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Critical reflections on the design, delivery and analysis of education in sport for development

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ABSTRACT

The analysis presented within this article derived from my recent completion of a PhD by publication. My PhD provided me with the opportunity to synthesise my previous research, the literature that informed it and my 22 years' experience as an educator in a variety of settings. The key aspect of the PhD was a critical reflection of the design, delivery and analysis of education in SfD. In building upon my PhD findings and the literature that informed them this article will reflect upon the broader role and purpose of education in SfD. The rationale for the critical reflection is to determine, in a constantly evolving and developing sector, the role of education in addressing both internal and external challenges. The aim is to address the tensions, inconsistencies and contradictions that surround the successful implementation of education within SfD. Whilst the article is a reflection it is also a synthesis that brings together knowledge from across SfD, education, physical education and development studies to inform understanding of the process of education in SfD. Findings highlight that the current environment provides significant challenges for those who see education as the essential element in maintaining SfD as a critical project. To address this concern I argue that the successful realisation of intended programme outcomes in SfD requires the creation of a participatory, equitable, inclusive, critical and reflexive environment that utilises education as the key element in achieving incremental, realistic and positive social change.

Introduction

The analysis presented within this article builds upon my recent completion of a PhD by publication. My PhD provided me with the opportunity to synthesise my previous research, the literature that informed it and, my 22 years' experience as an educator in a variety of settings. The key aspect of the PhD was a critical reflection of the design, delivery and analysis of education in SfD. In relation to my own analysis I concur with Hartmann and Kwauk (2011, p. 298) who stated that for sport practitioners to be serious about development.

> they need to figure out what they believe development should be and construct sport programs and education initiatives designed specifically to address these ideals and objectives.

Whilst SfD is a multi-faceted area of practice and research I believe that creating clear connections between the educational aspect of SfD and intended programme outcomes is fundamental for the

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realisation of positive social change outcomes. Education in SfD therefore requires further consideration of how it is constructed and delivered.

A reason for an increased consideration of education and its construction is that 37% of SfD organisations have education as their primary focus (Svensson & Woods, 2017). Whilst it is central to many SfD projects, it has been argued that the role of education is not always communicated, understood, or implemented in the way that it is intended (Spaaij & Jeanes, 2013: Rossi & Jeanes, 2016; Schulenkorf et al., 2016). One of the concerns relates to curriculum that is developed outside of the communities in which it is delivered. Schinke et al. (2013) highlight that such a process creates a void between local challenges and outsider understanding. This is particularly problematic regarding inequitable representations of different histories and perspectives (Rossi & Jeanes, 2016; Darnell, 2014; Mwaanga & Prince, 2016 & Mwaanga & Adeosun, 2017).

In building upon my PhD findings and the literature that informed them this article will reflect upon the broader role and purpose of education in SfD. Whilst the article is reflective it is also an original synthesis that brings together knowledge from across SfD, education, physical education and development studies to inform our understanding of the process of education in SfD within both practice and research. The analysis is intended to open up dialogue regarding the design, delivery and analysis of education. It will do so from the understanding that to realise positive social change SfD organisations are required to directly address power inequities through specific and informed approaches to participant engagement and pedagogical development. In this I concur with Svensson and Woods (2017) who have called for researchers to determine how education in SfD can influence the lived reality of participants by delving deeper into the educational dynamics involved and any potential contextual differences.

The rationale for the critical reflection is to determine, in a constantly evolving and developing sector, the role of education in addressing both internal and external challenges. The aim is to address the tensions, inconsistencies and contradictions that surround the successful implementation of education within SfD. For example, the SfD sector is facing external challenges from a global socio-economic downturn. Due to austerity policies embraced by many western governments since 2010 it is generally accepted that financial contributions for aid have been reduced and the decline in contributions has either continued to decline and/or flattened out (Rossi & Jeanes, 2017). Further to this are concerns around the reduction in the sectors capacity to develop as a transformative social movement due to increased external influence. This is what Moustakas (2024) refers to as elite capture where an increased institutionalisation and/or professionalisation has reinforced and legitimised the interests and values of corporate actors which, are diametrically opposed to SfD projects that advocate for structural change. These issues in turn impact upon how SfD is funded, who gets the funding and the impact of this upon the capacity of SfD organisations to realise social change through education. I argue therefore, that it is imperative to delve deeper into the role of education in SfD and to further determine how it can be utilised to create a direct relationship between project outcomes, participant engagement, social justice and pedagogical developments.

To realise the aim I will in the first instance introduce myself and reflect critically upon how my own experiences have informed this reflection. Secondly, a background to the role of education within SfD will be presented. Following this section the methodology of critical reflection will be discussed. This will include the process of reflexivity, the parameters for the study, including a description of the literature search process and thematic analysis. The analysis section will explore four key aspects of education within SfD and determine the way in which it has been designed, delivered and analysed up to this point. Finally, a summary will determine what I have learned from this process and present informed guidance on how education practice can be enhanced within SfD.

Who am I?

At this stage I believe that it is important for me to introduce myself. My personal and professional reflections do not legitimate my arguments, they do however, provide my background and highlight

how my knowledge and experience within education and SfD have informed and shaped the critical reflections. In developing these reflections, I acknowledge the influence of my research and professional experiences alongside my own perspectives on the passing of time. These include, but are not limited to, significant political, professional and personal changes that have occurred over my 22 years as an educator across a variety of settings.

