

Inclusion and Exclusion Through Youth Sport

Edited by
**Symeon Dagkas and
Kathleen Armour**



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Inclusion and Exclusion Through Youth Sport

'We can reach far more people through sport than we can through political or educational programmes. In that way, sport is more powerful than politics. We have only just started to use its potential to build up this country. We must continue to do so.'

Nelson Mandela

Nelson Mandela's statement reflects a widely held view that sport can contribute in unique and far-reaching ways to the delivery of important social outcomes. But is this really the case? Can sport bring people from different backgrounds together, and in so doing act as a force for social transformation and change? In the language of policy makers and practitioners, can sport contribute to social inclusion or could it be argued that sport acts to marginalise and disadvantage some groups in society? In other words, could sport reinforce, rather than challenge, social inequality?

Focusing on youth sport as a touchstone sector of sport in society, this book examines the theoretical and empirical bases of arguments for the role of sport in social inclusion agendas. Authors are drawn from around the world and offer critical perspectives on assumptions underpinning the bold claims made about the power of sport. This book represents the most up-to-date and authoritative source of knowledge on inclusion and exclusion in youth sport. As such, it is essential reading for those who want to use sport to 'make a difference' in young people's lives. It is, therefore, recommended for students, researchers, policy makers and practitioners working in sports development, sports coaching, sport studies or physical education.

Symeon Dagkas is a lecturer in the School of Education, Department of Sport Pedagogy, University of Birmingham, UK. His research interests lie in intersectional issues in sport participation through the examination of multiple layers of disadvantage including socio-economic factors, ethnicity, gender and religion.

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The *Routledge Studies in Physical Education and Youth Sport* series is a forum for the discussion of the latest and most important ideas and issues in physical education, sport, and active leisure for young people across school, club and recreational settings. The series presents the work of the best well-established and emerging scholars from around the world, offering a truly international perspective on policy and practice. It aims to enhance our understanding of key challenges, to inform academic debate, and to have a high impact on both policy and practice, and is thus an essential resource for all serious students of physical education and youth sport.

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Preface

Youth sport is the foundation of sport in society, therefore what happens in this sector of sport matters. It is often argued that sport can contribute much to social inclusion agendas yet, at the same time, some of the practices that prevail in sport result in exclusion and marginalisation for some young people. This book considers this conundrum by critically examining the arguments underpinning social inclusion claims made about sport. Drawing on detailed conceptual analyses and examples from empirical studies, leading scholars from around the world offer a range of perspectives on the causes of exclusion and marginalisation, and on the practical and pedagogical steps that can be taken towards greater inclusion.

This collection of essays on 'Inclusion and Exclusion Through Sport' represents an up-to-date and authoritative discussion on the core issues in the context of youth sport, as part of the *Routledge Studies in Physical Education and Youth Sport*. It is an invaluable text for those involved in sport provision and pedagogy who believe in the power of sport and who want to deploy it to make a difference in children's lives; especially those children and young people who tend to be left out. There is something in this book for students in the broad field of sport who are trying to grapple with some of these issues for the first time; researchers trying to break new ground; policy makers who are striving to develop inclusive sport; and professionals and practitioners in physical education and youth sport who are attempting to meet the diverse needs of the young people they encounter. For all these groups, this book will raise questions and offer insights and challenges.

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We want to thank our colleagues from around the world who have contributed chapters to this volume. Your patience throughout the process is much appreciated. We would also like to extend our gratitude to the many young people whose 'stories' are represented in this volume. It is only through the hearing and telling of such stories that we can begin to appreciate the range of youth positionalities and experiences. Understanding difference, and respecting the needs of children and young people whoever they are, and whatever their needs, are the first steps towards developing advanced pedagogies of inclusion in physical education and youth sport. Finally, we would like to thank Routledge for supporting this project.

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Introduction

Symeon Dagkas and Kathleen Armour

Questions and assumptions

Engagement in sport has been highlighted as an effective means of combating social exclusion both in national government policies and by the World Health Organization. The EU Commission in its White Paper on Sport (EC, 2007) argued that all EU residents should have access to sport regardless of social, religious, cultural or ethnic background, and that sport can promote social integration and inter-cultural dialogue.

The optimistic view that sport can contribute – in unique and far-reaching ways – to the realisation of a range of positive social outcomes has been promoted around the world by New Labour and neo-Conservative governments. Yet, questions have been asked about whether there is sufficient robust evidence to support such optimism. Is it true that sport can bring people from different backgrounds together, acting as a force for social transformation and change? In other words, are sport and physical education able to live up to claims that they contribute to social inclusion? Or, would it be more accurate to claim that sport and physical education marginalise and disadvantage some groups within society? Is there any sense in which they reinforce, rather than challenge inequities? Could it even be argued that we, as researchers, contribute to the process of ‘othering’ in society by identifying specific groups as ‘youth at risk’ and targeting them for special attention? Questions such as these, that is, questions at the very heart of social inclusion/exclusion agendas, are at the heart of the essays presented here.

This book is part of the *Routledge Studies in Physical Education and Youth Sport* series which provides a forum for academic debate, discussion and furthering of knowledge and understanding of key issues of inclusion and exclusion in, from and through sport, school and club settings. This book has been written for students, researchers and practitioners (teachers, coaches and sport developers). Its core purpose is to ‘map’ young people’s experiences of sport and physical education from an inclusion/exclusion perspective. The challenges inherent in the language of inclusion/exclusion are identified in different ways by different authors and, in this introduction, we present an overview of some of the key issues. For example, authors have identified youth positionalities and subjectivities in relation to issues of geographic location, gender, race, social class, ethnicity, sexuality and