look to draw the data together and consider how, collectively, they serve to advance debates in this area of SfD, disability and inclusion.

Adult Data

The data generated with adults (via pre- and post-training surveys and the interviews) afforded valuable insights into educators' perceptions of the relevance of *Playdagogy*, the programme's impact (both on their own practice and pupils' learning) and its capacity to effect broader change through the transfer of learning. These core themes are now addressed in turn.

1. Perceived Value of *Playdagogy*

Analysis of the adult data indicated that there was considerable interest in the *Playdagogy* offer because it was perceived that the focus on disability and inclusion addressed a notable 'gap' in many educators' own practice. Interestingly, only 33% of respondents to the pre-training survey had received any form of 'disability-awareness' training and many (78% of respondents) indicated that they did not feel confident in their knowledge in this area and would like to have more specific knowledge relating to processes and pedagogies of inclusion. Qualitative survey-responses reinforced these ideas, for example:

"I hope to gain a better understanding regarding disabled people and how to better include them and integrate them into sporting activities"

1   *"(I want to know) how to change activities to benefit disabled children (and) knowledge of*

2   *disabilities"*

3   Similarly, educators' often commented that they felt *Playdagogy* would also be of significant benefit

4   to the young people with whom they worked, citing benefits such as encouraging enhanced empathy

5   for/understanding of disabled people, facilitating more 'positive attitudes' towards impairment and

6   offering practical ideas about how to engage and support disabled peers in sport/PA. Interestingly, in

7   articulating the broader value of *Playdagogy*, some educators (albeit in somewhat unnuanced ways)

8   embraced the rhetoric of rights, respect, and inclusion which sit at the heart of the initiative and were

9   strongly embedded in the training programme:

10   *"I believe that (…) everyone should be included no matter what the game is"*

11   *"ALL children, regardless of any disability they may or may not have, should be able to fully*

12   *participate in all areas of life to the best of their ability"*

13   A common theme within the adult data was that the value of *Playdagogy* lay in the fact that it offered

14   something 'different' to other initiatives and helped schools to meet various requirements, e.g.

15   regarding inclusion or active learning. For example, one interviewee commented that he valued the

16   focus on *'learning through activity'* and sport as a vehicle for personal and social development, while

17   another spoke of the programme's potential to deliver both PA and personal development objectives.

18   Additionally, another individual commented that it was the focus on '*being able to manipulate games*

19   *to make them more inclusive*' that drew him to the programme. The focus of the programme on

20   inclusion and participation of disabled and non-disabled pupils was also identified as important, with

21   the 'discussion' elements of sessions highlighted as being of particular significance here.

22   There was, however, debate around *Playdaogy's* 'place' within the educational landscape, with one

23   educator asking, *'is it PE or is it something else?'*. Respondents acknowledged that the programme

24   aligned well with a PE offer given its application of sport/games; yet they were unsure whether it

could help meet PA 'targets'. Indeed, one educator increased the length of his sessions due to concerns that, by including discussion, the children *'weren't active enough'*. Other educators felt that *Playdagogy* might be a better 'fit' with Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) or Citizenship elements of the curriculum, as these subjects already incorporated an element of critical discussion. Two of the interviewees talked about 'optimal' conditions for *Playdagogy*. One suggested that it may work best with *'smaller groups…to facilitate discussion'* and another recommending its use with older age groups because *'with the younger ones…to get them to stop at the end and have a discussion…it can only go so deep'*. Thus, while *Playdagogy* was acknowledged as offering something 'different', educators were undecided regarding its best 'fit' within the school curriculum and were making adjustments to its delivery in order to enhance its pedagogical potential.

2. *Playdagogy* in Practice

As noted above, the adult data identified many benefits, including those for educators' practice. In this respect, there was talk of the value of the training, of the programme's capacity to enhance their practice or aid young people's enjoyment of sport and personal development. One individual described how the training had changed the way he and his team thought about inclusion in their day-to-day practice, describing it representing *'a kit for their minds'*. Another commented that using *Playdagogy* within his practice had encouraged the young people he worked with to be more inclusive themselves. Data indicated that educators saw benefits for young people in areas that reflected key aspects of the programme, including enhanced teamwork, understanding of impairment effects and disabling barriers, and confidence to get involved/play with peers with different abilities. It was clear from both the interviews and observations, however, that some educators favoured simpler activities that had a more 'obvious' message. As one interviewee noted, *'we want the children to discover the answers themselves through the activities'*, although others noted that practitioner explanation and guidance were key to children's learning. Some concerns were expressed about activities that were 'too complex', as it was felt these could lead to important messages being obscured, young people