My original engagement with education research sought to address the issue of inequity through a focus on inclusion and social justice. In concurrence with Ainscow (1999) I believe that successful inclusion rests upon demonstrating positive attitudes and a commitment to inclusion whilst embedding inclusive values as an integral aspect of pedagogical practice. To further develop my understanding of inclusion I explored the concept of social justice. The value in exploring social justice was to determine its potential to remedy disadvantage through advocating for a fairer distribution of opportunities and resources. Whether a society is just or unjust depends on the way that individuals and institutions deal with inequity. Acknowledging our own fortune increases our understanding of, and empathy for, others, the circumstances in which they exist and the structural factors which reinforce inequity (Rawls, 1971). I contend that to realise social justice requires exploring the relationship between individual awareness and structural reform. It is this perspective that continues to inform my understanding of inequity, inclusion and social justice in education.

My professional and research experiences in education were, from my perspective, a natural starting point for the study of education within a SfD context. In reflecting on SfD, I consider sport in its broadest sense to be a political project. In this context, there is a requirement to focus on how sport can be used to address wider social issues whilst being fully aware of how poorly designed interventions reinforce the very issue they are seeking to resolve (Haudenhuyse et al., 2013). These concerns resonate with my own experience of designing and delivering a SfD project in Cape Town, South Africa. It was a challenging experience and one that ultimately failed to fully deliver on its intended objectives. The key issue during the development of the organisation was how both the pedagogical and methodological approach failed to connect with the transformational aim and objectives of the project (Meir, 2017). From the experience of designing and delivering a SfD project I wanted to better understand pedagogical approaches utilised within SfD, their impact on participants and, their capacity to deliver positive social change outcomes. This understanding manifested itself in an exploration of the disparity that exists between educational intentions, programme design and participant outcomes. Through this exploration I have researched whether increased participant engagement in project design can enhance social cohesion as well as the value of critical pedagogy; particularly dialogical action in realising intended project outcomes (Meir & Fletcher, 2019; Meir, 2022). It is my intention to build on my understanding of education and SfD and through critical reflection, explore how the process of curriculum design and pedagogical practice can be enhanced. The first step in this process is to present a background to the role of education in SfD.

Background

SfD in diverse locations and contexts is inevitably affected by wider social, historical, and cultural factors. SfD organisations and local actors are connected to differing aspects of local cultural contexts yet are also affected both directly and indirectly by wider forces (Lindsey & Grattan, 2012). I contend that these factors have been reinforced through curriculum design. In many instances education is delivered through manuals and practices that reinforce an unequal relationship regarding knowledge and how that knowledge is applied in practice (McSweeney et al., 2019). Such concerns reinforce the concept of development agencies shaping what SfD is (Nicholls et al., 2010).

In reflecting upon Smith's (1992) statement that indigenous communities were trapped within a narrow range of existing mainstream schooling options Stewart-Withers et al. (2023) contend that three decades on, similar criticisms could be attributed to SfD initiatives with/for Indigenous communities. This critique reflects the position that SfD practise remains predominantly entrenched within traditional top-down approaches to development that reduce capacity to understand SfD

participants cultural lives and the ways in which they interpret and engage with their experience (Collison & Marchesseault, 2016; Rossi & Jeanes, 2017). Transitioning away from top-down development towards increased participant engagement requires a shift towards valuing participant knowledge, experience and understanding. This shift is seen as critical for achieving an informed and contextual understanding of SfD (Spaaij et al., 2017). Informed and contextual understandings are reinforced through the recognition of local knowledge as valid knowledge and encouraging participants to contribute ideas, information and resources. However, developing SfD programmes in a way that enables participants to have a sense of ownership and to collaborate in the development of projects that directly affect them is a significant challenge to the status quo (Forde et al., 2023). From a sporting perspective this can be understood through SfD providers ignoring culturally relevant, land-based and traditional games due to the hegemony within the field of Western sport (Fabian & Giles, 2023). Ultimately, to ensure genuine engagement and ownership 'Indigenous inclusion need to be understood alongside the activism and advocacy of Indigenous sport leaders' (Forde et al., 2024, p. 10). Approaching the development of SfD collaboratively positions participants as the experts in their own experiences. Positioning participants in this way gives them control over how those experiences should be framed and fosters a sense of ownership. It also enables them to become valued collaborators throughout the process (Nicholls et al., 2010; Schinke et al., 2013; Hayhurst et al., 2016; Mwaanga & Adeosun, 2017; Middleton et al., 2022).

A further way of embedding participant engagement within SfD practice is in the development and delivery of equitable and inclusive programmes. Equity considers the social justice ramifications of education in relation to fairness, justness, and impartiality (Jacob & Holsinger, 2009). In support of an equitable approach to education, inclusion is 'the primary mechanism to break the structural inequalities that impede sustainable development and prevent social cohesion' (UNESCO, 2015, p. 20). An inclusive approach can provide an in-built flexibility that gives practitioners freedom to adapt their working methods to achieve maximum impact and relevance within a specific context (UNESCO, 2015).

The importance of equity and inclusion have been reinforced through 'Transforming our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development' (UNESCO, 2015). Within the 2030 Agenda there is no specific Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) for sport. The United Nations does however, recognise that sport is an important enabler of sustainable development through its promotion of tolerance and respect alongside its contribution to gender equality, education, social inclusion, and health. A significant goal for SfD is SDG4: 'Ensure Inclusive and Equitable Quality Education and Promote Lifelong Learning Opportunities for All'. Education is a central part of SDG4 which reinforces issues around inclusion, lifelong learning, and relevant and effective learning outcomes through appropriate pedagogical implementation.

A pedagogy that can address the requirements of SDG4 is critical pedagogy. Implementing critical pedagogy within SfD education can enable political, social, and economic factors to be addressed and, challenge the practices that are taken for granted within dominant culture and conventional educational practice (Macedo, 1994; Gruenewald, 2003). The relevance of critical pedagogy is reinforced by UNESCO (2016, p. 18) that state that the principles of equity and inclusion are not only about ensuring access to education but also about having 'pedagogies that enable students to thrive, understand their realities and to work for a more just society'.

