The will for inclusion: Bothering the inclusion/exclusion discourses of sport


Abstract

Worldwide, governments extol the virtues of sport for the benefit of the individual and society. Indeed, for many, participation in sport provides pleasure, a sense of achievement, companionship, identity, health outcomes, income etc. but there is more to sport than this. Sport is an embodied cultural practice that is invested with several interrelated biopolitical purposes beyond individual fulfilment, such as health promotion, social cohesion, and nation-building. The discourses of sport, often articulating assumptions about sport's inherent worthiness, permeate contemporary societies such that it is nearly impossible to sit outside the circulation of these discourses. Schools, families, community organisations, businesses, then media, government policies and associated services are all invested in the idea that the population should participate in sport. Thus, there is an enduring and omnipotent belief that non-participants, those 'excluded' from sport engagement for whatever reasons, should become participants such that they are 'included'. Given this will for inclusion, we suggest that one is never fully excluded from the discourses of sport, although some individuals might be excluded from the practices of sport. This is the first position we take in this chapter. Our second position, following from the first, is that inclusion and exclusion discourses of sport are not a binary; that is, in practice, children and young people move across a spectrum of engagement that may take them to a point of non-participation from the sporting practice (but not from the discourses). We suggest that this spectrum of engagement involves the circulation of power between the young people and the sporting contexts in which they are included/excluded. Thus, data are presented following two themes: choosing exclusion, where children and young people resist sport participation and being excluded, where children and young people are 'othered' in sporting contexts resulting in them becoming non-participants. Regardless of the level of engagement, we conclude that most children and young people in developed countries operate within the discourses of sport though not necessarily through physical engagement.

Social exclusion vs. social inclusion

The social exclusion term was eventually imported from France by the New Labor government in the 1990s (Barry, 1998). However, for New Labor the socially excluded were regarded as the poor but not only the poor. They stated that the socially excluded often lack the necessary skills and capabilities to get and keep a job and are often cut off from the world of work and education. Likewise, inclusion was also incorporated in the official policy discourse of Albania in 2008, after which, the issue has gained considerable currency. However, Albania’s meet with the concept should also be understood in the broader context of policy discourse that surrounds official development agencies, and its considerable leverage in the development policy of Albania.