(particularly disabled children) disengaging, and educators having to ultimately *'give the answers'* (i.e., tell the children what they *should be* thinking or concluding e.g. about disabling barriers) rather than guiding the young people in a form of discovery learning. One educator also felt there was perhaps an '*over-reliance on team games*' which he felt fuelled the competitive nature of some young people and worked against the inclusion objective.

As noted, *Playdagogy* activities had been designed to convey the programme's key messages about: the importance of adapting activities to aid inclusion; the nature of impairments; disability being socially produced; and the need to re-think ability expectations and develop enabling environments. One educator observed that *'some of the activities are really good in terms of getting (these) messages across'*. It was not always clear, however, whether all educators fully understood the messages associated with each activity – i.e. what the activities were supposed to support children to learn/understand. One of the research team made the following observation in their field notes whilst watching a *Playdagogy* session:

> *'Is this Playdagogy? It's not clear. I'm not sure any explanation has been given to the children for the game…being played'.*

In addition, some educators stated that they had experienced 'tricky moments' during discussion elements, which left them feeling exposed and underprepared:

> *'We found a few issues coming out…that children were saying stuff…that we didn't really know how to handle…the word "spastic" came out during the whole thing, from one of the kids…and like me and my colleague, we were a little bit shocked… sometimes we just looked at each other and we were like "what do we do now?!"'*.

Interestingly, the pre-training survey had identified a lack of confidence among many educators with regard to discussing issues of disability and inclusion with pupils, with 25% of respondents 'unsure' in this respect and another 15% 'not very' or 'not at all' confident. The *Playdagogy* training did

appear to provide some positive impact here, with 92% of respondents to the post-training survey noting they felt 'confident' or 'confident enough' to engage in such conversations. Moreover, qualitative data (from surveys and interviews) also revealed that educators believed the training had enhanced their knowledge, understanding and, importantly, the translation of this knowledge into practice:

"Now I will be able to include all children and give them more creativity and freedom in the lesson"

"(I have) increased confidence in discussing complex issues around disability and awareness. New and interesting methods of delivering education through sport and play"

However, as the aforementioned quote indicates, the context-specific nature of education meant there were still occasional discrepancies between educators (ideal) perceptions and their experiences in practice. Indeed, on another occasion we observed an educator implementing *Playdagogy* with a class of children that included wheelchair users. During warm-up the teacher asked the class to begin 'star jumps'; turning to the children using wheelchairs he added:

"You lot in the wheelchairs, do something else!"

As such, there is perhaps a note of caution to heed here in reading educators' articulation of changing perceptions and a need to recognise the need for ongoing learning opportunities.

3. <u>Transfer of Learning</u>

All respondents emphasised the importance of transfer of learning vis-à-vis *Playdagogy*. They hoped, and desired that knowledge/skills children gained through the 'fun' activities would be applied in other aspects of their lives including, as noted below, the broader school environment:

"I was thinking, well hopefully if they do something like this (Playdagogy) and see how easy it is to adapt the games that they play to include other people that (it) will take them outside of their social situation and into the classroom".

One way in which educators sought to support transfer was by adapting activities to fit the specific needs of individuals and contexts, and they exercised reflexive practice in this regard. For example, one individual noted that they had adapted some of the *Playdaogy* game ideas because he foresaw that some young people he worked with would struggle to play *'in an inclusive manner'*. He had also reworded some of the questions for the discussion elements of some sessions to meet the needs of his pupils and facilitate their confident engagement, noting that *'some of the words they just wouldn't have understood'*. Another noted that his team had needed to *'simplify the message'* at times, to ensure that their pupils understood the key ideas being communicated and were able to put them into practice. In this respect, the final session in the *Playdagogy* toolkit – 'Get Creative' – was seen by educators as being particularly important, as it was the culmination of programme learning and encouraged the young people to create inclusive games/activities themselves.