A significant aspect of critical pedagogy is praxis which is a response to a real situation where we act based on our understanding and commitment to transformation (Carr & Kemmis, 1986). For myself this process occurred throughout the project that was developed and analysed in Meir and Fletcher (2019). The project worked with young people to address concerns around social cohesion through a co-designed sport project. Due to the participatory nature of the project the parameters continuously evolved and required engagement with praxis at different stages of development to reinforce my understanding of, and commitment to, the transformative aspects of the project.

   In the context of education in SfD praxis involves problem identification and analysis, a plan of action to address the problem, the implementation of the plan and, an analysis and evaluation of the action (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008). Knowledge emerges through invention and re-invention and the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue with each other (Freire, 1972). This inquiry involves dialogue to understand critically the social structures and ideologies that shape and control our daily lives and practices (Torres & Mercado, 2004). Ultimately, praxis refers to the concrete work of action, critical reflection and a commitment to transformative action (Freire, 1976). In the context of praxis, the following section will describe the process of critical reflection I have undertaken through both the completion of my PhD and the development of this article.

Methodology

Critical reflection and reflexivity

Critical reflection is a way of researching personal practice or experience in order to develop our understandings of ourselves as knowers or makers of knowledge. This in turn helps us make specific connections between ourselves as individuals and our broader social, cultural and structural environment. We do this by challenging the assumptions on which our beliefs and values have developed, our ability to be transformative and whether we are open to fundamental changes in our perspective (Mezirow, 1990; Cranton, 1996; Fook, 2015). Undertaking such a process requires an understanding of our experiences in the social context and a willingness to examine the assumptions that underpin and enhance our practice (Pockett et al., 2011; Hickson, 2011; Fook, 2015). Improving our practice through critical reflection requires engagement with varying ways of understanding situations, to be conscious of dominant discourses and power relations and, the ways in which problems and issues are framed (Pockett et al., 2011).

   In developing my understanding of critical reflection I was influenced by the work of Cornwall and Brock (2005) and their critique of buzzwords in development policy; Hartmann and Kwauk (2011) and their overview, critique and reconstruction of SfD; Whitley and Johnson (2015) and their confessional tales of using a community-based participatory approach; Collison et al. (2016) and their critical reflections on conducting cross-cultural comparative research, and Nicholls (2009) exploration of critical reflexive methods in research and indigenous participation. In building upon the approaches undertaken within this research the form of critical reflection employed within this study is that of reflexivity. To be reflexive we need to keep asking critical questions that challenge assumptions that underpin current practices and be aware of the many and varied ways in which we might create, or at least influence, the type of knowledge we use (Fook, 2015; Penney et al., 2018).

   In conducting this critical reflection I utilised three distinct but interrelated forms of reflexivity; personal, functional, and disciplinary (Finlay & Gough, 2003). In undertaking the initial critical reflection during my PhD I engaged in personal reflexivity. Through this process I became aware of myself as unfinished; of being incomplete as a researcher. A someone who transitioned to working at a university at the age of 40 without a PhD there were significant gaps in my knowledge and experience. These gaps were specifically evident within the processes of developing research projects and my positionality. My unfinished character necessitated a continuous process of praxis and an understanding of how to continue my development (Freire, 1972). The process of functional reflection enabled me to enhance my knowledge of education and SfD through developing a deeper understanding of the literature and its impact on both my research and the wider field. Through developing the critical reflections disciplinary reflexivity enabled me to question the distinction between facts and values and challenge widely held perspectives (Schuurman, 2009). Ultimately, the intention of the reflexive process was to challenge certain perspectives of the purpose and design of education in SfD (facts) and, to develop alternative perspectives that promote a

participatory, inclusive, dialogical and critical future (values). Further to this, it was important for me to reflect upon the additional political and relational layers of reflexivity required to enable a critical evaluation of the role of education in SfD.

Method: setting the parameters

In undertaking a critical reflection of my published research, the literature that has informed it and my professional experiences, four themes were generated. The themes are: (1) participant engagement; (2) addressing inequity through inclusion and social justice; (3) critical pedagogy, and (4) participant outcomes and praxis. The generation of those themes was determined through the following linear process.

A fundamental requirement of my PhD process was to reflect upon the key aspects of my research and professional experience in SfD and education. Ultimately, I was required to synthesise those aspects into a cohesive narrative and explore how they could increase understanding of how education could be designed, delivered and analysed within SfD. For example, I determined that inclusion continuously informs my thinking on both SfD and education. Through reflecting on the influence of inclusion and its impact, I explored its connection with social justice and concluded that inclusion and social justice are interconnected; one cannot be realised without the other. Whilst the concepts of inclusion and social justice are fundamental to the development of equitable education they should also be considered as fundamental elements of SfD programming more broadly. Secondly, I returned to the literature that had informed my work to reinforce the connections between the research and my personal and professional reflections. For example my re-engagement with the literature reinforced my understanding that (1) the development and realisation of relevant programme outcomes in SfD are directly connected to participant engagement and, (2) a pedagogy is required to enable participants to understand their lived reality and engage collectively in the realisation of positive social change.

Finally, I conducted a further review of the literature to reinforce my understanding. I started the process with a review of the literature on participant engagement and SfD. A variety of search terms alongside sport for development (I also employed alternative search terms to SfD including sport in development, sport and development and sport for development and peace) were employed. These were (1) participatory action research; (2) community based participatory approach; (3) participatory research and, (4) participant engagement. Initial search through SportDiscus generated n = 48 articles. Once exclusion criteria of academic journals date range from 2010 to 2024 (date range was employed to ensure that the literature was as up to date as possible considering SfD is a relatively new field of research with constantly evolving perspectives) and English language were applied n = 37 remained. Upon assessing the articles relevance n = 22 were removed due to not relating specifically to SfD. A further n = 13 articles were removed due to either being duplicates or already having been utilised within my research. This left n = 9 remaining. When combined with the existing n = 9 articles already utilised within my research this left a total of n = 18 articles. The same process was undertaken for the search on SfD and critical pedagogy. The original n = 11 articles found were reduced to 2. When combined with my existing articles n = 14 articles were utilised to inform the reflection.

The reinforcement of addressing inequity through inclusion and social justice as a key theme within this reflection was determined not by the extensive literature within SfD but by the lack of it. Whilst there is research that focuses on social inclusion within SfD there are limited studies which specifically incorporate inclusion and social justice in an educational context. To address this limitation I utilised literature within physical education as in relation to inclusive education it is a more established and extensive field of research than that of SfD. The intention was to provide new and cross disciplinary perspectives for SfD scholars and practitioners. Approaching it this way allowed me to build upon the understanding that I have generated through my education research and professional experience and apply it to the context of SfD. I contend that the principles

of equity, inclusion or social justice are fundamental to the development of education and therefore should be fundamental to the development of education in SfD.

Finally, the theme of participant outcomes and praxis was generated through the requirement to synthesise the key elements from my reflections and the wider literature. To synthesise the different aspects of the critical reflections required a concept that would enable my personal reflections and the analysis of the literature across participant engagement, inclusion for social justice and critical pedagogy to be framed reflexively and critically. The work of Wright et al. (2016) was important to my awareness of the role of praxis in improving education and increasing engagement in SfD. Through engaging with the concept of praxis I was able to critically reflect upon my own knowledge, understanding and practice. Ultimately, this reflective process enabled a critical exploration of the relationship between participant engagement, inclusion, social justice and critical pedagogy.

Critical reflections

The following critical and thematic reflections are structured in a way that enables me to (1) critically reflect on the theme in the context of SfD and education; (2) personally reflect on my experiences and understanding of the theme and, (3) explore future possibilities for enhancing education in SfD.

Critical reflection 1: participant engagement

There are two fundamental aspects of participant engagement within SfD. These are (1) the engagement of participants in the design and development of programmes and, (2) the engagement of participants within the research process. The following section will bring these two different elements together to explore the challenges and the potential for participant engagement to inform the design, delivery and analysis of education within SfD.

In the context of collaborative design and delivery Whitley et al. (2022) state SfD programmes should be based upon participant needs, experiences and knowledge and, aligned to development objectives that are valued by the community. The development of SfD programmes in this way can provide opportunities for participants to develop skills that are important within their community and help them to navigate and disrupt systemic and structural inequalities (Hayhurst et al., 2016). To do so, programmes should utilise existing resources with the understanding that people, programmes and communities are complex, dynamic and integrated (Rossi & Jeanes, 2017; Whitley et al., 2022).

One of those resources is academic researchers and how they are utilised in the design and analysis of programmes. Currently, research that engages with the concept of participant engagement in SfD generally does so through a methodological focus. This approach has focused upon conducting and analysing different forms of participatory research through the lens of the researcher themselves. The lens has been focused inwards to look at the role of the researcher and their attempts to mitigate against issues such as their outsider status and the inevitable power disparities that their role engenders. In undertaking this work there has been a significant variety of participatory methodologies employed. For example, Participatory Action Research (Smith et al., 2023); Community Based Participatory Action Research (Middleton et al., 2022); Transnational Postcolonial Feminist Participatory Action Research (Hayhurst et al., 2016) and, Participatory Social Interaction Research (Collison & Marchesseault, 2016).

The knowledge and understanding generated from this work has been fundamental in shaping collective understandings of how to conduct participatory research yet also leaves unanswered questions in relation to genuine participatory engagement with regard to driving and shaping educational content at the outset of projects by those who participate within them. There are some notable exceptions to this, see Luguetti et al. (2022) amongst others, whose youth participatory action research (YPAR) approach challenges traditional research by privileging the co-production

of knowledge with young people. However, I contend that an increased exploration of the utilisation and engagement of participants in the development of curriculum at the outset of SfD programmes would enhance our understanding of how to develop truly participatory and critical approaches to education in SfD. One way to do so is through researchers and participants being collaboratively involved in the design and development of programme curriculum from the beginning. Whilst there would be numerous advantages in such a position there remain significant challenges in its realisation.

The work of Sherry et al. (2017) is important in understanding these challenges. They state that the engagement of researchers in the design and development of SfD programmes is uncommon. The reasons for this is that engagement between programmes and researchers is mainly retrospective, with research mainly considered as an afterthought as opposed to being 'part of a holistic and strategic process to understand initial programme design and ongoing implementation' (Sherry et al., 2017, p. 75). In this context it is understandable that researchers have been predominantly focused on the analysis of projects rather than the utilisation of participatory methodologies to inform and analyse their development. A key transition therefore, is to determine ways in which we as researchers can increase our engagement with projects and their participants from the start through specific participatory methodologies that meet the educational requirements of SfD organisations and the communities in which their programmes are delivered.

Personal and professional reflections

My own experience of utilising participatory research involved both calling for, and later applying, Participatory Action Research (PAR) as a methodology best suited for SfD research. The principles of PAR were not evident in my initial study of a SfD programme in Cape Town. The initial methodology within Meir (2017) was not participatory. Local actors were engaged through a level of shallow participation. I controlled this process and the participants were confined to taking part in enquiries rather than contributing to the project from the beginning. In applying PAR in Meir and Fletcher (2019), we positioned local actors at the centre of the process to utilise their experiences and to resolve identified issues independently and through consultation. This created a shifting power dynamic and ensured that the project was contextually informed and relevant (Sherry & Schulenkorf, 2016; Spaaij et al., 2017; Meir & Fletcher, 2019).