We noted during our observations, however, that some adaptions were not entirely successful, with one fieldnote entry documenting the '*over-complication of games'*. Likewise, an educator commented that from his perspective, some activities could simply not be adapted to meet the needs of all participants:

"We had one activity we just ruled out straight away…Cross the River…we've got guys in the wheelchairs and we thought…how can we adapt it…?"

While we suggest that with imagination this activity could have been adapted, the educator's comment hints at a lack of perceived confidence by some practitioners in this respect.

While transfer of learning was identified by educators as key to facilitating impact from *Playdagogy*, they recognised that this was not a straightforward process and would require the *'the key ideas being*

1 *embedded throughout (the school)'*. Moreover, there was recognition of the role of the wider

2 school/teaching staff in this process (*'they need to grasp the ideas'*). One educator noted that many

3 primary teachers he worked with lacked specific knowledge about adapting sport/games and were

4 *'wary of inclusive activities'*. He argued there is a need for *'ready knowledge'* – such as that provided

5 by Playdagogy - to support their practice in this respect.

6 *Youth Data*

7 It is impossible within the confines of this article to report all the findings from discussions with

8 children. A more in-depth discussion is provided in the project reports (see Beckett, 2016; Sandford

9 & Giulianotti, 2016). For the purposes of this paper three key areas are highlighted here for

10 consideration: the perceived benefits of *Playdagogy*; changing attitudes; and the transfer of learning.

11 In what follows we do not identify children as 'disabled' or 'non-disabled' unless this is important

12 for understanding their comment[ii].

13   1. Perceived benefits of *Playdagogy*

14 It was clear that young people had enjoyed the programme. Frequent descriptions of activities

15 included: 'good', 'fun' and 'interesting'. Children enjoyed being able to spend time with friends,

16 including those in other classes and years at the school (where *Playdagogy* had been implemented in

17 this way), and a number of children also identified making new friends as a result of this:

18 *"I enjoyed working together as a team. Working with different people that I don't usually play*

19 *with"*

20 *"I think it encourages us to play more with people we haven't played with before"*

21 *"... you get to know new people as well as do the sports"*

Many children felt that *Playdagogy* had helped them to enhance their social skills, in particular teamwork and collaboration - learning to work together to help each other and solve problems. In this respect, some of the children said they had gained practical knowledge about to how to include disabled peers within their games:

"(I've learnt) socialising, communicating, learning things from each other"

"It's taught me that when someone has a disability, I should help them get involved"

"We weren't doing very well in the game so (the educator) told us we had to talk to each other to work out what to do"

Finally, *Playdagogy* sessions were viewed as something 'different' to the usual school PE offer, which was seen to enhance enjoyment and engagement: *"It was cool because we get to do different things to usual PE"*. The focus on learning about impairment, disability and inclusion was identified as a unique factor here, with the discussion elements of Playdagogy – voicing opinions and listening to others - seen as important in this respect (*'it's not only about your opinion, it's other people's as well'*). We noted that educators were careful not to 'spotlight' any disabled children in group discussions. A member of the research team observed in their fieldnotes, however, that one educator had recalled how a disabled child chose a *Playdagogy* discussion to 'come out' as a disabled person and to discuss her experiences with her peers, who listened carefully and respectfully. The educator commented to the researcher that this had been a big surprise to him, since this child had, to his knowledge, never discussed her impairment or experiences of disability in such a way before. *Playdagogy* as implemented by this skilled educator, appeared to have become a 'safe space' for this type of open discussion and exchange.

Several children commented that they felt Playdagogy sessions were 'better' than their usual PE provision. One child commented that *'in PE we only learn about one or two things, but we learn about a variety of things (in Playdagogy)'* and another noted that *'it's more fun (than normal PE)*

because we do warm-ups in a different way, because we do it like how a Paralympian would do it!'. Notably, however, a few children stated that they preferred their usual PE lessons, as they could be more active and *'can play more games and be more competitive'*.