My transition to, and application of PAR, reinforced my belief in participatory research for analysing SfD programmes and the process of education within them. I do acknowledge the unique nature of individual SfD project analysis and therefore, the wide variety of different participatory approaches that can be applied. As Spaaij et al. (2017) state, participatory research is not unified and much research that claims to be participatory can fall short in practice. I include my own research in this bracket and acknowledge the need for critical reflection on the planned and unintended consequences of participatory research in SfD alongside the need to unpack the assumption that there will always be positive outcomes (Smith et al., 2023).

Future possibilities for enhancing education in SfD through participant engagement

Hayhurst et al. (2016) highlight their concerns about the broader social, political, historical and economic systems SfD programmes work within and the ways in which the systems influence their mandates. Such concerns are reinforced by stakeholders having different goals, reasons for and, reservations about, participation (Whitley & Johnson, 2015). In this context participant engagement and programme design remain complex particularly when individuals and communities are wary of outsiders (individuals and organisations) with many perceiving SfD through a critical lens (Seiler & Chepyator-Thomson, 2024).

There remain significant challenges in navigating multiple and disparate cultures and ethical issues related to power, participation and relationships when undertaking participatory research (Rich et al., 2024b). These challenges include methodological and ethical tensions alongside the requirement for long term commitments, partnerships and relationships (Enderle (Mohammadi) &

Mashreghi, 2022; Rich et al., 2024a; Rich et al., 2024b). Undertaking participatory research requires the understanding that tension will always exist (Dao, 2020). For example Fitzgerald et al. (2021) stated that their plans for working with research participants did not always materialise as intended and recognised that interactions can create uncertainty and a need to react quickly to emerging and different situations. The way in which these responses occur is not straightforward and can be messy. These challenges are more likely to be resolved through equitable partnerships that privilege formerly subjugated knowledge. Equitable partnerships would allow control to be extended to participants beyond the initial stage of negotiation; creating opportunities for researchers and participants to make a significant contribution to the design and development of educational practice and outcomes (Nicholls, 2009; Nicholls et al., 2010; Meir, 2022).

Whilst this article does not have the scope to delve deeply into different methodological approaches and the methods utilised to capture data within them Spaaij et al. (2017) describe an approach which provides a clear framework and fits with the critical intentions of this article. They propose that participatory research can be conceptualised along three inter-related dimensions; (1) the degree of local participation which refers to the extent to which those who are part of the research process are actively involved across all phases of the research (2); the degree of power shifting which requires that researchers find a way to put participants within the centre of the process and, (3) the degree of reflexivity which enables the building of mutually beneficial and respectful relationships. The following scholarship provides reference points for different methods which would complement this approach: pre-evaluation process; community mapping; reflective surveys; stories for change and, photographic/videographic journal (Nicholls et al., 2010; Whitley & Johnson, 2015; Spaaij et al., 2017). It is important to acknowledge however that as technology develops so too will the methods that can be employed. The capacity for different forms of data capture within participatory research will evolve and change over time (*see* Rich et al., 2024b).

Regardless of the approach the process has to be flexible, dynamic and adaptable through reflections on the knowledge being gained (Spaaij et al., 2017). Project goals and outcomes will continuously shift and addressing these shifts will require consistent, open and honest communication (Whitley & Johnson, 2015). Such a process would embrace inclusive and social justice principles and increase the likelihood of inequity being addressed.

Critical reflection 2: addressing inequity through inclusion and social justice

To further analyse the ways in which inequity can be addressed in SfD it is important to explore the complexity associated with defining equity. The rationale for seeking clarity in defining equity is that it is often conflated with the concept of equality, yet equity must include, and at the same time transcend equality. As equity also includes the concept of social justice it can remove itself from the constraints of equality. The inclusion of social justice in defining equity is based upon the understanding that equality is not necessarily fair (Castelli et al., 2012). Therefore, any analysis of equity should be approached from an understanding that equity, to a large extent, cannot be separated from wider socio-economic contexts as it is related to various aspects of the life of a community (Castelli et al., 2012). Further to this Kearney (2022) states that equitable education ensures that personal and social circumstances such as disability and socio-economic background are not obstacles to access, participation, and achievement. In building upon these statements I define equitable education as a fair, inclusive and just process that transcends equality to address specific social and educational challenges faced by individuals with regard to access, participation and achievement. Addressing existing inequities requires SfD organisations to realise the impact of power disparities and the disjuncture between policy intentions and the reality of educational practice. It also requires an understanding that to be equitable SfD organisations must be inclusive.

Whilst I am an advocate for inclusion I do so with the caveat that inclusion is, in many ways, a misunderstood and misused concept that has, to some degree, become a taken for granted assumption (Atkins, 2016). Between the incorporation of inclusion within policy and its possible enactment

as practice rest a host of complicated and compounding factors. Further to this Liasidou (2012) described inclusion as a semantic chameleon due to the multiple meanings associated to the term and the way in which those meanings are interpreted by different people in different contexts. This notion reflects the position outlined by Dyson (2005) in that inclusion is a fundamental principle for some, but no more than convenient language for others. The danger is that SfD and the educational aims within it questionably becomes an opportunity for those already with a sense of agency, the talented and the targeted (Collison et al., 2016).

Personal and professional reflections

In relation to connecting equity with partnership working and power disparities Meir (2017) provides a relevant example. The project analysed within the article was developed in partnership with two governmental departments in Cape Town. The partnership was mutually beneficial and focused on implementation and programme delivery. There were, however complexities due to multi-level alliances that incorporated the organisation, its funder, and the local governmental departments. Whilst partnerships within the project should have been based upon the facilitation of collaborative work, disparities were reinforced through differentiated power relations and patronage within, and across, the different government departments (Adams & Harris, 2014; Giulianotti et al., 2016). The conflicting dynamics evident within the partnership were further influenced by the political landscape in Cape Town and notable tensions around legitimacy, autonomy, power imbalances and resource dependency (Collison et al., 2016). This experience reinforced my understanding of the complexities involved in partnership working and the challenges associated with developing equitable, inclusive and socially just curriculum within a SfD project.

My understanding the challenges of equity and social justice were enhanced through reflections in Meir and Fletcher (2020) in relation to policy and, Meir (2022) in relation to pedagogy. Findings concurred with the argument presented by Heyneman and Bommi (2016) in that for SfD projects to develop inclusive and equitable education requires a shift from solely providing access to a project to providing an equitable, inclusive and socially just education. The rationale for this focus is that social justice teaching strategies are enabled and constrained by the contexts in which they are practised (Gerdin et al., 2019). Ultimately, to realise social justice principles in SfD requires circumnavigating the complex processes of what makes education inequitable and exclusive (Wilson-Strydom & Okkolin, 2016).

Future possibilities for enhancing education in SfD through equity, inclusion and social justice

To develop genuine inclusive education within SfD requires an exploration of the opportunities and constraints associated with historical, economic, social, political, and cultural factors. Progression of inclusion is not solely a matter of access or as an act of accomplishment but rather as an on-going process that must be continuously and routinely achieved (Evans, 2014). Regarding the continuous process of inclusion I concur with Penney et al. (2018) who state that to move beyond narrow and potentially exclusive conceptions of inclusion and social justice requires a willingness to question assumptions that underpin the established norms of practice that reinforce inequities. Time therefore, should be spent examining the philosophical context for inclusion in SfD and articulating a clear rationale for inclusive education. A rationale that moves beyond adaption to understand how pedagogy and practice can become transformational through shared endeavour in which the voices of all participants are heard (Petrie et al., 2018).

To work towards positive social change through education within SfD requires organisations to explore the potential within equitable and symbiotic relationships (Black, 2017). An acceptance of symbiosis does not mean an acceptance of unequal symbiosis. When opportunities present themselves, local capabilities and interests can be achieved through informal operations of local SfD organisations. Through equalising power within SfD organisations participants can be developed as active social agents in the realisation of project outcomes through education. A collaborative

and dialogical approach to curriculum development and pedagogy creates the opportunity to resist unequal symbiosis and deliver equitable, inclusive, and socially just education within SfD.

Critical reflection 3: critical pedagogy

Pedagogy is not singular and practitioners in any educational setting implement any new pedagogical recommendations in a range of ways. These recommendations are impacted by factors such as individual circumstances, experience, status and participant age, gender etc. (Thompson, 2013). Considering these variables enables a more complete understanding of where different pedagogies work, how they work and with whom (Schweisfurth, 2011). Knowledge of how and where to apply different pedagogical strategies in SfD projects is based on the understanding that in line with the development of inclusive practice, embedding pedagogical change is a process. This process requires SfD organisations and their practitioners to be educated in, and persuaded of, the value of alternative pedagogical approaches for their participants alongside how best to communicate that value to donors regarding policy alignment.

In SfD critical pedagogy has been utilised to explore the influence of power on how knowledge is produced, distributed, and consumed alongside its potential contribution to the transformative potential of education in SfD (Spaaij & Jeanes, 2013; Mwaanga & Prince, 2016; Spaaij et al., 2016). Further examples of critical pedagogy in SfD scholarship include the constraints to transformative action and the wider challenges that educators face within SfD (Oxford & Spaaij, 2017; Hayhurst et al., 2016); creative and dialogic pedagogies in sport education (Knijnik et al., 2019); the tension that exists between traditional pedagogical approaches and the ideals of critical pedagogy (Wright et al., 2016); a critical examination of pedagogies implemented with young people with refugee backgrounds in sport (Hudson et al., 2023) and, addressing power disparities, reduced local democratisation and rising inequalities within education (Knijnik & Luguetti, 2021). Despite these advances in scholarship, I contend that further analyses of critical pedagogy, particularly its application in practice are required as the 'educational elements of SfD are central to the movements ability to contribute to sustainable development and just as importantly social justice ambitions' (Rossi & Jeanes, 2016, p. 493).

Personal and professional reflections

My interest in pedagogy within SfD derives from the understanding that SfD utilises sport to address wider social issues and contribute to different development circumstances and contexts (Levermore, 2008). It is this understanding of SfD, particularly its capacity to contribute to educational objectives, that influenced my decision to develop my own SfD project in Cape Town. On reflection, the pedagogical approach applied within the project was didactic. Education was done to participants rather than with. There was a lack of opportunity for dialogue and collaboration for participants in terms of their opportunity to shape pedagogy (Mwaanga & Prince, 2016). I accept the flaws in the approach but contend that critically reflecting upon those flaws has helped to develop my understanding of how dialogical and critical approaches to education within SfD can be applied.

In Meir (2022) I analysed critical pedagogy through Freire's (1972) concept of dialogical and anti-dialogical action. Freire (1972) argued that effective dialogical action supports the liberation of people through their own reflection and actions upon their world to change it rather than as an act of dominance or oppression. Dialogue facilitates deep learning experiences and is realised through participation in constructive discourse. The intention is to enable participants to share their experiences and to use the experiences of others to develop their understanding of their own views, opinions, and assumptions and how these are influenced (Brown, 2014). I believe that utilising dialogical action in my own practice has enabled me to create space for critical reflection and participant voice that is rooted in, and informed by, local contexts. Such a space enables stimulating socio-critical reflections and the facilitation of historically, politically, and socially aware citizens (Wright et al., 2016).