2. <u>Changing attitudes</u>

There was some evidence of a shift in attitudes towards/perceptions of disability and inclusion amongst the pupil participants. In the early stages of *Playdagogy,* many of the children expressed attitudes towards disability and disabled people that reflect previous research findings (Beckett 2015) and are potentially 'disabling' (e.g., seeing disabled people as needing help or being less capable). By the later sessions, however, there was more evidence of critical thinking and of enabling ideas emerging. For example, pupils were more likely to be reflecting upon their previous ideas about disability/disabled people, articulating disability as a social justice issue and expressing a desire to be more inclusive, empathetic and empowering of disabled peers and others:

> *'I learnt that just because someone is disabled it doesn't mean that they (are) totally different from you...like they're humans too.'*

> *'Being able to read Braille, it's clever because it is like the enigma code!'*

> *'I think (Playdagogy) is so you can put yourself in the...different ability people's shoes.'*

> *'It makes me think about all the times I've seen...disabled people being bullied by people... it makes me want to make them not feel ashamed to do <u>anything</u>'*

> *'Playdagogy helps people around the world...to understand what it feels like (to have an impairment) and they can, like stop making fun of people (with disabilities)'*

This is not to say that a transition in attitudes was uniformly present amongst the pupils interviewed. Certain ideas about disability, in particular 'personal tragedy model' (Oliver 1990) perspectives, were

persistent. Despite many positive findings, by the end of the *Playdagogy* programme, some young

people continued to describe disabled people in terms which implied a certain 'distancing' between

'them' and 'us' and on-going association of disability with deficit:

> *[What have you learnt from Playdagogy] 'When seeking to assist a disabled person it is*
>
> *important not to go too much into what's wrong with them and not overcrowd them'.*

Despite all *Playdagogy* sessions including disabled and non-disabled children, there appeared to be a

dominance of 'non-disabled' voice in these discussions, i.e., most conversations were driven by

children with no visible disability. The voices of disabled students (e.g., children with mobility

impairments, who were wheelchair users or who had one-to-one support) were noticeably

quiet/absent within activity sessions, as the following observation fieldnote comment shows:

> *Although the educators are making a point of asking the disabled children their views on certain*
>
> *questions, they rarely say more than a few words. The dominant voices are those of the non-*
>
> *disabled pupils – they seem more confident to speak*

Though we recognise that not all impairments are visible, such findings suggest that additional

thought might be needed regarding how best to facilitate/encourage opportunities for disabled

children's 'voice', without pressuring them to join in.

3. Transfer of learning

Variable practices amongst educators and/or schools when implementing *Playdagogy* (see above)

resulted in differences when it came to children's views concerning the transfer of learning. Some

children were able to talk quite confidently about how they might transfer understanding gained from

Playdagogy to other aspects of their school and day-to-day life. For example, some pupils talked

about applying new knowledge in other classes or in 'the wider school' environment:

"They're (the messages from Playdagogy) helpful when we're playing in the playground… (we can) take some of the ideas from them onto the playground and make them public"

Others noted that they had discussed key messages from *Playdagogy* with their parents when they got home, and one pupil talked about how they had replicated some of the activities/games at home with their siblings. Yet there were also children who struggled to see the relevance of *Playdagogy* beyond the activity sessions themselves and there we numerous responses of *'I don't know'* or *'I'm not really sure'* to questions asked about how they might apply their learning beyond the sessions. Data from observation notes indicates that the degree to which such 'transfer' was overtly discussed and reinforced by educators during *Playdagogy* sessions made a difference here:

When the pupils struggle to answer a question about the meaning of impairment (the educator) encourages them by saying 'think about what we've talked about over the past few weeks'

Certainly, where educators had a good knowledge of the pupils, the school and broader curriculum aims, pupils seemed to be more confident in articulating ideas regarding the transfer of learning.

Conclusion

The key issues set out above provide critical insights and understandings of a sport-based educational initiative in the area of disability – the *Playdagogy* programme – from the varied perspectives of different stakeholder groups. Our study identifies positive impacts and notable challenges relating to this innovative programme, and considers how it, and similar initiatives, might be (re)shaped to enhance the experiences and learning of those involved in delivering and undertaking activity sessions. Heeding calls for 'closer examination of the educational process and impact of SfD initiatives' (Rossi & Jeanes, 2016 484), in this final section we summarise the key

1   issues and assess the relevance of our earlier arguments for broader research and academic

2   literature.