Future developments for enhancing education in SfD through critical pedagogy

Whilst I advocate for a dialogical and critical pedagogy in SfD there requires an awareness of the challenges of its application beyond theoretical understanding and into practical reality. In his reflections on critical pedagogy in physical education Tinning (2002) advocated for an incremental and modest critical pedagogy as an orientated way of thinking about what claims can be made in the name of pedagogy. A modest pedagogy is about being circumspect in what we can claim to know and acting without certainty regarding pedagogical claims about the facilitation of emancipatory outcomes. Acting without certainty is particularly relevant in developing understanding as to how critical pedagogy can be utilised in SfD.

To increase the likelihood of SfD organisations successfully implementing critical pedagogy, the intention should be to work incrementally and to aim for partial change. This is known as ritual appropriation, where new practices are accepted and incorporated within the old. Practice is redefined to ensure continuity despite those changes. There is a clear connection between the old and the new; they are separate, but they mutually affect one another (Todd, 2004). However, the incremental nature of ritual appropriation has been critiqued as too narrow. The focus on change is at a small scale and does not demonstrate that the change is imperative or hold organisations or people accountable for change (Welton et al., 2018). Whilst acknowledging the narrow focus of incremental change there is a need for SfD organisations to take time for deliberation, reflection, and experimentation in recognising that any change is likely to require local adaptation and adjustment (Stouten et al., 2018). To overcome the narrow and small-scale aspects within ritual appropriation, SfD organisations would need to be diligent in identifying inequities and tracking progress across time (Curry-Stevens, 2022).

In terms of applying critical pedagogy in SfD to facilitate a transformative approach the evidence is honest in its capacity to realise transformational outcomes and positive about the incremental nature of its application. Firstly, Spaaij et al. (2016) qualitative study on programmes in Kenya and Cameroon showed the complexities of designing and implementing critical pedagogy in a SfD context and, in particular, the fact that the transformation experienced by participants was generally small-scale and typically occurred at an individual or interpersonal level. Secondly Nols et al. (2018) exploration of the pedagogy of an urban SfD initiative in Belgium found that whilst the SfD initiative was considerable distance from fully-fledged critical pedagogy, the young people nonetheless experience it as a space where they could be themselves, feel at home, gain respect, learn to reflect and form opinions and be temporarily freed from their daily struggles. Whilst there are no specific examples from within SfD of the use of ritual appropriation I would argue that examples outlined above reinforce the value of an incremental approach. Some of the limitations evidenced highlight the need for patience and show that through incrementalism critical pedagogy can be applied successfully if given the time to do so.

I contend that being rational and honest through embracing the principle of ritual appropriation in both rhetoric and practice would impact positively on the design and implementation of pedagogy in SfD. The rationale for this perspective is that an incremental approach is more likely to engage those who find the concept of critical pedagogy a challenge; personally and professionally. Tinning (2020) suggests that social reform is best achieved through incremental change stimulated by conflict and contestation over time. Essential to that conflict and contestation is rationality and reason. Embracing dialogue, negotiation and collaboration rationally between organisations, researchers, participants and the wider community is a starting point for the incremental development of a more transformative approach (Fitzpatrick, 2019). Getting this balance right is fundamental for organisations, practitioners and scholars who seek to maintain the critical project in SfD and realise transformative participant outcomes.

Critical reflection 4: *participant outcomes and praxis*

Whilst critical reflection is essential, providing opportunities for both practitioners and participants to act upon these reflections is fundamental to the development of equitable, inclusive and transformative

practice. This process is described by Freire (1972) as praxis which is defined as the capacity to reflect and act upon the world in order that it can be transformed. Human nature is expressed through intentional, reflective and meaningful activity that is situated within dynamic historical and cultural contexts (Freire, 1972). Praxis is important when addressing the value of intended education outcomes within SfD. As Svensson and Woods (2017) state, developing valid and appropriate outcomes requires an in-depth exploration of the realities faced by SfD organisations in evolving their education practices. Praxis, in this context, is the concrete work of understanding and changing conditions through further action, critical reflection, and a commitment to transformative action (Freire, 1976).

Personal reflections

My transition from advocating PAR in Meir (2017) and applying it in Meir and Fletcher (2019) was a process of praxis. Engaging with PAR through praxis involved problem identification and analysis, a plan of action to address the problem, the implementation of the plan and an analysis and evaluation of the action (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008). The process involved dialogue between me as the researcher, practitioners and community members to understand critically the social structures and ideologies that shaped and controlled their daily lives and practices (Torres & Mercado, 2004). Such dialogue should be considered a fundamental practice regarding education within SfD to address ongoing concerns about engagement, equity, inclusion, and pedagogy. Specifically in relation to pedagogy, this dialogue would focus on the topics and pedagogical models that underpin programmes as the 'mere presence of educational values or educational programming does not guarantee positive outcomes' (Svensson et al., 2016, p. 510).

Future developments for enhancing education in SfD through praxis

Engagement in praxis requires SfD organisations to analyse how their project aligns with or diverges/resists from the histories and structures of inequality and what can contribute towards changing those structures (Darnell et al., 2018; Darnell & Millington, 2019). Critical reflection through praxis is particularly relevant in understanding the use of knowledge in SfD, especially with respect to the intersections of class, race and gender that are inherent within SfD settings (McSweeney et al., 2019). In developing an understanding of how this would work in practice, I concur with Wright et al. (2016) in that SfD organisations and practitioners should create spaces for praxis on issues of justice, equity, and power through a critical and transformative approach. Finding space for praxis requires the creation of a culture where participants inform practice and are provided with the opportunity to challenge dominant ideas and perspectives. For example Ahamd (2021) discussed monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) specifically in relation to sport, gender and development. They identified the possibility, through creating space for praxis, of well-designed, collaborative and bespoke MEL systems that are meaningful, break down power relations, consider local knowledge and create space for dialogue and mutual learning.

In such a space a transformative vision of development can be created by connecting sport to the pursuit of social change and recognising that the structures of inequality, oppression, and exploitation require active transformation (Hartmann & Kwauk, 2011; Darnell & Millington, 2019). Changes to the distribution of power and control can enable collective and collaborative engagement to extend the voices of those who struggle to be heard, legitimising and equalising their voice (Adams & Harris, 2014). For these reflexive discussions and processes to have practical value they would require in-depth dialogue concerning the type of programme outcomes that are envisaged, how these outcomes can be implemented through practice and how the concepts of engagement, equity, inclusion, and pedagogy are connected to those envisaged outcomes clearly and rationally.

Summary

The incorporation of scholarship from across SfD, education and development alongside my own practice and research, has generated four key aspects which I contend are central to how education

should be designed, delivered and analysed in SfD. Prioritising these aspects would challenge the wider contextual factors that reinforce power disparities, create inequity, limit inclusion, and utilise anti dialogical pedagogy. These aspects build on the understanding that education within SfD should not be developed in a pre-packaged way. Instead, it should be community owned and developed by local interests, capacities and aspirations to enable solutions to be collectively owned and devised (Rossi & Jeanes, 2017).

Whilst I advocate for participatory approaches to pedagogical development Whitley et al. (2022) identify pedagogical limitations within SfD highlighting that a strong focus on educational development within specific programmes often fails to address broader social, cultural, and organisational issues. Whilst I acknowledge these limitations I again agree with Hartmann and Kwauk (2011) who see education as a.

> crucial, underlying, and insufficiently appreciated aspect of virtually all of the various visions of sport and development in the contemporary world. (p. 287)

I maintain therefore, that to develop education successfully in SfD requires the understanding that increased engagement in the same inequitable ways isn't progress. Ensuring an alternative and truly participatory approach requires addressing the way in which

> power and knowledge constitute a hidden curriculum of values and beliefs within a durable network of institutions, volunteers, and discursive policy formation that define specific types of behaviours. (Seiler & Chepyator-Thomson, 2024, p. 2)

Challenging existing norms of power and knowledge within SfD education requires praxis and dialogical action to de-centre power from organisations, practitioners and scholars from outside the community and locate it instead with practitioners, participants and scholars from within the community.

Ultimately, education within SfD does not require external agents to design and deliver pedagogy. Instead they should provide the help and support for people to do so for themselves. Such an approach would enable the development of pedagogy that challenges specific world views and the pedagogical practices that are structured around them (Rossi & Jeanes, 2017; Seiler & Chepyator-Thomson, 2024). By changing the dynamic in this way inequity is addressed through facilitating dialogue, collaboration and negotiation. In turn, the concepts of inclusion and social justice would connect the design of pedagogy to intended programme outcomes.

Building from this position I contend that the future developments in practice and research at the intersection of sport, education and development should be built from our understanding of the four aspects. To enhance this understanding further I have developed the following guidance. Within this guidance I consider participant engagement as the central principle that informs a projects approach to addressing inequity, embedding inclusion for social justice, designing pedagogy and realising outcomes. The process of designing, delivering and analysing education in SfD cannot be cyclical. Rather the process should involve review, reflection and adaption at any point in the lifecycle of a project through the facilitation of continuous engagement, dialogue and praxis.

Participant engagement

1. Develop SfD projects through aligning intended educational outcomes to the needs and experiences of participants and, the knowledge and resources that exists within the community.
2. Through engagement and negotiation apply participatory methodologies that are relevant to the specific needs of the project and the community e.g. YPAR.
3. Determine how to increase opportunities for researchers and participants to be directly involved in the design, delivery and analysis from the outset of projects.

4. Within this approach ensure that any partnership between researchers, organisations and partici-pants is collaborative and equitable and that participant knowledge is valued equally through ensuring equal control over project development.
5. Be honest in our appraisals of projects and the complexities and inevitable conflict that will arise in undertaking participatory work.

Equity, inclusion and social justice

1. Develop conceptual clarity to enable clear definitions of equity, inclusion and social justice within the design of SfD curriculum.
2. Ensure that inclusion is a fundamental principle within SfD curriculum design with the under-standing that the enactment of inclusion in specific locations is restricted and/or enhanced by social, cultural, economic and political factors.
3. Addressing inequity requires the building and maintaining of partnerships that are collaborative and challenge existing power disparities.
4. Embrace inclusion as an on-going process which is constantly evolving to meet existent need and to respond to changing perspectives.

Critical pedagogy

1. To understand that embedding any pedagogical change is a complex and multi-faceted process that requires development and persuasion of all stakeholders involved.
2. To engage in further scholarship that explores the complexity involved in embedding critical pedagogy in SfD practice.
3. Embrace a dialogical approach to pedagogical development and resist anti-dialogical perspectives.
4. To facilitate truly transformative action and to continue to develop SfD pedagogy in an incre-mental and critical way requires an awareness of the benefits and limitations of ritual appropriation.

Participant outcomes and praxis

1. Embrace dialogical action as a fundamental process of reviewing and developing educational practice.
2. Continuously and collaboratively reflect upon the design, delivery and analysis of education in SfD and its relationship to intended programme outcomes.
3. Create space for praxis that provides the opportunity for all stakeholders to challenge dominant ideas and perspectives of the role of education in SfD and its value to the realisation of relevant and valued project outcomes.

In building upon this guidance I contend that the current environment provides significant chal-lenges for those who see education as the essential element in maintaining SfD as a critical project. If the critical and social change intentions of SfD are to be fully realised then the way in which we design, deliver and analyse education has become more important than ever. I argue therefore that the successful realisation of programme outcomes in SfD requires the creation of a participatory, equitable, inclusive, critical and reflexive environment that utilises education as the key element in achieving incremental, realistic and positive social change.

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