3   Educational institutions have long focused on shaping the character, skills, and values of young

4   people (McCuaig et al., 2015). Moreover, the potential of sport, physical education, and activity to

5   support young people's positive development (e.g., Bailey et al., 2009) and facilitate wider social

6   goals such as in promoting social inclusion of marginalised populations (Coalter, 2013), is well-

7   evidenced. As discussed, *Playdagogy* sits at the intersection of these ideas and thus offers an

8   interesting opportunity to, as Rossi and Jeanes (2016) suggest, examine development as an

9   'educative process'. Our research identifies benefits in having a programme approach that rests

10   upon constructivist ideas of learning and provides opportunities for critical thinking (e.g.,

11   MacDonald, 2013). Moreover, the combination of games-based activity and discussion/debate was

12   valuable in creating spaces for learning about disability and inclusion; providing programme

13   practitioners and user-groups with opportunities to challenge (to varying degrees) normative

14   assumptions, disability stereotypes, and social biases (Beckett 2015). Our findings affirm that

15   facilitating learning within the affective domain in this way can enable more holistic educational

16   outcomes for young people within and through the subject of PE (Hooper et al., 2020). Further, they

17   suggest that *Playdagogy* has potential for application beyond sport-based learning, particularly in

18   the wider realm of play-based learning. Indeed, building on the concept of 'inclusive play' may be

19   particularly helpful when applying the principles and techniques of *Playdagogy* in different social

20   and educational contexts.

21   While there are several important and encouraging findings, there are aspects of *Playdagogy* that

22   require refining. For example, transfer of learning was identified as key to facilitating positive

23   impact but was an inconsistent feature of practice. As has been documented elsewhere, impact was

24   reliant on staff 'buy-in' and messages being shared across discipline areas (Armour & Sandford,

25   2013). Such findings reinforce the notion that the positive attitudes of physical educators can be a

1 critical factor in shaping meaningful experiences for pupils with disabilities (see also Haegele &

2 Sutherland, 2015). Moreover, while PE was certainly a pertinent subject-area for *Playdagogy*, it

3 was not the only context in which programme messages were relevant. This leads us to argue the

4 need for a programme such as *Playdagogy* to operate not in relative isolation within the educational

5 experiences of young people, but rather to be situated as part of an holistic, all-school approach to

6 education about disability. This finding chimes with wider points in the PE and SfD fields that

7 sport-based activities or interventions are not a 'panacea' or 'magic bullet' but must instead be

8 integrated within wider educational- or development-focused frameworks in order to have the most

9 impact (see Armour & Sandford, 2013; Giulianotti et al. 2019). Thus, we also argue for extending

10 the training element of *Playdagogy* significantly, to include school staff beyond those involved in

11 the actual delivery of activity sessions. We also found that educators and school staff need to have

12 an enhanced understanding of programme content and principles – and on the broader aims and

13 objectives of SfD initiatives – in order to ensure that the key programme messages and mission are

14 not underplayed or overlooked.

15 On *Playdagogy* specifically, we flag the need for enhanced training for educators on specific areas

16 of practice, particularly around helping young people to challenge deeply embedded normative

17 ideas around dis/ability (Goodley 2014). We hope that our findings will prompt the design of

18 additional games/activities, which seek to unsettle and transform the ability expectations that are

19 built into many sports and play-based activities (Giese & Ruin, 2018). Noting the tendency for

20 many SfD organisations or programmes to operate either independently or within their own practice

21 circle, we recommend that this development is undertaken in partnership with disabled people

22 (including young disabled people), their organisations and researchers in the interdisciplinary field

23 of Disability Studies. In this way, *Playdagogy* and other such programmes could benefit directly

24 through engaging and utilising the knowledge and skills of experts-by-experience and other

25 advocates of disabled people's inclusion, participation, and rights. Finally, we note some limitations

26 with *Playdagogy* with regard to facilitating disabled voices. In this respect, we contend that the

stated commitment to promoting inclusion was perhaps not fully realised in practice and, once

again, educators could benefit from additional training with regard to how best to facilitate this

aspect of their practice. Together, we suggest, such changes could enhance the impact of

Playdagogy – and similar initiatives – considerably.

In closing, we note that *Playdagogy* was not perfect; yet it had some positive impact. We believe it

should be acknowledged as an innovative and interesting effort to create a sport-based educative

programme focusing on disability/inclusion, to be employed within a school context. In this respect,

it is rare amongst SfD approaches, which have shown relatively limited engagement with work

focused on disability (Giulianotti et al. 2019; Howe, 2019). The learning outlined above has the

potential to build on this commendable starting point, and to support an iterative process of

programme development that can in turn shape future work in this area.

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1   Adapt Your City

2   60-minute session.

3   Aim: To help children to understand that the environment can be an obstacle if it is not adapted to
4   meet everyone's needs.

5   Sports activity: a relay race.

6   Round 1, teams have to complete a course as fast as possible (in both directions), navigating around
7   obstacles (e.g. cones) and 'check-points' (where they may be told to wait for a time) set out across
8   their gymnasium or playground. If they accidentally touch an obstacle, they have to complete the
9   course in a more complicated and difficult manner (e.g. hopping is suggested, but educators are
10   encouraged to consider children's abilities).

11   Round 2, there is a short break and a 'narrative' is introduced. Children are told to play the game
12   again, but this time imagining that the playground is a city street with obstacles to avoid. They are
13   asked what types of obstacles there might be on a street. The check points become the crossroads.
14   The children are then put into pairs. One child in each pair is blindfolded and the other becomes a
15   guide who must help them to navigate the obstacles.

16   Various options and variations are provided to the educator to extend the activity.

17   The session ends with a discussion. Children are asked to think about what type of impairment might
18   mean someone cannot see the obstacles in a street (i.e. visual impairment). They are asked what they
19   think someone who has visual impairment can and cannot do. They are asked to think about how the
20   guides assisted the person who was blindfolded and what other types of assistance (e.g. guide dog)
21   or assistive devices (e.g. white cane) a person who has a visual impairment might use to navigate
22   around a city. They are then encouraged to think about other types of assistive technology and
23   inclusive designs that help disabled people to be independent. The key message is that 'we' should
24   all be concerned to ensure that the environment is accessible and enables everyone to participate.

25   Figure 1: An example lesson plan summary from the *Playdagogy* programme.

DATES	RESEARCH PHASE	RESEARCH ACTIVITIES	NOTES
Jan 2015	Programme Overview	• Meeting with Cambridge House staff (including project leads)	Provided further background to the initiative and summarised activities to date. Clarified evaluation structure, timetable etc.
Jan – Mar 2015	Playdagogy Training	• Pre-Training Survey • Post-Training Survey • Observation of training delivery (n=2)	Each session began with participants completing the pre-training survey and closed with them completing the post-training survey. Training took place over one full day and included both classroom-based and practical sessions.
Apr – July 2015	School-based Research	• Participant observation of activity sessions in 6 schools (n = 10) • Focus group discussions with pupils (n=11 involving 50 pupils in total)	Observation of activity sessions were undertaken in 6 participating schools. Sessions were delivered by Playdagogy educators (usually in pairs) but sometime also involved school staff (teachers, support staff etc.). The intention was to visit each school twice, but this was not possible in all cases. Focus group discussions were undertaken with a sample of pupils following each activity session. On one occasion, a repeat session was undertaken to facilitate better group numbers. All participants were identified/selected by their teachers.
July – Aug 2015	Educator Interviews	• Individual interviews with adult stakeholders (n = 4)	These were in-depth interviews with key adults involved in the design and delivery of Playdagogy. Each interview was semi-structured and lasted between 45-60 minutes.
Sept – Nov 2015	Analysis	• Collation and analysis of data (from surveys, focus groups and interviews)	Analysis of quantifiable data via descriptive statistics and qualitative data via a broad thematic analysis.
Nov – Dec 2015	Reporting	• Writing up • Delivery of evaluation reports	Collation of findings and presentation via project reports for the funders.

1   Figure 2: Summary of *Playdagogy* Evaluation Phases

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[i] The identification of pupils to participate in *Playdagogy* was negotiated between Cambridge House and participating schools. The researchers were given no specific information relating to the disability status of pupils, though it is likely that schools will have drawn on criteria typically used to identify pupils as having a Special Educational Need or Disability (SEND) e.g., physical impairment, ADHD, autism or one-to-one support requirements. It was requested that, where possible, focus groups could comprise both disabled and non-disabled pupils.

[ii] Within this study, we wanted to be sensitive to the fact that previous research has shown that whilst some disabled children strive for a positive disability identity, others reject it and many have a fluid approach to this matter – their identities are, especially at primary-age an 'unfinished business' (Priestley et al, 1999). Given the sensitivities in this area, we opted to give children the power to self-identify, or not. Whilst one child 'came out' as disabled during a Playdagogy discussion (as discussed in the article) no children self-identified as part of focus group discussions.